

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Management Board held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Monday 12 October 2026 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Ben Proctor (chairperson)
Councillor Louis Stark (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Jenny Bartlett, Simeon Cole, Frank Cornthwaite,
Pauline Crockett, Dave Davies, Toni Fagan, Liz Harvey and Ed O'Driscoll

In attendance: Simon Cann (Committee Clerk), Hayley Crane (Head of Service Housing), Carole Gandy (Cabinet Member, Adults, health and wellbeing), Hilary Hall (Corporate Director Community Wellbeing), William Neville (Housing Operations Service Manager) Cllr Peter Stoddart (Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services) and Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer).

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received.

13. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There had been no named substitutes.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

For information purposes relating to agenda item 10, Councillor Ben Proctor (SMB Chair) pointed out that he had been an employee of Hoople Ltd between 2012 and 2016.

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 06 July 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

One question had been received and had been published, along with a response, as a supplement to the published meeting agenda on Herefordshire Council's website.

17. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No questions had been received from members of the council.

18. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

1. Members explored the causes of homelessness and how effective the council's prevention work had been. Officers were asked how success was measured and whether intervention was taking place early enough. Officers explained that all

prevention activity was reported to government and that performance data showed significant growth in successful prevention cases. Additional resources had been invested in early intervention, including partnership work through Talk Community, with officers increasingly identifying households at risk before homelessness occurred.

2. The committee questioned how lessons from individual cases informed service design and resource allocation. Officers stated that data, customer feedback and reflective practice were used to improve services, while new housing drop-in sessions were helping identify local issues earlier. Officers said a trauma-informed approach was used, supported by specialist staff and close working with mental health practitioners and other partners.
3. Members sought assurance that sufficient resources were available for prevention work. In response, it was emphasised that early intervention was seen as the best opportunity to reduce homelessness, particularly where family relationships were breaking down or where residents were experiencing financial difficulties. Officers highlighted work to resolve rent arrears, maximise benefits, address wider support needs and negotiate with landlords to avoid eviction wherever possible.
4. Discussion turned to the wider structural causes of homelessness. Members highlighted a shortage of affordable and social housing, arguing that limited housing supply remained a key driver of demand. Officers agreed that prevention alone could not solve the issue, noting that many households became ready to move on from temporary accommodation but suitable housing was unavailable. Housing affordability, private rental costs and limited housing association capacity were all identified as contributing factors.
5. Members explored relationships with housing associations and private landlords. Officers confirmed that housing associations were encouraged to refer tenants at risk of eviction at the earliest opportunity, allowing officers to intervene and, where appropriate, clear debts, provide support and prevent homelessness. The committee also heard that landlord forums had been reintroduced and stronger links established with environmental health services, Talk Community and other partners. Officers advised that information packs were being developed for letting agents and private tenants to encourage earlier requests for help.
6. The board examined the impact of homelessness on families and children. Members questioned how prevention activity specifically supported households with children and sought examples of joint working with children's services. Officers outlined close partnership arrangements, including a housing and children's board, and explained that accommodation placements took account of school attendance, transport requirements and family wellbeing. Support available included travel assistance, school uniforms, food vouchers and prioritisation of self-contained accommodation for families where possible.
7. Members also considered whether the council's wider enforcement activity could inadvertently contribute to homelessness. Questions were raised about links between housing services and planning or regulatory enforcement teams. The committee stressed the importance of a joined-up "one council" approach, ensuring that housing impacts were considered whenever enforcement action could place households at risk.
8. Attention then shifted to temporary accommodation provision and future demand. Members questioned whether planned capital investment would be sufficient to address current shortfalls. Officers reported that additional accommodation was

being secured through property acquisition, council schemes and partnership arrangements with the private sector. However, demand continued to rise and was increasing faster than new accommodation could currently be brought into use.

9. The committee received updates on efforts to reduce dependence on hotels and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Officers described ongoing work to secure more self-contained properties, bring housing association voids back into use and improve accessibility within available stock. Members also discussed under-occupied social housing, empty properties, accommodation above commercial premises and opportunities to increase housing supply through alternative approaches.
10. Questions were raised about financial pressures and the impact of delays to capital projects. Officers advised that delays to major schemes, including the John Venn project, had increased reliance on expensive temporary accommodation. Members heard that the project would eventually provide 28 units and generate revenue savings by reducing hotel use. Discussion also covered budget management, grant funding opportunities and work to maximise value from existing resources.
11. The committee explored innovative approaches, including modular accommodation, static caravans, supported housing and tenancy-readiness programmes. Officers outlined proposals for a future assessment and support centre aimed at helping people with complex needs develop the skills and support networks required to sustain permanent housing.
12. Members concluded that officers had demonstrated a strong understanding of the challenges facing the service and were managing increasing demand effectively. The committee commended the quality of the report and welcomed evidence of robust planning, partnership working and financial oversight. However, members recognised that significant pressures remained and that long-term solutions would require wider action to increase housing availability and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.

