

Agenda

Cabinet

Date: **Thursday 25 September 2025**

Time: **2.30 pm**

Place: **Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

Notes: Please note the time, date and venue of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

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If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format, please call Samantha Gregory, Democratic Services Officer on (01432) 260176 or e-mail samantha.gregory@herefordshire.gov.uk in advance of the meeting.

Agenda for the meeting of Cabinet

Membership

Chairperson	Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council
	Councillor Graham Biggs
	Councillor Harry Bramer
	Councillor Barry Durkin
	Councillor Carole Gandy
	Councillor Dan Hurcomb
	Councillor Ivan Powell
	Councillor Philip Price
	Councillor Pete Stoddart

Agenda

	Pages
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive any apologies for absence.	
2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive declarations of interests in respect of Table A, Table B or Other Interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.	
3. MINUTES To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2025.	To follow
HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS <i>The deadline for submission of questions for this meeting is:</i> <i>5pm on Friday 19 September 2025.</i> <i>Questions must be submitted to councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk. Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted.</i> <i>Accepted questions and the response to them will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved</i>	
4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC To receive questions from members of the public.	
5. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS To receive questions from councillors.	
6. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES To receive reports from the Council's scrutiny committees on any recommendations to the Cabinet arising from recent scrutiny committee meetings. There are no scrutiny reports for this meeting.	
7. Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT To review performance for Quarter 1 (Q1) 2025/26 and to report the performance position across all Directorates for this period.	11 - 42
8. Q1 2025/26 BUDGET REPORT To report the forecast position for 2025/26 at Quarter 1 (June 2025), including explanation and analysis of the drivers for the material budget variances, and to outline current and planned recovery activity to reduce the forecast overspend.	43 - 80
9. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - UPDATE TO CABINET	81 - 102

	To provide an update on the key headlines from the Spending Review June 2025 and potential impact of local authority funding reform on the council's future financial position.	
10.	RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE QUARTER 1 2025-26 To provide an update on the status of corporate risks at the end of Quarter 1 2025/26 (June 2025) and provide assurance that risks are being managed effectively across the council.	103 - 116
11.	HEREFORDSHIRE SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY To approve a Suicide Prevention Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 - 2029. The strategy has been developed in collaboration with local partners and highlights our commitment to reduce the number of local lives lost to suicide. The strategy takes a whole-county, all-age approach. It is intended that partner organisations will each take forward actions and work collaboratively to reduce the number of suicides in Herefordshire.	117 - 152
12.	CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE To receive the report on the outcome of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, held 23 - 26 June 2025, and to approve the council's action plan in response to the recommendations for publication.	153 - 196
In the opinion of the Proper Officer, the following item will not be, or are likely not to be, open to the public and press at the time it is considered given the exempt information contacted in the papers.		
RECOMMENDATION:	that under section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act, as indicated below and it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.	
3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person	
5	Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.	
13.	WEST MIDLANDS SAFE CENTRE To outline the opportunities and risks to the council in proceeding to form a partnership with other local authorities in the West Midlands to create a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for the West Midlands Safe Centre to own and manage the secure welfare provision on behalf of the 14 local authorities/Trusts.	197 - 302

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You have a right to:

- Attend all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings unless the business to be transacted would disclose 'confidential' or 'exempt' information.
- Inspect agenda and public reports at least five clear days before the date of the meeting. Agenda and reports (relating to items to be considered in public) are available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings
- Inspect minutes of the Council and all committees and sub-committees and written statements of decisions taken by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. (A list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report). A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
- Access to a public register stating the names, addresses and wards of all Councillors with details of the membership of Cabinet and of all Committees and Sub-Committees. Information about councillors is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the Council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title. Information about councillors is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors
- Copy any of the documents mentioned above to which you have a right of access, subject to a reasonable charge (20p per sheet subject to a maximum of £5.00 per agenda plus a nominal fee of £1.50 for postage).
- Access to this summary of your rights as members of the public to attend meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees and Sub-Committees and to inspect and copy documents.

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The reporting of meetings is subject to the law and it is the responsibility of those doing the reporting to ensure that they comply.

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Public transport links

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The location of the office and details of city bus services can be viewed at:

<http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1597/hereford-city-bus-map-local-services->

Guide to Cabinet

The Executive or Cabinet of the Herefordshire Council consists of a Leader and Deputy Leader and eight other Cabinet Members each with their own individual programme area responsibilities. The current Cabinet membership is:

Cllr Jonathan Lester (Leader)	Corporate Strategy and Budget
Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst (Deputy Leader)	Environment
Cllr Ivan Powell	Children and Young People
Cllr Harry Bramer	Community Services and Assets
Cllr Pete Stoddart	Finance and Corporate Services
Cllr Carole Gandy	Adults, Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Graham Biggs	Economy and Growth
Cllr Barry Durkin	Roads and Regulatory Services
Cllr Philip Price	Transport and Infrastructure
Cllr Dan Hurcomb	Local Engagement and Community Resilience

The Cabinet's roles are:

- To consider the overall management and direction of the Council. Directed by the Leader of the Council, it will work with senior managers to ensure the policies of Herefordshire are clear and carried through effectively;
- To propose to Council a strategic policy framework and individual strategic policies;
- To identify priorities and recommend them to Council;
- To propose to Council the Council's budget and levels of Council Tax;
- To give guidance in relation to: policy co-ordination; implementation of policy; management of the Council; senior employees in relation to day to day implementation issues;
- To receive reports from Cabinet Members on significant matters requiring consideration and proposals for new or amended policies and initiatives;
- To consider and determine policy issues within the policy framework covering more than one programme area and issues relating to the implementation of the outcomes of monitoring reviews.

Who attends cabinet meetings?

- Members of the cabinet, including the leader of the council and deputy leader – these are the decision makers, only members of the cabinet can vote on recommendations put to the meeting.
- Officers of the council – attend to present reports and give technical advice to cabinet members
- Chairpersons of scrutiny committees – attend to present the views of their committee if it has considered the item under discussion

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- Political group leaders attend to present the views of their political group on the item under discussion. Other councillors may also attend as observers but are not entitled to take part in the discussion.

The Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)

1. Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

2. Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.



Title of report: Q1 Performance Report

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 25 September 2025

Cabinet member: Cabinet member finance and corporate services

Report by: Director of Finance

Report author: Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To review performance for Quarter 1 (Q1) 2025/26 and to report the performance position across all Directorates for this period.

Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- a) review performance for Q1 2025/26

Alternative options

Cabinet may choose to review delivery and operational performance more or less frequently; or request alternative actions to address any identified areas of underperformance, including referral to the relevant scrutiny committee.

Key considerations

1. This report aligns with the Council Plan 2024-2028 and the associated annual Delivery Plan for the 2025/26 financial year.
2. It provides a summary of the activities undertaken to deliver the key priorities and goals in Quarter 1 and highlights progress in delivery of the key performance indicators (KPIs). Appendix A provides the full breakdown of the Q1 updates on the Delivery Plan milestones. 199 out of 226 milestones (88%) profiled to be 'in progress' by the end of Quarter 1 in 2025/26 have been delivered or are on track to be delivered by the end of the financial year.
3. Minor amendments to the Delivery Plan, approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 27 March 2025, have been under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive to ensure that key deliverables and milestones, against which performance will be monitored throughout 2025/26, reflect planned activity to achieve the priorities of the Council Plan.
4. Beyond the Delivery Plan, the council has achieved the following successes in Q1 of 2025/26.

Quarter 1 highlights

5. The council has continued to deliver on its Capital Investment Programme. The following table presents some of the highlights for Quarter 1.

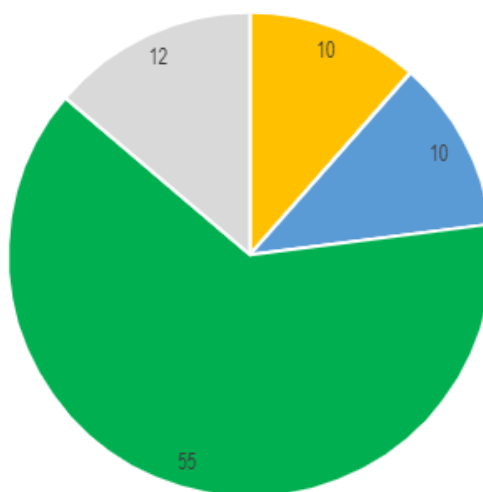
Project	Investment	Where are we...
Hereford Transport Hub	£11.57 million, of which £6.3 million is Levelling-Up grant funding and £1.0m is Active Travel Measures grant funding	Following a procurement process during Q4, the contract with the main contractor was finalised in Q1. The contractor is currently working through the contractor-design elements of their appointment and developing information necessary to discharge planning conditions. The initial phase of construction work is due to commence during Q2.
Holme Lacy Road Active Travel Improvements (Levelling Up Fund)	£7.914 million grant funding	Procurement concluded during Q1. The appointed contractor is mobilising for commencement on site during Q2. Tender returns were more favourable than pre-construction estimates, allowing the extent of associated 'Quiet Routes' south of the river to be expanded.
Western By-Pass Phase 1	£40.3 million	Following appointment of the design consultancy in Q4 (2024/25), the design work has been proceeding at pace through Q1 with a view to commencing a contractor procurement process in Q2.
Phosphate Mitigation/ Integrated Wetlands	£4.76 million grant funding	Construction of the second integrated wetland at Tarrington got underway in Q1 and is progressing well. Agreement subject to contract was also reached during Q1 with the school which will be the subject of the pilot private sewage treatment works replacement scheme. This will now proceed to formal contract in Q1, in tandem with procurement for a design and build provider and subsequent planning consent.

Employment Land in Herefordshire	£12 million (£8m Ross & £4m other market towns)	<p>Detailed design and other key pre-construction activity for phase 1 of Ross Enterprise Park completed in Q1, and this will form the basis for a contractor procurement exercise in Q2.</p> <p>Significant progress has also been made developing opportunities in other market towns, specifically at this stage the Bromyard Old Depot Site and the Buttercross building in Leominster. A key decision is imminent in Q2 recommending budget approval for £3.7m to progress these, with the balance allocated for options development in other market towns.</p>
Hereford Museum & Art Gallery	£20.529 million (of which £12.129m is grant funding)	<p>Pre-Construction Services (PCSA) period commenced in Q1 and the full design team working to develop the remaining detailed technical RIBA4 design. One of the contractors is engaging with the market for subcontractors to deliver the construction and to ensure the cost plan produced at the end of RIBA4 is an accurate market-tested assessment for the project.</p> <p>Temporary works design completed in Q1 and RIBA4 design for the gallery fit-out continues with co-production and access panels stakeholder engagement providing support. Café designers have been appointed and have provided their initial concept ideas.</p>
Warm Homes Grant	£2.485 million grant funding	The new Warm Homes home retrofit scheme for 2025/26 got underway in Q1, with a positive start benefitting from mobilisation work and homeowner expressions of interest undertaken in readiness during Q4.
Peterchurch Primary School – New school Building	£10.853m	<p>Planning permission for new school building granted.</p> <p>Final contractor cost submission is due in July 2025 with the construction contract to be entered into and a proposed start on site for August 2025.</p>
Aylestone School Expansion	£13.1m DFE Grant Funding	The planning application is now to be determined at the October planning committee. Should approval be received, it is anticipated that works on site will commence in January 2026.
Hampton Dene Primary School – Extension to LRC	£2.6m DFE Grant Funding	<p>Procurement for construction contractor completed.</p> <p>Planning approval granted subject to Secretary of State approval (due 24th July</p>

		2025) with a proposed start on site in September 2025.
Schools Capital Maintenance Programme	£3.2m DFE Grant/Borrowing	Two projects completed in Q1 (Peterchurch Primary School drainage & Michaelchurch Primary heating) – value of £150,000 with a further 12 schemes tendered for implementation during the school summer holiday period of 2025.
Estates Capital Programme Improvements	£2.5m in 25/26	5 projects completed in Q1 with total projects value of £307k with further projects in procurement stage for delivery during the financial. Procurement complete on 2 further projects with start dates to be confirmed.

Performance: People

RAG status of Delivery Plan Milestones at end of Q1



Milestones Colour Key: Green: On Track; Amber: At risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Blue: Completed; Red: Significant risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Grey: Not due to start yet

Children and Young People

- Family Group Conferencing is now available for all families, including those whose needs are met by Early Help, enabling earlier, family-led decision-making that empowers families to take ownership of their challenges and solutions. By involving extended family and support networks, FGC promotes more sustainable outcomes, reduces reliance on statutory services, and helps children remain safely within their family environment. This inclusive approach supports early intervention, strengthens resilience, and ensures that families receive the right support at the right time, ultimately improving outcomes and reducing long-term demand on social care.
- Increasing capacity through the mobilisation of a new Residential Children Home has been successfully opened and was registered with Ofsted in June 2025 despite the recruitment challenges. The second home is on track to open in September 2025. This expansion strengthens local placement sufficiency, reducing reliance on out-of-area or high-cost independent placements. It supports better outcomes for children by enabling them to remain

closer to their communities, schools, and support networks, while also improving oversight, continuity of care, and long-term cost-effectiveness for the council.

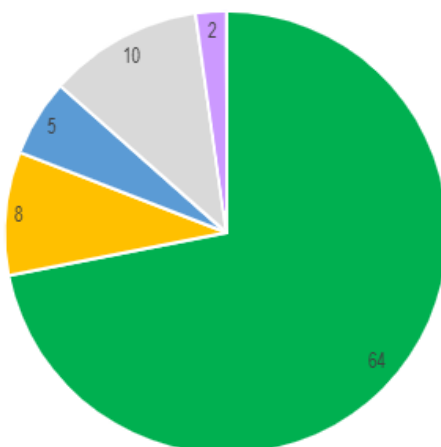
8. Progress continues on the development of a new build special free school as part of the Department for Education's (DfE) free school programme. While we await further detail from the DfE regarding the project timeline, the council remains committed and ready to move forward with the appointment of an academy trust as soon as confirmation is received. This project represents a key investment in local specialist education provision, and we look forward to working with partners to deliver this important new facility for children and families in our community.

Community Wellbeing

9. The Herefordshire Connect cross-sector referral platform is now ready to launch as a pilot with identified partner organisations supporting the Household Support Fund. Data sharing agreements are in place, and the platform has been successfully built and tested. This innovative tool will improve access to cost-of-living support by enabling direct referrals between organisations, reducing duplication, and ensuring residents receive timely and coordinated help tailored to their needs.
10. Work is progressing to improve the support people receive in the community after being discharged from hospital, including access to reablement services. A review process and supporting audit tools have now been developed in collaboration with health and care system partners. The audit, scheduled for Quarter 2, will involve key stakeholders and help identify opportunities to strengthen the discharge pathway. This work aims to ensure individuals receive the right care at the right time, reduce readmissions, and support people to regain independence more effectively.

Performance: Place

RAG status of Delivery Plan Milestones at end of Q1



Milestones Colour Key: Green: On Track; Amber: At risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Blue: Completed; Red: Significant risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Purple: Parked as waiting on other interdependent activity; Grey: Not due to start yet

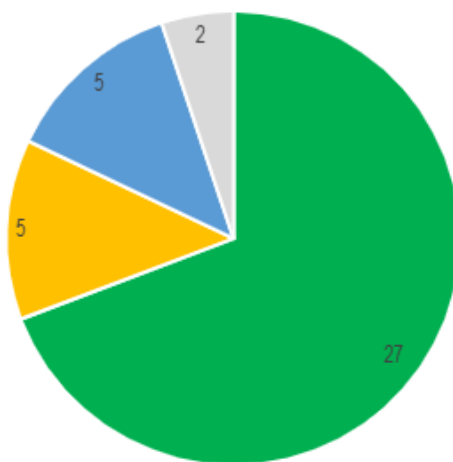
11. A countywide Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland strategy to value nature and uphold environmental standards has now been finalised following extensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders. To support its successful countywide adoption, a launch and adoption event is being planned for September, aligning with Herefordshire Council's formal commitment as the initial signatory. This strategy sets out a shared vision for minimising

pollution, enhancing biodiversity, and protecting natural assets for future generations. By working collaboratively with partners, the strategy will help ensure a healthier environment, support climate resilience, and contribute to the long-term wellbeing of communities across Herefordshire.

12. The review of the Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2019–2029 is progressing well in partnership with the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (HCP). Following a successful consultation with stakeholders and partners, a refreshed vision and set of priorities have been drafted. An update on progress was shared at the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee in June 2025. The updated strategy will help shape a vibrant and inclusive cultural landscape across the county, supporting local creativity, boosting the economy, and enhancing wellbeing through greater access to arts, heritage, and cultural opportunities for all residents.
13. As part of our commitment to reducing waste, increasing reuse, and boosting recycling rates, plans to introduce a separate food and a garden waste collection service are progressing. The rollout of these services is dependent on confirmation of new burdens funding from central government, which is still awaited. While this may affect the original timescales, the council remains fully committed to delivering this important service. Once in place, separate food and garden waste collections will help reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, lower carbon emissions, and support a more sustainable future for Herefordshire.

Performance: Growth

RAG status of Delivery Plan Milestones at end of Q1

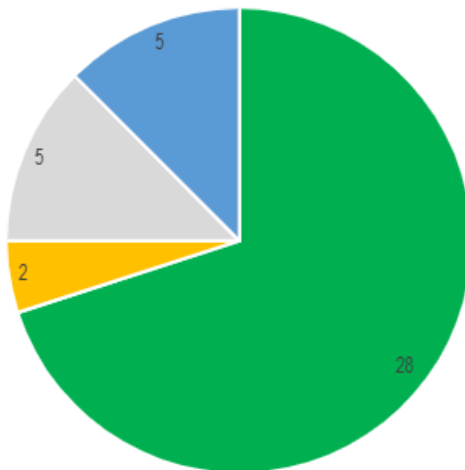


Milestones Colour Key: Green: On Track; Amber: At risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Blue: Completed; Red: Significant risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Grey: Not due to start yet

14. A key step has been taken to support residents in accessing skills development, training, and employment opportunities. A Cabinet Member decision has now been made to enable delivery of the 2025/26 programme. This programme will help people across Herefordshire gain the skills and confidence they need to enter or progress in the workforce, supporting economic growth, reducing inequalities, and improving quality of life for individuals and communities.
15. As part of our commitment to supporting Hereford City and our market towns as vibrant, thriving hubs, we are continuing to explore opportunities to improve regional connectivity and economic growth. We are currently awaiting the outcome of modelling by Transport for Wales on a proposed fast rail service between Cardiff and Manchester, which will help assess the impact on local line capacity. In parallel, the outcome of proposed housing allocation sites for the Regulation 18 consultation will help inform the business case. These developments are key to shaping future infrastructure and investment decisions that will benefit residents, businesses, and communities across the county.

Performance: Transformation

RAG status of Delivery Plan Milestones at end of Q1



Milestones Colour Key: Green: On Track; Amber: At risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Blue: Completed; Red: Significant risk of not being completed by the end of the financial year; Grey: Not due to start yet

16. As part of our commitment to attracting and retaining an excellent workforce, several improvements have been made to enhance the recruitment and onboarding experience. These include the introduction of revised candidate application forms to make the process more accessible and user-friendly, the implementation of a feedback process to gather insights from both candidates and hiring managers, and strengthened pre-employment checks to ensure safer and more efficient hiring. These changes support a more inclusive, transparent, and high-quality recruitment process; helping the council build a skilled and motivated workforce to deliver the best outcomes for residents.
17. The council continues to invest in its property assets to ensure they are well maintained and to reduce the long-term cost of reactive repairs. Good progress is being made in completing Estates and Schools capital programmes from previous years, and a number of new projects within the 2025/28 programme have now commenced and are on track to be delivered within the year. This ongoing investment helps ensure that council buildings remain safe, efficient, and fit for purpose; supporting the delivery of high-quality services to residents while reducing future maintenance costs.