The committee unanimously agreed the following recommendations:

- 1. That all service areas are aware of and flag risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity and work proactively with housing teams to prevent homelessness.**
- 2. That the replacement Local Housing Strategy 2027-2032 make direct reference to preventing homelessness and reducing the need for temporary accommodation in the housing vision of the county, the strategy should also be joined up with related strategies including preventing homelessness and empty homes.**
- 3. That the executive assesses whether a larger housing acquisition and development programme would deliver better long-term value than continued growth in temporary accommodation expenditure, and reports the findings to Scrutiny Management Board.**
- 4. The executive should identify and remedy the issues delaying and preventing the use capital allocations already made by council, to reduce the costs associated with temporary accommodation.**
- 5. That the executive give assurance that the funding will be provided within the 2027/28 budget to ensure delivery, and also operation to full capacity, of the planned tenant support centre.**

1. The committee considered the final report of the Commercialisation Task and Finish Group, a request to include details of the group members at the beginning of the report was noted by the report author.
2. Members discussed the treatment of council assets and agreed that assets should be reviewed against their contribution to Council Plan objectives, while recognising that some assets provide community, social or service benefits rather than financial returns, and could not be sold or disposed of. Members felt that the words 'for disposal' at the end of recommendation 3, as set out in the draft report, should be removed for clarity.
3. During the discussion, members expressed concern that several recommendations from previous commercialisation reviews remained outstanding and emphasised the need to progress income generation and cost recovery opportunities across service areas.

The committee unanimously approved the report, subject to amendments, and agreed to submit its findings and recommendations to Cabinet:

1. **Herefordshire Council's annual review of fees and charges includes:**
 - a. a calculation of the cost to provide the service
 - b. the service fee required to cover the cost of the service
 - c. a link for any subsidy to an objective of the Herefordshire Plan.
2. **Herefordshire Council adopts a commercialisation strategy supported by appropriate governance arrangements, workforce development, and organisational culture change to enable the council to pursue commercial opportunities in a manner that supports the delivery of Council Plan objectives while maintaining effective oversight of management and risk.**
3. **Herefordshire Council adopts an asset management framework, which requires all assets to support a Council Plan priority, achieve at least revenue neutrality where applicable, and clearly identify and justify any subsidy. Assets that do not support Council Plan objectives should be reviewed.**

20. ANNUAL REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

1. The committee considered the report and discussed the effectiveness of scrutiny and whether future reviews should include feedback from directors, portfolio holders and other stakeholders to provide a broader assessment. Concerns were also raised that the committee was effectively assessing its own performance, and members explored whether the Audit and Governance Committee should have a role in reviewing future effectiveness reports.
2. A proposal to submit the report in draft form to the Audit and Governance Committee for comment before finalisation was debated but was not supported following a vote.
3. The committee approved, by majority, a proposal for the Chair of Scrutiny Management Board to discuss with the Chair of Audit and Governance how that committee could contribute to future annual scrutiny effectiveness reviews.

The committee agreed the following recommendations:

1. **Noted the findings and recommendations of the Annual Scrutiny Effectiveness Review.**

2. **Requested the Chair of Scrutiny Management Board to engage with the Chair of Audit and Governance regarding potential involvement in future annual effectiveness reviews.**

21. HOOPLE SPOTLIGHT REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The committee considered the proposed terms of reference for the Hoople Spotlight Review. Members discussed the scope of the review, including the need to understand the full range of services provided by Hoople, how decisions are made to use Hoople rather than alternative providers, and how value for money is assessed. Officers advised that detailed lines of inquiry would be developed separately and supported by briefing information provided before the review.
2. Members noted that the ongoing Value for Money review was expected to provide evidence relevant to the Spotlight Review. Discussion also highlighted the growth in Hoople's range of services over time and the importance of examining the rationale and strategic direction behind that development as part of the review.
3. The committee agreed that the final bullet point within the 'Purpose of the Review' section should be removed, noting that any recommendations should arise from the review process itself.

Resolved:

1. **The committee approved the Hoople Spotlight Review terms of reference as set out in Appendix 1, subject to the removal of the final bullet point within the 'Purpose of the Review' section.**

22. WORK PROGRAMME

1. The committee reviewed the scrutiny work programme and noted that the proposed ESSC flooding spotlight review would be removed, as it was not considered likely to add value at this stage. Members also noted that the December voluntary and community sector item would support recommendations arising from the Early Help Task and Finish Group Report.
2. Members discussed the council's transformation programme, expressing concern that scrutiny had limited visibility of progress despite its importance to delivering future savings. It was suggested that transformation should feature more prominently in future scrutiny and budget discussions.
3. The committee also considered the use of risk information within scrutiny work planning. Members supported greater visibility of corporate and departmental risk registers to help committees identify areas requiring scrutiny and to ensure significant risks were being appropriately managed. Officers agreed to raise these matters through forthcoming committee planning discussions. The work programme was subsequently noted unanimously.

Resolved:

1. **The committee noted the work programme.**

23. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 1 December 2026, 2pm

The meeting ended at 16.46

Chairperson