Local Authority Data Explorer

18. The Office for Local Government (Oflog) has closed, and Local Authority Data Explorer has now been removed.
19. The MHCLG announced in July that they are launching a new Local Government Outcomes Framework. The outcomes align with the key national priorities, ranging from preventing homelessness and rough sleeping to community safety and satisfaction. The outcomes are underpinned by metrics to measure progress.
20. This approach is designed to support a move away from hundreds of ringfenced grants to instead focus on a small number of tangible improvements for people and communities.
21. Central government will still take a key interest in outcome delivery and intervene where necessary and MHCLG will work with other government departments to make sure that support and challenge in response to the Framework works.

22. Framework data will also feed into Government's assessment of whether the Best Value Duty is being met.

23. MHCLG have requested feedback on the draft framework and the metrics contained within. Herefordshire Council is currently working on a response and also considering the alignment of the Herefordshire Council's Delivery Plan outcomes metrics with the metrics proposed by MHCLG. When this work has been completed, the new Outcomes Framework will be shared with Cabinet.

24. In the meantime, we will continue to report on our top ten indicators:

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Q4 Actual	Q1* Projection	Q1* Actual	Q1* RAG**
Percentage of service users aged 65+ discharged from hospital into Home First who are still at home 91 days after discharge	79.83%	80%	76%	Amber
Percentage of Children and Young People social work assessments completed within timescale (45 days)	67.7%	85%	74.43%	Red
Percentage of children in care who have an up-to-date review	98.25%	95%	99.7%	Green
Percentage of major planning applications dealt with within 13 weeks (or 16 weeks if subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment), or with an agreed extension of time <i>Provisional subject to DLUHC confirmation</i>	94.59%	70%	90.91%	Green
Percentage of non-major (minor and other) planning applications dealt with within 8 weeks, or with an agreed extension of time <i>Provisional subject to DLUHC confirmation</i>	77.71%	80%	79.84%	Amber
Number of kg of waste that is not sent to reuse, recycling or composting (per household) <i>Provisional subject to DEFRA confirmation</i>	366.40kg (YTD Dec 2024)	480kg (YTD Mar 2025)	494.51kg (YTD Mar 2025)	Amber
Number of affordable homes delivered	276	86	133	Green
Number of people rough sleeping	1	5	8	Red
Value of grants awarded to businesses to support viability and enable growth through UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund	£2,937,548	£0	£0	Green
Average days sickness per FTE	8.02	9	8.37	Green

* year to date (April 2025 – June 2025) unless stated otherwise

** RAG (Red Amber Green) Key: Green (target met/ exceeded); Amber (within 10% threshold); Red (away from target by 10%+ in an adverse direction); Grey (not targeted/ monitoring only)

25. Q1 data on Social Worker Assessment within timescales at 74.3% reflects the three months between April and June where we can see a low start at 63% and much higher finish by June

at 84.8%. This range is reflective of staff management within the period where we have managed leavers and new starters and intermittent vacancies that increases workloads and effect delays on completion. In one instance, the departure of a team member in April required the reallocation of 25 cases. Due to the volume and timing, this temporarily impacted the ability to meet expected timescales. During the assessment period children are seen and parents and partners spoken to, with any immediate safety issues addressed as we work to complete the assessment. We have had a successful first Q1 on recruitment in this part of the service and we hope to be fully and permanently staffed by the end of September.

26. The number of people rough sleeping is fluctuating throughout the quarter. There were only 5 rough sleepers when the night shelter closed and we will continue to review the number of people rough sleeping. On street support is provided by the Outreach Team and where available accommodation is provided.
27. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund are key tools for supporting local business growth and resilience. While no grants were awarded in Quarter 1, this reflects the planned focus on setting up the schemes, developing guidance, and inviting applications. The first grants are expected to be awarded from Quarter 2 onwards, ensuring that funding is delivered effectively and reaches businesses that can make the most impact in supporting local economic development.

Community impact

28. In accordance with the accepted code of corporate governance, the council must ensure that it has an effective performance management system that facilitates effective and efficient delivery of planned services. To support effective accountability the council is committed to reporting on actions completed and outcomes achieved, and ensuring stakeholders are able to understand and respond as the council plans and carries out its activities in a transparent manner.
29. Regularly reviewing performance with a view to identifying actions which will further drive improvement in outcomes or efficiencies helps ensure the council achieves its County Plan priorities.

Environmental Impact

30. This report details how progress is being made in achieving the Delivery Plan which details how the council is working to deliver the environmental ambitions set out in the County Plan. Individual projects and deliverables included within the Delivery Plan will all be subject to their own governance arrangements and assessment of environmental and ecological impact.

Equality duty

31. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

32. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
33. Each project within the Delivery Plan will assess its equality impact individually. Where a decision is likely to result in detrimental impact on any group with a protected characteristic it must be justified objectively. This means that attempts to mitigate the harm will be explored. If the harm cannot be avoided, the decision maker will balance this detrimental impact against the strength of legitimate public need to pursue the service change.

Resource implications

34. These recommendations have no direct financial implications, however cabinet may wish to consider how money is utilised in order to meet the council's objectives.

Legal implications

35. This Council is a best value authority designated under the Local Government Act 1999. It is required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way it exercises its functions. Measuring performance is a tool to evidence such improvement.

Risk management

36. The risks associated with the council's business are recorded on the relevant service risk register and escalated in accordance with the council's Performance Management Framework and Risk Management Plan. The highest risks, i.e. those scoring greater than 16 after controls, are escalated to the council's Corporate Risk Register.

Consultees

37. None in relation to this report.

Appendices

Appendix A Refreshed Delivery Plan 2025/26 with Q1 updates

Background papers

Council Plan 2024-28
Delivery Plan 2025-26

Appendix A - Council Plan Delivery Plan Updates

People: We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Support all children to have the best start in life	Ensure sufficiency of local care placements	Set up two new Residential Children Home (RCH) providing a total of 4 beds	Green	Mobilisation of homes completed. Recruitment challenging but first home open and registered (Ofsted) June 25 and second scheduled Sept 25. Referral complicated due to prioritisation, care plan changes and relationships. No placement made as yet; however no charges incurred. Risk of void places and charges imminent. All Age Commissioning (AAC) oversight in place.
		Understand ways that the council may use capital funding to purchase accommodation and develop additional children's homes in county.	Green	Operational decision to pause phase 2 Children Home project. Governance underway to re-purpose capital funds for use for overnight short breaks project and purchase of accommodation. Planned procurement of care via tender. Project plan in place.
		Undertake market engagement events locally/regionally with Independent Fostering Agencies to promote working relationships and their acceptance of our referrals	Green	Our engagement with providers now has significantly improved. West Midlands Placement Team Forum has been set up and the Council chairs quarterly meetings with all West Midlands local Authorities. Providers /Independent Fostering Agencies are invited to attend to promote working together and getting better placement for our children regionally.
		Implement 25/26 Foster Carer Recruitment campaign	Green	Recruitment is going really well, Q1 has seen 12 new fostering households – a net gain of 7. We currently have 12 families in assessment.
		Review the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) financial support offer and obtain Cabinet agreement for any recommended developments increase	Green	SGO data / cases being reviewed and financial / support policy being updated to ensure we have compliance and to promote our offer
		Development of the specialist foster carer scheme for children needing care who have significant additional needs and challenging	Green	We have launched the specialist foster carer scheme through social media and we are currently creating it as a job advert for promotion externally through sites such as Indeed and Linked in. Development of a further criteria for Specialist Foster Carers for children with complex additional needs including Autism underway
	Further develop short break sufficiency with increased capacity and choice	Develop a communication strategy with Parent Carer Voice (PCV) and the Children with Disability (CWD) team to ensure wider take up of the existing short break offer	Green	Promotional materials have been co-produced and distributed to schools, libraries, primary health settings, children's centres and local activity providers
		Purchase an accommodation for a new overnight short breaks provision and confirm a provider	Green	Accommodation has been identified – purchasing underway and refurbishment in development. Soft market for potential provider undertaken with interest confirmed
		Develop ways that we can deliver new arrangements to buy and manage daytime community based short breaks	Green	Consultation has started with Parent Carer Voice. Demand analysis ongoing to inform options and business case as required. Review of existing contracts to inform future commissioning/recommissioning.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
22		Review demand & data to decide if there is a requirement for overnight respite and if there is how we can make it happen in timescales.	Green	Governance to manage capital in place. Early stage consultation in place and ongoing. Project plan in development.
		Review intelligence relating to targeted allowance scheme and its impact and identify improvements	Green	
	Establish a framework of commissioned providers to deliver alternative curriculum provision, for children who are not able to attend school and those needing additional support, increasing choice, quality and value for money	Undertake procurement to put in place the framework	Green	Procurement timetable in place and on track. Market engagement and consultation undertaken and on track.
		Monitor the impact of the Alternative Provision providers and manage concerns as they arise.	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Continue to strengthen the programme of interventions to support children's oral health	Develop standardised resources and materials provided to parents following the findings of the toothbrushing audit undertaken in 2024-2025	Blue	A package of standardised resources has been developed comprising toothbrushing packs, leaflets and toolkit for parents. These resource packs have been distributed throughout the county including community groups and charities, Talk Community hubs, children's centre services, and health visitors etc
		Identify the number of early years/primary school settings in areas of deprivation participating in the toothbrushing programme and produce an options appraisal for increasing participation and promoting the programme	Green	46.5% of all of our early years providers are taking part in the supervised toothbrushing programme and of these 80% are in the most deprived areas of the county. An options appraisal to increase uptake will be completed during the summer.
		Undertake an annual survey of parents re barriers, opportunities and impact of the new 4-6 month oral health and healthy weaning check	Green	Initial work has begun on a survey for parents who took up the offer the 4-6 month check, which was introduced in August 2024. We also plan to survey parents who declined the invitation to provide information on barriers/difficulties.
	Review implementation of the new pre-school health needs assessment which identifies any developmental needs early	Report on how the pre-school check aligns to the health check at 2½ years	Green	A working group is currently reviewing the data and information collected during the health development review at 2 and a half years. The next stage will be to review the information collected at the new 3-4 year health development review to ensure consistency and alignment.
		Develop local baseline measures for 'school readiness'	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Develop new Alternative Provision for children with needs that require additional support to enable them to remain and or return to mainstream education	Identification of provider	Amber	We continue to look to secure a building. Once secured expression of interest exercise can commence.
		Build/furnishment	Amber	Capital funding bid submitted. We continue efforts to identify and secure a suitable building.
		Registration of provision	Amber	Registration will follow once building secured and provider in place.
	Progress the development of a new build special free school as part of the DfE (Department for Education) new free school project	Meet with the church commission regarding covenants on the old Whitecross playing field	Green	The whitecross site covenants are too complex and will take time to resolve. Therefore other sites being explored.
		Work with the DfE to appoint an academy trust	Green	Despite the council's efforts, no update has been received from the DfE regarding the free school timeline. As a result, the appointment of an academy trust remains on hold pending further detail from the DfE.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
	Continue to deliver the schools capital investment programme	Commence construction at Peterchurch Primary School	Green	Planning has been approved, but a pre-commencement ecology condition will take at least six weeks to discharge. Contract signing has also been delayed, now expected by 11 July. Both issues have impacted the programme, but mobilisation and construction are still expected to start in Q2.
		Commence construction at Aylestone High School	Amber	The planning application is awaiting decision and must go to committee, likely not before September. Highways have objected, raising several conditions. Our consultant is working to address these to enable progression of the application.
		Commence works at Hampton Dene Primary School	Green	Following a delay, planning was approved at committee on 4 July. The construction tender has concluded and contract award is imminent. Mobilisation and construction are still expected to commence in Q2.
		Complete works at Brookfield School	Amber	Significant delays to design proposals have put delivery behind schedule. This has impacted the decant process and delayed works within the secondary school. Completion is now expected in Q3.
Support all residents to live healthy lives within their communities	Invest in play areas to encourage children to get out and stay active	Delivery of £500k investment in play areas across the county and associated asset transfers	Green	Political Group Consultation (PGC) arranged for 23rd July.
	Deliver active travel programmes to encourage more walking and cycling	Support five businesses at the Hereford Enterprise Zone (HEZ) with employer travel plans	Green	HEZ employee travel survey results complete. Report being prepared and will act as prompt for businesses to update their travel plans. New temporary travel plan consultant in Transport Policy team will undertake this work.
		Deliver Level 1 and Level 2 of the Bikeability (cycle training) programme to 1472 pupils	Green	Good progress with 183 level 1 and 2 places delivered in April and May. Figures exclude June delivery, these figures will follow.
Tackle inequality and facilitate social mobility by focussing on early intervention and prevention activities that enable people to live independent and fulfilling lives	Provide effective Early Help to families	Monitor the impact of the Early Help services and providers and manage concerns as they arise.	Green	
		Undertake monitoring to understand impact and respond to feedback	Green	
	Evaluate five technology pilots within the wider Technology Enabled Living Programme	Complete the evaluation of the technology pilots delivered in 2024-25	Blue	
	Deliver schemes to tackle inequality that support our most vulnerable residents	Deliver the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) targeted at children in receipt of free school meals	Green	Summer HAF application process is underway, with 41 providers approved to deliver activities and meals for eligible children and families.
		Deliver the Household Support Fund (HSF) to those affected by cost of living	Green	Household Support Fund delivery is ongoing to support vulnerable residents with essential costs. Monitoring uptake and responding to local needs.
	Review and refresh the action plan to 'Prevent Ill-Health and Reduce Health Inequalities'	Engage with key partners including adult social care and the voluntary and community sector	Green	Integrated Care Board (ICB) Health Inequalities and Prevention Strategy refreshed. Work has started on a Prevention in Adult Social Care (ASC) strategy. Two workshops planned for this summer to engage stakeholders in developing this.
		Produce revised action plan	Grey	To be started after the Prevention in Adult Social Care (ASC) strategy and plans for neighbourhood health have been formed.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Enable people to support themselves and each other by providing the right help at the right time	Work with Talk Community to develop and implement the children and family community support provision	Expand multi-agency forums within localities develop the children & families community support provision and use these forums to co-produce community based support and identify local solutions	Green	Existing multi-agency forums are being reviewed to incorporate a children's focus. Engagement with partners underway to agree format and priorities. Next steps: confirm forum structure and pilot children's agenda
	Implement against the Children's Social Care reforms and the Department for Education's (DfE) Families First Partnership Programme	Recruit lead officers to support the locality model	Blue	Children's Community Officers are now in post.
		Develop a multi agency steering group and agree governance of the programme	Blue	Governance agreed through Children & Young people Strategic partnership. Multi Agency steering group in place.
		Develop Families First implementation plan and deliver Quarterly progress report to DfE	Green	Implementation plan and progress report DfE Q1 completed. – DfE feedback "It is clear that you have been doing a great deal of thinking and planning for the reforms and engagement with partners and families has been central to this"
		Develop the single vulnerable child assessment and plan combining the Early Help Assessment (EHA) and Social Worker Assessment (SWA) to form one family plan	Green	Currently reviewing two assessment documents from other Local Authorities to be shared and discussed with Service Managers as the first steps, followed by children, families and partners.
		Develop the support offer, including financial support to family and family networks to reduce the need for protection and care services	Green	Early Help funding available through combined PCC/LA joint fund – applications being received. Parenting Apart / Parental Conflict service commissioned through contract variation Review of Family Hubs (including DfE Survey) completed and small grant received to support development Community Spaces Grant – award process completed
		Develop the Family Help Lead Practitioner role within the partnership and provide a consultation, support and training programme to the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to enable them to build skills and confidence in managing presenting needs and risks in children and young people	Green	Early engagement with VCSE partners is underway to understand training needs and map existing provision. Findings will inform the development of tailored training materials. Practitioner surveys have been distributed and responses will be used to develop a training and support offer around the Family Help Lead Practitioner role. Lead
		Develop Family Group Conferencing for vulnerable children in need of early help and support to identify and provide support through family networks	Blue	Complete. Family Group Conferencing is now available for all families including those whose needs are met by Early Help.
	Explore options to develop a new care facility, aimed at delivering local care and support to adults with a range of complex needs	Undertake soft market testing	Green	Positive initial market engagement. Progressing with Worcestershire Council to ensure procurement route via their framework is secured. Specifications created to quantify data modelling.
		Develop options appraisal for future delivery models	Amber	Further updates to data to feed into housing demand modelling work. Housing demand modelling expertise is being secured to enable accuracy in the number of units of accommodation required.
		Develop business case	Amber	Business case in draft form awaiting housing demand modelling information.
	Review all Supported Living services, offering accommodation and support to adults with a range of needs including learning disability, autism and mental health with the aim of	Review of each supported living scheme	Green	Principles and resources for the review agreed. Work now underway to gather data and information to formulate initial appraisal of supported living schemes.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
25	ensuring a range of services that are fit for the future and meet changing needs	Undertake future demand planning	Amber	Data collection ready and being updated for housing demand modelling work.
		Develop options appraisal for future delivery models	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
		Design commissioning plan for future models	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Review and develop a range of community activities to ensure meaningful opportunities for adults with a range of needs including learning disability, autism and mental health	Develop and implement a communication and engagement plan for service users and their families to review the range of community activities and identify how they can be improved to promote independence	Green	Early engagement at Hear Our Voices event and provider forum discussions. Further engagement due to be implemented in August and September 2025, to include young people.
		Undertake future demand planning for community activities	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
		Undertake a series of market engagement activities to review the current community activities offer and identify scope for the future	Green	
		Develop options appraisal for future models	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
		Design commissioning plan for future models	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Develop a Domestic Abuse Strategy	Develop the Domestic Abuse Strategy and action plan	Green	Domestic abuse needs assessment completed (Apr 2025) which has informed the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025-2028. The strategy has been taken through the Council governance. A workshop is being planned to refresh the action plan.
		Implement the Domestic Abuse Strategy action plan	Green	Key areas of work continue to progress under the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. A workshop is being planned for refreshing the domestic abuse action plan to reflect the strategy.
	Increase promotion and improve knowledge of mental health support services	Update the information held on the Talk Community Mental Health support service webpage	Blue	The mental health and wellbeing pages on the Talk Community website have been updated and are now live.
		Deliver four Mental Health campaigns across the year	Green	A Herefordshire council mental health communications plan is being drafted to ensure consistent and sustained messaging to support national and local campaigns. We are working with partners specifically for world suicide prevention day, national walking month, Baton of Hope and mental health awareness week.
		Mental Wellbeing information to be included in at least four of the 'Spotlight' newsletters to schools	Green	Information provided in Spotlight, since March, has covered suicide bereavement support, promoting the Baton of Hope event and a focus on existing and new mental health support and services available in Herefordshire for children, young people and families.
		Develop a suite of communications and marketing resources	Green	Resources are being shared with partners to enable consistent information and new resources will be developed where none currently exist.
	Improve services for carers of all ages	Produce an annual report on progress of the strategy - January 2026	Grey	This is due for quarter 4.
	Improve services for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues	Sign up three new work opportunities providers	Grey	This work is linked to the community activities review.
	Improve the model to ensure that people who are discharged from hospital receive the right support in the community, including reablement	Undertake a review of 25 sample discharge cases to provide assurance on partnership working	Green	In progress, a process to undertake the review and the respective audit paperwork has now been developed in conjunction with system partners. The audit will take place within Q2 with stakeholders.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Work with partners and residents to build connected and resilient communities	Support local providers including foster carers to meet the cultural, religious and social needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)	Review placement of UASC by type and location	Blue	Our UASC needs for accommodation are met and this is not a priority for new commissioning. Tina Russell has removed this from the commissioning intentions 2025/26. Working with current providers of accommodation and foster carers is BAU
	Embed partnership working within the Joint Commissioning Forum (JCF), comprising Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board to jointly address health and care needs of children, young people and families with an initial focus on children and young people with Special Educational Needs	Agree Joint Commissioning Strategy for Special Education Needs and Disability 2025-28 and commence implementation	Amber	Review of joint commissioning forum needed to evaluate purpose and remit.
		Review and refresh S75 arrangements for joint funding across Health, Education and Social Care	Green	
		Work with partner agencies to understand how therapies are delivered and impact. Consider development plan.	Green	Working group to scope existing provision, gaps and opportunities in place across Herefordshire County Council (HCC) and Integrated Care Board (iCB)
	Deliver the Community Spaces Capital Grant Scheme to enhance community hubs, infrastructure, and spaces that support local engagement, inclusion, and wellbeing	Evaluate Expressions of Interest (EOIs), shortlist applicants, and invite full applications	Blue	EOIs have been assessed and shortlisted by the panel. Successful applicants invited to submit full applications and business plans.
		Allocate funding to successful projects and initiate delivery	Green	EOIs have been assessed and shortlisted by the panel. Successful applicants invited to submit full applications and business plans.
		Monitor implementation of funded projects and evaluate outcomes	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Pilot the Herefordshire Connect cross-sector referral platform through organisations that are supporting the household support fund to improve access to cost-of-living support services by enabling direct referrals between organisations, reducing duplication, and ensuring residents receive the help they need quickly and effectively	Finalise partnerships and complete technical setup, ensuring seamless integration with key partners	Blue	Data sharing agreements are in place. Platform built and tested. Ready for pilot launch with identified partners.
		Launch the pilot phase with identified service providers and support initial onboarding	Green	Pilot phase has launched. Initial onboarding and training for service providers underway to ensure effective use of the platform.
		Monitor platform performance, user experience, and system efficiency through ongoing evaluation	Green	Monitoring will begin following pilot launch to gather feedback and assess platform performance.
		Produce an evaluation report with data-driven recommendations for full rollout, identifying opportunities for scaling and innovation	Grey	Evaluation report will be produced following pilot completion, informing future rollout and improvements.
	Enable people to access the housing they need through strategic housing service	Continual engagement with Registered Providers, supporting them with planning comments and grant funding opportunities through Homes England	Green	This work is ongoing as planning applications are received. We meet with Registered Provider partners on a quarterly basis and Homes England also attend this meeting.
		Continual engagement with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Governments to secure grant funding for additional council properties to be purchased and refurbished to meet specific client groups	Green	MHCLG have changed their approach to grant funding, sweeping a range of smaller grants up into a single Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant. Funding has been secured to enable the purchase and refurbishment of transitional accommodation for people that are homeless.
		Maintain up to date housing needs data to support the delivery of accommodation	Green	Homepoint data is utilised on every development to evidence need internal needs data is also gathered on vulnerable client groups.
	Invest in a flood risk response programme to reduce both the likelihood and the impact of flooding across the county	Investment of £1m in scheme delivery, scheme development, community engagement and the use of technology	Amber	Formal flood investigations across the county are underway. Political Group Consultation (PGC) to be arranged on the allocation of this funding.
	Support people to feel safe and respected in their communities	Develop our community safety approach as a partnership to address extra familial risk of harm in the community	Using the locality model establish a partnership across the safeguarding network and local community leads in each locality	Blue

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
		Further development of the information sharing processes to identify new and emerging push/pull factors driving missing episodes	Green	Information from Return Home interviews , and the learning from the Multi Agency Child exploitation (MACE) Meetings are being collated in a Quarterly report. This will be shared across the partnership service to ensure new and emerging trends are highlighted quickly and will be coordinated with uour Prevent work. The Strategic Profile on Exploitation was shared with the community safety partnership (CSP) in May.
		Update the Herefordshire Partnership Prevent Strategy and action plan for 25-26 and develop a Prepare Plan and Protect plan tailored for each locality	Green	The Prevent Strategy is in place with an action plan 25/26 with the Prevent group working upon it. The assurance letter from the Home Office has been received by the Council and we are meeting our duties and exceeding in one area.
		Further development of the information sharing processes to identify new and emerging risks associated with Child Sexual Exploitation	Green	This will be brought together at the end of Q2. The Exploitation Strategy is being updated in the coming months by the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) subgroup. This is being completed with feedback from children in schools. As part of the Locality Launches which are happening this week greater connections are being made in each area which will inform these plans.
	Deliver the safer streets to schools' project	Commence construction	Green	Sensors installed and Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) trials set to start
		Complete construction	Green	Sensors installed and ETRO trials set to start

Key		
Green - On Target	Amber - At risk of missing Deadline	Red - Not on Target
Blue - Completed	Grey - Not started	Purple - Parked

Place: We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place, and do everything we can to improve the health of our rivers.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive	Deliver the Local Transport Plan to ensure places can prosper and thrive with the right integrated transport networks	Commence consultation	Blue	
		Seek Cabinet approval to adopt the plan	Green	
		Commence implementation	Green	
	Prepare a new Local Plan in response to the National Planning Policy Framework changes and the government mandatory housing targets	Commence development of a new Local Plan	Green	The first stage in the preparation of a new Local Plan commenced in July 2025 with the 'Call for Sites'. This enables all landowners and interested parties to submit land for consideration for a number of uses within the county. These sites will then undergo detailed service assessments in order to consider their suitability for development.
		Gateway 1 Consultation	Grey	Evidence gathering and the call for sites has commenced to inform this work. Progression to Gateway 1 cannot formally progress until such time as the secondary legislation for the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act is published. The delivery milestone is Q4.
	Develop the Masterplan to set the long-term direction for growth and development in the city	Draft the Hereford Masterplan in consultation with partners and stakeholders	Green	Consultants (the Urbanists) appointed to produce Masterplan document first draft due mid-summer, A number of site visits and engagement meetings held.
		Seek Cabinet approval for the Masterplan	Green	As above, consultants now preparing the plan for cabinet consideration in Q3.
		Publish Masterplan and commence implementation	Green	As above, strategy commissioned and on track for publication in Q4
	Establish a strategic plan for the eastern expansion of Ross-on-Wye	Undertake stakeholder engagement	Green	Masterplan consultants appointed and have produced initial draft for internal consultation.
		Draft strategic plan produced	Green	First draft received, work being aligned to local plan process prior to public consultation.
	Establish a strategic plan for the west side of Hereford	Stakeholder engagement	Green	Scope of work being finalised to align Growth Corridor development with current work via highways on phase 1 Western Bypass
		Draft strategic plan produced	Green	To be produced in Q3
Deliver the Public Realm services	Award the new Public Realm contract		Green	The Invitation to Submit an Initial Tender (ISIT) stage was completed on time, with officers being pleased with the number of submissions received. A gap analysis of the tenders received was completed on time and as a result a decision was taken by the Board to move to the negotiation phase, which is planned for July.
		Commence demobilisation of current contract and commence mobilisation for new contract	Grey	De-mobilisation is not due to start until Q2. Mobilisation will not commence until Q4.
	Continue to deliver Section 106 infrastructure projects	Reduce backlog of Section 106 schemes	Amber	Good progress being made on the backlog, however, resourcing replacements for the two S106 interims has been held up by the Project Management Office (PMO) restructure. This may delay a few schemes but a plan is in place to try to mitigate this.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
29		Commission infrastructure projects in a timely manner to ensure best value for money when income is received	Amber	Good progress being made on the backlog, however, resourcing replacements for the two S106 interims has been held up by the PMO restructure. This may delay a few schemes but a plan is in place to try to mitigate this.
	Deliver a review of all leisure assets and service provision across Herefordshire	Undertake visioning and consultation exercise	Purple	An initial Leisure Review session with cross-sector stakeholders took place in March 2025, with positive support. The Leisure Review has since been paused temporarily while a new Leisure Lead is recruited. The intention is to action the Leisure Review once a new person is appointed and this will run across 2025/26
		Develop Herefordshire Council vision for leisure provision	Purple	An initial Leisure Review session with cross-sector stakeholders took place in March 2025, with positive support. The Leisure Review has since been paused temporarily while a new Leisure Lead is recruited. The intention is to action the Leisure Review once a new person is appointed and this will run across 2025/26.
		Undertake condition surveys of leisure assets	Green	Halo Leisure has been requested to undertake a condition survey review as part of their obligations under the full repair lease agreement with Herefordshire Council. Work has begun on this in partnership with Properties/ Estates.
	Continue the redevelopment of the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery	Progress from design stage (RIBA – Royal Institute of British Architects - Stage 4) to construction (RIBA Stage 5) for the building	Green	Redevelopment progressing to schedule and budget. Risks remain actively managed through monthly programme reviews.
		Rollout the Museum Activity Plan across Herefordshire	Green	Continuing as planned
	Support the local Food Alliance to increase partnership, food collaboration and local food consumption	Scope a Local Food Strategy	Green	A healthy weight needs assessment has been drafted and will underpin the development of the strategy. The sustainable food places coordinator role is currently vacant so the final strategy may be delayed.
		Develop plan to achieve Sustainable Food Places Silver award	Green	The Food Alliance Steering Group continues to meet and has plans in place to achieve the sustainable food places silver award, taking into account the short-term absence of a coordinator.
Expand and maintain the transport infrastructure network in a sustainable way and improve connectivity across the county	Complete the construction of the Transport Hub	Commence construction of the Transport Hub	Amber	Delayed start due to lengthy negotiations in securing a range of Value Engineering options.
	Progress the delivery of the Holme Lacy safe pedestrian corridor improvements	Commence construction	Green	Construction contract has been awarded this quarter and construction is due to start in early autumn.
	Complete the necessary work to tender for the design and construction of Phase 1 of the Hereford Western Bypass	Delivery of Phase one and Phase two business cases	Green	Traffic modelling has commenced and growth strategies being built to inform both phase 1 and phase 2 business cases.
		Award of Design and Construction tender for the Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1	Green	Procurement Strategy to go to Cabinet in July. Procurement will begin once strategy is agreed with award currently programmed for January 2026.
	Complete the design work and start construction on the Aylestone Hill safe pedestrian corridor improvements	Final design completed	Green	Design work has been finalised during this quarter and tender documents are being prepared. Should be tendered in autumn with construction award before December.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
30		Tender the construction contract	Grey	Design work has been finalised during this quarter and tender documents are being prepared. Should be tendered in autumn with construction award before December.
	Complete the Great Western Way improvement project	Commence construction	Green	Scheme was delayed due to procurement issues, but is now on track with tender documents out and award of construction contract in autumn.
		Complete construction	Green	Scheme was delayed due to procurement issues, but is now on track with tender documents out and award of construction contract in autumn.
	Deliver Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding	Deliver a Bus Services Summit	Green	Bus summit convened on 18th June with plans to organise more meetings in the future
		Expand/ extend eight bus routes, running across the county	Amber	Planning for all routes has been completed, however, operators are experiencing issues in adding additional timings and routes due to driver shortage. We are working with the operators in terms of looking at their schedules. To get improvements started we also need to await approval from the Traffic Commissioner.
		Develop the plan for spending £1.1m of capital funding for bus infrastructure improvements	Green	New member of staff starting to assist in implementing the capital infrastructure projects. Lists of improvements, including new shelters and Real Time Information screens have been collated.
		Commence delivery against the plan	Amber	Planning for all routes has been completed, however, operators are experiencing issues in adding additional timings and routes due to driver shortage. We are working with the operators in terms of looking at their schedules. To get improvements started we also need to await approval from the Traffic Commissioner.
	Deliver the highways maintenance investment programme across the county	Deliver £10m of investment in the resurfacing of the county's highway network through the Resurfacing Herefordshire Highways 1 and 2 programmes	Green	The project is on track to deliver the £10m investment by the start of Q3. At the start of June 2025 £5.8m had been committed or spent on the project.
		Deliver £3.985m of investment in highway infrastructure assets including £250k on Public Rights of Way through the Highway Infrastructure Investment programme.	Green	The project is on track to deliver the £3.984m investment by the end of Q4.
		Deliver £2.5m of investment in the preparation and delivery of surface dressing schemes through the Highway Infrastructure Investment 2 programme	Green	The project is on track for delivery during Q2. A contract for surface dressing works has been signed and is due to start in late July.
	Deliver the Highway Core Revenue spend	Delivery of £5.3m of revenue spend in-year	Green	Initial design work has been commissioned via Balfour Beatty and a programme is being prepared to then allow engagement to take place with relevant stakeholders, including prioritising local businesses and residents.
	Deliver the Highway LTP (Local Transport Plan) Capital Maintenance spend	Delivery of £22.9m of capital spend in year* (*subject to confirmation from Department for Transport)	Green	Works commissioned through Public Realm Contract Annual Plan and the Framework Agreement for Highways and Public Realm Works. Risk Registers in place with progress and risks monitored monthly through the contract Operations Boards. All works programmed have been completed to plan.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
	Work with City, Town and Parish Councils on locally important maintenance	Deliver grants to the City, Town and Parish Councils to support delivery of the following schemes: - Lengthsman scheme (£500k) - Public Rights of Way (PROW) scheme (£250k) - Drainage scheme (£445k)	Green	
	Deliver £1.2m of Public Realm investment in Hereford City and the market towns	Identification and delivery of appropriate projects across Bromyard, Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye, working in partnership with the Town Councils of each	Green	A Political Group Consultation was held on 20th June to discuss the proposals with Ward Members. The decision report is being finalised by Officers for publication.
Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity	Deliver Phase 2 Strategic Mitigation for Phosphate Credits	Start construction of second wetland site	Green	Land purchases have moved forward and Heads of Term (HOT) have been agreed.
		Complete construction of first off-mains treatment plant replacement	Green	Legal discussions with school has progressed well
		Commence design for third wetland site	Green	
		Commence planning application for third wetland site	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Support and facilitate the partnership approach to address river pollution	Publish Nutrient Management Plan for the Wye Catchment Area	Green	Draft is due by end of July for review.
		Deliver the third annual rivers conference	Green	Conference being planned for November
		Work with partners to bring forward river restoration projects	Green	The council continues to work in partnership with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Environment Agency(EA), Natural England(NE), Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and partner Local Authorities in river catchment area.
	Support the Wye Catchment Partnership Catchment Management Plan	Work with partners and government agencies to bring forward the delivery of the Catchment Management Plan	Green	Grant funding offer letter received from Welsh Government, tender spec drafted with partners.
		Work with both governments to secure funding to support delivery of the plan	Green	Continued collaboration with all stakeholders - see line above
	Deliver a regenerative farm mentoring programme to five farmers across the county to support the recommendations from their carbon audit	Commission provider to deliver mentoring programme	Blue	Procurement complete and the consultant has begun delivery of the contract
		Commence delivery of one-to-one meetings	Green	First meetings/site visits with the five farms are all complete, next step is to develop the recommendations to support the implementation of the carbon audits
	Adopt the countywide Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy	Adopt the strategy	Green	The new strategy has been finalised following extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement. In order to facilitate the successful countywide adoption by stakeholders and partners a launch/adoption event is currently being developed for Sept to align with the HC corporate adoption as an initial signatory.
	To lead and be responsible for the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Publication of the Nature Recovery Strategy	Amber	Timeline likely to need extending to March / April to accommodate additional stakeholder engagement

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Reduce waste, increase reuse and increase recycling	Develop a new food waste collection service	Adopt the business case (subject to funding) for a new food waste collection service for introduction in 2026-27	Amber	Food waste service is contingent on receiving new burdens funding from government and this has not yet been confirmed. This means that the proposed timescales are now compromised.
	Develop a new garden waste collection service	Finalise the business case and, subject to approval, commence roll out of the service	Amber	Garden waste service is contingent on receiving new burdens funding from government and this has not yet been confirmed. This means that the proposed timescales are now compromised.
	Commence a review of waste disposal contracts	Undertake a strategic options appraisal and procurement options for the future waste disposal arrangements from 2029	Grey	This is currently amber because of delays in making contact with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) who manage the shared resource required to undertake the options work. This is being escalated, lack of progress may result in further escalation and the next update being red.
Work towards reducing county and council carbon emissions, aiming for net zero CO ₂ by 2030/31 and work with partners and communities to make the county more resilient to the effects of climate change	Deliver sustainable energy solutions in all council owned accommodation	Upgrade all refurbishments to a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C. Consideration dependent on the property for sustainable energy solutions such as solar panels and electric boilers	Green	The refurbishment of the 15 units of accommodation purchased using Single Homeless Accommodation Programme funding have been to EPC C and above.
	Reduce the council's own CO ₂ footprint through implementing our Carbon Management Action Plan	Deliver five heat decarbonisation plans for the corporate estate	Green	Eleven heat decarbonisation plans have been shared with the project team as first drafts. Fed back comments to provider and final drafts to be shared shortly. Prioritisation of corporate estate ongoing with £150K capital spend in mind and further outline business capital case been written up.
		Achieve a 70% reduction of CO ₂ emissions from our 2008-09 baseline by the end of the financial year 2025-26	Grey	Data is being collated and initial figures will be ready at the end of the summer
		Publish new Carbon Management Plan for the period 2026-27 to 2030-31	Green	Work is progressing well with great input from the Cabinet working group
	Deliver solar car port canopies in the north car park adjacent to Plough Lane to reduce the council's reliance on grid electricity, exposure to energy markets and improving security of energy supply	Completion of surveys on the car park for feasibility of installation (e.g. management of surface water, presence of asbestos, suitability of concrete to support structure)	Green	Surveys underway, initial feedback is positive and governance is progressing for next stage. Currently grant is being used to cover revenue costs relating to surveys.
		Planning permission obtained	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
		Commence installation of solar car ports	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Support households and businesses to take action to address climate change	Install energy efficient measures to 40 homes and retrofit assessments completed for 60 households	Green	Under Warm Homes Local Grant a total of 35 retrofit assessments have been delivered to date. One property has been approved for multiple measures and another six properties are awaiting approval. There is a strong pipeline of over 315 residents submitting an expression of interest
	Expand the electric vehicles charging network in council owned car parks and additional points through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funded project	Deliver 27 new publicly available charge point sockets across the county	Green	At the end of Q1 there are 6 car parks with charge point installations approved awaiting installation dates under the car park contract, and 5 on-street locations approved awaiting section 50 licences and installation dates under the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) pilot contract. No installations were expected in Q1
	Adopt the Local Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Infrastructure Plan and provide residents with different travel choices through integrated networks	Seek Cabinet approval	Green	Approved by Cabinet Member, moving to adoption stages
		Publish the plan and commence implementation	Green	Approved by Cabinet Member, moving to adoption stages

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Support our local culture and heritage and make Herefordshire a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit	Finalise the design proposals and start construction of the Shirehall Library and Learning Centre	Procure contractors for the build refurbishment	Green	Tender procurement documentation for the Main Build contractor for Shirehall was released in March 2025. Applications received in May 2025 and currently under evaluation. Appointment of Main Contractor targeted for end of June 2025.
		Commence refurbishment of the Shirehall building	Green	Dependent on the procurement of the Main Contractor. Project is on currently on time and construction will begin prior to Q4.
	Review and update the Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2019-29 in partnership with the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (HCP)	Work with HCP to produce draft vision and priorities of the Herefordshire Cultural Strategy	Blue	Cultural Strategy consultation complete with stakeholders and partners. Cultural Strategy progress requested at Connected Communities Scrutiny on 3 June 2025. Draft Cultural Strategy vision and priorities completed.
		Produce final strategy	Green	Due to the request to discuss the Cultural Strategy at Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee on 3 June, and the need to test the draft fully with all partners, the completion of the final strategy is now likely be completed end Q2.
		Endorsement by Cabinet of Herefordshire Cultural Strategy	Green	The endorsement of the final Cultural Strategy is now planned for Q3.
	Produce a Herefordshire Library Strategy.	Draft new vision and priorities and test with stakeholders and users	Green	Analysis undertaken of consultation with public, staff and partners both within and outside the Council. Feedback shared with team and Cabinet member to inform development of new strategy document
		Produce final strategy	Green	Strategy currently being drafted for consideration by Cabinet Member
		Cabinet Member approval of Herefordshire Library Strategy	Green	Strategy being drafted for Cabinet Member approval in Q2
		Develop and commence implementation of action plan arising from the strategy	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Update Herefordshire Archive Plan.	Produce new three-year Archive Plan 2025-2028	Green	Plan has been developed in consultation with the Archive staff team
		Achieve service accreditation for the Herefordshire archive service	Green	Compilation of appropriate documentation and evidence is underway
	Deliver the Our Place creative arts project in partnership with Herefordshire Cultural Partnership	Deliver the project in Leominster, Hereford and Golden Valley	Green	The Our Place project has completed Year 1 delivery and satisfied UKSPF outputs. Herefordshire Council continues to support the programme delivery and a new Creative Health Action Group has been established. All on time and budget.
	Expand community programming and increase accessibility through targeted outreach for Herefordshire Museum Service.	Launch <i>Revealing Our Roots</i> project (co-production with communities) funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	Green	Being rolled out as planned
		Implement part two oral history project <i>Voices of the Wye</i> to preserve cultural stories funded by an external project grant	Green	Continuing as planned
		Establish youth led <i>Fixing Our Broken Planet</i> project funded by the Natural History Museum	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Embed participatory and inclusive practices into decision-making processes in the Herefordshire Museum Service	Establish co-production groups (Access, Equalities, Young People and Veterans & Military Families)	Blue	Complete
		Develop a Curatorial Advisory Panel and Teacher Panel	Blue	Complete

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
	Identify additional income streams to support the financial sustainability of the Museum service	Explore commercial opportunities with a higher education provider to run accredited programmes through the museum	Green	Continuing as planned
		Build on current income generation initiatives to ensure financial resilience of the museum service	Green	Continuing as planned
	Deliver highway improvement schemes at known collision cluster sites	Design and commence delivery of works at top ranking sites including (i) A465 junction with B4348 Locks Garage, Allensmore, and (ii) B4203 junction with B4204 High House Crossroads, Upper Sapey.	Green	Initial design work has been commissioned via Balfour Beatty and a programme is being prepared to then allow engagement to take place with relevant stakeholders, including prioritising local businesses and residents.

Key		
Green - On Target	Amber - At risk of missing Deadline	Red - Not on Target
Blue - Completed	Grey - Not started	Purple - Parked

Growth: We will create the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county; attracting inward investment, building business confidence, creating jobs, enabling housing development along with providing the right infrastructure.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
35	Develop employment land to unlock new business opportunities for the county and generate local jobs	Commence development works on Ross Enterprise Park	Procure a contractor	Green Tender documents are being finalised for issue in July 2025. On track to appoint in Q3.
		Commence works to create access to the site, and 4 acres of service development ready plots	Green	As above, tender documents are being finalised, on track for a contractor to be appointed and on site in Q3.
	Develop outline business case for the potential development of business units on the Bromyard Depot site	Develop outline business case	Green	Cabinet Member decision taken to appoint a design team, to inform the development of the business case. On track for completion in Q2.
		Develop full business case	Green	As above - full business case to follow outline business case which is on track.
		Appoint Design team	Green	Following cabinet member approval, tender documents to appoint eh design team being drafted.
	Attract new and growing businesses onto the Hereford Enterprise Zone to support the economic growth of the county and provide better paid jobs	Agree the sale of six plots on Hereford Enterprise Zone to support growing businesses	Green	On track 2 sales agreed in Q1
	Support existing and new businesses on Hereford Enterprise Zone to increase productivity and provide better paid jobs	Implement a Key Account Management approach for providing targeted support to businesses on Hereford Enterprise Zone	Green	Key Account Management approach has been launched for Hereford Enterprise Zone businesses, but further work is required to increase take-up by businesses.
	Support existing and new businesses on Hereford Enterprise Zone to increase productivity and provide better paid jobs	Businesses identified and receiving dedicated contact and support from a named Economic Development Officer every three months	Green	As above.
	Develop and implement an Inward Investment and Place Marketing plan for Herefordshire	Establish an inward investment programme	Green	Inward Investment Programme has been developed, to be shared with Cabinet Member for Economy & Growth.
		Commence delivery of the inward investment programme	Green	As above, although key elements of the Inward Investment Programme have already commenced, including procurement of an Inward Investment Website, development of bank of photography, videography and drone footage to support the Programme, and the establishment of a Property agents Forum.
		Publish a Defence and Security Investment Prospectus setting out both financial and development opportunities	Green	Work has started on the development of an Investment Prospectus, which will be supported by photography, videography and drone footage.
	Support market towns and Hereford City to be vibrant hubs through working with residents, grassroots organisations and businesses	Develop and agree proposals (subject to funding) for business hubs/ co-working space in each of the market towns	Green	Cabinet Member decision to progress this project was made on 4 July 2025, so work on business case will take place following completion of the governance process. Design work for the Business Hub at the Buttercross Building in Leominster is underway.
	Support projects and priorities identified in the 2021 Market Town Investment Plans	Work with Town Councils to identify funding to take forward projects	Green	Discussions are ongoing with Town Councils to review recently completed UKSPF funded feasibility studies and agree how these will be progressed.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
	Work with partners in the Golden Valley Parkway Task Force to complete a study looking at the viability for a new railway station	Study completed	Amber	Awaiting feedback from Transport for Wales modelling of fast service between Cardiff and Manchester to assess impact on line capacity and outcome of proposed housing allocation sites for Reg 18 to inform business case.
		Findings of study evaluated, and next steps agreed	Green	Awaiting outcomes from Transport for Wales report to determine if any space on timetables before commencing work on the study.
Support residents to access skills development, training and employment opportunities	Support the Herefordshire Skills Board in engaging with local businesses to understand and help address skills gaps	Deliver a range of initiatives to address identified skills gaps and business needs.	Green	The Skills Board chair and the new Business Growth Board have met to discuss private sector engagement. A workforce skills conference is due to be held in September to bring together employers and skills providers. A Skills Strategy is due to be commissioned.
		Continue to develop our partnership with NMITE to support their development and growth around shared strategic ambitions for education, skills and economic development	Green	Continuous support has been maintained with NMITE.
	Attract external funding to help address skills gaps and business needs	Seek Cabinet Member approval to implement the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) for 25-26	Blue	Completed - cabinet member decision taken to enable delivery of the 2025/26 programme.
		Implement the UKSPF in accordance with the Cabinet Member approval to address identified skills gaps and business needs	Green	A range of new grant programmes launched.
	Agree a new strategic plan for the council's adult and community learning education service	Develop and agree the new strategy and delivery plan to support learning and enable access to employment, further training, and skill development opportunities	Amber	This work has started and is in progress. We have received a 6% reduction in Tailored Learning for 2025/26 academic year, which needs to be taken into account. We are awaiting the national post 16 strategy to inform which should have been published beginning of July but has been delayed until the Autumn.
	Working in partnership with the Skills Board to promote the higher education offer available in Herefordshire	Delivery a joint promotional/marketing campaign and the Careers and Enterprise programme in local schools and college, to attract students to study in the county including local residents	Amber	Initial discussions have been held with stakeholders.
Work with partners to provide high quality and affordable housing to meet all needs	Bring forward council owned sites for development	Seek outline planning approval and dispose of sites such as the former Holme Lacy school to enable development	Green	Feasibility layouts obtained, viability being undertaken as part of wider possible housing delivery vehicle work. discussions ongoing in relation to reuse of former school building to support college
	Complete the strategic plan for Merton Meadow and Essex Arms sites in Hereford	Complete the strategic plan	Green	Consultants appointed, public and stakeholder consultation programme being undertaken over summer (launched in July 2025), First draft Masterplan/development strategy due to be reported back in Q3 25
	Commence the flood alleviation works on the Merton Meadow and Essex Arms sites in Hereford	Seek outline planning permission	Green	Planning application due to go to Planning Committee 30 July 25.
		Commence development of the flood alleviation works	Green	Procurement process in progress, Contractor identified contracts being finalised, target start on site September 25
	Finalise the long-term strategic model for the delivery of housing across the county	Complete review of options	Green	External resource procured to assist with Financial modelling and governance structures to educate draft business case to be reported to cabinet late July 25
		Seek Cabinet approval for the preferred option(s)	Green	Cabinet decision taken to further investigate development of a council owned housing development company

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
	Utilise the full range of measures to prevent people becoming homeless including through the provision of transitional accommodation	Develop costed business case for the preferred option(s)	Green	Outline business case currently being drafted.
		Complete procurement process and award contract for refurbishment works to a city centre building for transitional accommodation for those who are homeless	Blue	Procurement completed and contract awarded.
		Complete refurbishment works to the city centre building	Amber	Initial survey work being completed and start on site date being agreed in principle.
		Design work and tender for contractor for refurbishment of the Buttercross, Leominster into affordable units completed	Amber	Procurement exercise underway and design work being developed.
		Commence work on the Buttercross	Grey	To commence when the above activity is complete.
		Finalise specification and arrangements for winter shelter provision	Blue	Tendered in 2024/25 with the option to extend for 12 months.
		Deliver winter shelter provision	Grey	Shelter will open in November 2025. Contract in place and plans agreed with Commissioning Manager.
Work with our partners and businesses to facilitate growth across the county	Support the Herefordshire Business Growth Board to better understand barriers encountered by the private sector and enable opportunities for development and growth	Establish the Board	Blue	Completed - Herefordshire Business Growth Board formed
		Identify priorities and delivery programme	Green	Business Growth Board identified initial priorities.
	Maximise the use of Business Growth Hub to support businesses across the county	Deliver regular engagement and support for businesses across the county, including business surgeries, training and workshop referrals	Green	Herefordshire Growth Hub delivering services as required
	Support county BID/ Visit Herefordshire to increase the economic impact of tourism across the county	Support the establishment of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership	Green	The Herefordshire Destination Management Plan was launched in April. Herefordshire County Business Improvement District have established initial proposals for the LVEP governance structure. Taking this forward is outside of the council's direct control.
		Support the partnership to develop the Herefordshire Destination Management Plan	Blue	Completed - the Herefordshire County BID launched the Herefordshire Destination Management Plan in April 2025

KeyGreen -
On TargetAmber -
At risk of missing DeadlineRed -
Not on TargetBlue -
CompletedGrey -
Not startedPurple -
Parked

Transformation: We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
Change and transform the organisation to be fit for the future and deliver the efficiencies required	Deliver the year one objectives of the council's Transformation Strategy and support implementation of the future council operating model	Deliver the Transformation Strategy - year one objectives	Green	Transformation Strategy launched, work plans scoped
	Implement an improved strategic commissioning, procurement and commercial model and strategy	Review our organisational commissioning and procurement model and develop and launch a strategic commissioning and commercial strategy	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Implement an improved approach to contract management	Implementation of the council's revised Service Level Agreement with Hoople to ensure best value and alignment with future target operating model	Green	Hoople SLA Work packages have been reviewed and awaiting final sign off. The overarching contract has also been reviewed and is awaiting final sign off
		Refresh and re-launch contract management tools and resources to ensure compliance with the new Procurement Act	Blue	
	Implement policies and processes that ensure that the council maximises service cost recovery and realises value for money	Review the approach to setting fees and charges across the council	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
		Review the council-wide approach to income collection and debt management	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Complete the review of home to school transport to mitigate increasing costs through a new delivery model	Strategic business case developed and approved for an in house, arms length or other direct delivery of elements of home to school transport	Green	Business case is being commissioned and is due by October.
		Implement new commissioning strategy to achieve better value for money	Green	Review of commissioning strategy and DPS is being commissioned and recommendations are due by October. Negotiations with taxi companies are being scoped and negotiation strategy has been drafted.
	Continue to invest in the property assets of the council to ensure they are maintained and decrease the burden on revenue repair works	Deliver Estates and Schools capital programmes	Amber	Whilst good progress is being made on prior years programmes in bringing those to conclusion, progress on the current 2025/28 programme has not been as proposed. A number of new year projects have commenced and will be completed within year.
	Attract and retain an excellent workforce through effective approaches to recruitment and retention	Ensure our recruitment practices reflect best practice and value for money	Identify any improvements in the application process for candidates and recruiting managers so that the process is as smooth as possible	Blue
Review our approach to temporary and interim appointments to get better value for money			Green	A review of the existing approach has taken place, involving internal stakeholders including the HR Advisory team and Procurement.

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks	
39		Review and develop the content of the council's recruitment microsite 'the Spirit of Herefordshire'	Green	A review of recruitment website content took place with the communications team in June 2025, with implementation of actions ongoing. Improvements include •Creation of employee case studies and Director introductions. •Addition of a page dedicated to inclusive selection processes. •Addition of a page dedicated to Employee Network Groups.	
		Incorporate the council's THRIVE values into our recruitment processes	Green	The project to implement and embed THRIVE values into recruitment practices has been scoped and due for consideration in July 2025.	
		Review the council's approach to recruitment payments and market forces supplements	Green	The revised Market Forces Supplement process and requirement for an associated business case has been embedded across the council.	
	Become an employer of choice	Launch the council's scheme to recognise long service and exceptional achievement	Blue	The recognition and appreciation framework launched on 1 April 2025. Recognising long service of 25 years or more, retirement leavers, long service leavers and achievement were prioritised. The scheme is working well and will continue to be reviewed, and additional milestones added, where appropriate, over the next 12 months in line with the workforce strategy priorities.	
		Launch a programme of leadership training for managers and aspiring managers	Green	The council's new leadership and development 'Lead@HC' was launched on 15 May 2025. A provider has been procured for the aspire and empower programmes and we are in progress in procuring a provider for the innovate programme. Demand and interest have been positive. We are in design stage of the programmes, and they are due to commence from September onwards.	
		Review the impact of the Workforce Strategy and progress made towards its stated objectives	Green	The workforce strategy is constantly used to ensure priorities and initiatives being developed are aligned to this strategy and thus, meeting the objectives as set out in the council and delivery plans. A full review of data and actions is planned to take place later in the year.	
		Deliver the improvements identified in the employee survey	Green	We continue to embed our THRIVE values, including scoping values-based recruitment practices, have launched a new customer charter, Lead@HC leadership offer and an updated skills and wellbeing offer. New employee awards and service recognition schemes have also been successfully launched.	
	Work collaboratively with our residents, communities and businesses to achieve the best results together	Strengthen our partnerships with communities to enable community action	Develop a long-term commissioning framework for voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
			Develop a council-wide approach to grant management and grant maximisation	Amber	Currently commissioning an online grants administration system, with a view to rolling this out across the Council.
Deliver the Talk Community Strategy – year one objectives			Green	Key actions underway: new communications plan in development, capital grant scheme launched, evaluation framework being scoped, and partnership work ongoing to strengthen early help and local intelligence	
		Build an understanding of our resident and communities' requirements	Revise current consultation guidance document	Green	

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
		Co-design and establish a young people's council and young people's consultation guidance with children and young people	Green	Research and scoping underway, meetings in place with other Local Authorities to review their existing youth council's to inform future development. Also, mapping out other key existing provision/forums already in place and undertake engagement with them.
		Develop and embed a volunteering policy to support the council to maximise opportunities to work with volunteer networks	Green	Research and scoping of existing policies and supporting documentation underway to support future development.
		Implement the Customer Services Target Operating Model	Green	Work is continuing to engage with customers to ensure we incorporate feedback and refine our Target Operating Model.
	Ensure improved working with Parish, Town and City Councils	Implement the Parish, Town and City Charter	Blue	Complete
40 Improve the way we use technology across our services	Complete and build on the foundation work to improve our existing IT platforms and infrastructure to transform how we work and deliver services to our residents	Finalise the roll out phase one of Microsoft 365 to ensure the workforce have the latest version of Microsoft tools	Blue	The majority of the workforce have been upgraded to M365; there are staff on long term absence (maternity, sick leave etc) and these staff will be upgraded as business as usual as they return to work.
		Upgrade the online and telephone payment function	Green	The project is progressing, but additional work has been identified prior to go live in relation to processing telephone payments, which means delivery is anticipated in Q2.
		Implement a new telephony system	Green	During implementation, technical issues with the payment statement have been encountered. These are now resolved and the new system will be implemented by Q2.
		Complete the transfer to a new CMS (Content Management System) to enable website development	Green	Project is progressing as expected with procurement activities commencing and internal work being completed to ensure readiness prior to moving to the new website platform.
		Develop the plan for digital functionality/capability which directly aligns to and supports the Customer Services Target Operating Model	Green	Progressing through implementation of the new web platform and telephone system, but also through planning for the next stage of developments post implementation of the above, as well as exploring additional opportunities.
		Initiate pilot programmes to test technological applications and evaluate outcomes for residents and council ways of working	Green	The council has commissioned socitim to work with the council on customer transformation
	Identify and undertake pilots of Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Complete an organisation wide internal pilot and evaluation of Microsoft Co-Pilot to understand areas of opportunity for future	Green	The pilot is ongoing
		Undertake a pilot project implementing Magic Notes into adults and children's social work practice and evaluate impact on efficiency and practice	Green	Current magic notes pilot has been extended by 3 months
Strengthen the council's strategy ensuring alignment for delivering the future vision	Develop a strong evidence base and become an intelligent organisation	Refresh the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy	Green	
	Develop a growth plan for Hoople in line with the future needs of Herefordshire Council	Develop and launch a council strategic plan for Hoople which aligns to our future target operating model	Green	
Build a data and performance rich culture to inform decisions, improve efficiency and manage demand	Strengthen the performance culture across the council	Implementation of the new performance management system for KPI and delivery plan milestones	Green	

Objectives	This Year We Will...	Key Milestones to achieve the Deliverable	RAG	Remarks
		Deliver workshops on the use of the new performance management system to all services and directorates	Grey	Not due to start in Quarter 1
	Strengthen the risk management culture across the council	Implement the organisation's refreshed risk management strategy	Green	
	Strengthen data quality and intelligence in social care	Review arrangements to record and monitor data to meet statutory and operational needs for children and adults' social care	Green	

Key

Green -
On Target

Amber -
At risk of missing Deadline

Red -
Not on Target

Blue -
Completed

Grey -
Not started

Purple -
Parked



Title of report: Q1 2025/26 Budget Report

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 25 September 2025

Cabinet Member: Cabinet member finance and corporate services

Report by: S151 Officer

Report Author: Director of Finance (S151 Officer)

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To report the forecast position for 2025/26 at Quarter 1 (June 2025), including explanation and analysis of the drivers for the material budget variances, and to outline current and planned recovery activity to reduce the forecast overspend.

To provide assurance that progress has been made towards delivery of the agreed revenue budget and service delivery targets, and that the reasons for major variances are understood and are being addressed to the cabinet's satisfaction.

The forecast 2025/26 outturn shows a net overspend of £4.3 million at Quarter 1, before management action estimated at £3.3 million to reduce the forecast overspend for 2025/26 to £1.0 million.

Recommendation(s)

That: Cabinet

- a) **Reviews the financial forecast for 2025/26, as set out in the appendices A-D, and identifies any additional actions to be considered to achieve future improvements; and**
- b) **Notes the management action identified to reduce the forecast outturn position for 2025/26; and**

- c) **Agrees the continuation of management actions to reduce the forecast overspend as identified in this report.**

Alternative options

1. Cabinet may choose to review financial performance more or less frequently; or request alternative actions to address any identified areas of variance from budget, including referral to the relevant scrutiny committee.

Key considerations

Revenue Outturn

2. The council's approved net revenue budget for 2025/26 is £231.5 million which includes planned savings of £3.9 million. Detailed explanations for variances from budget are set out in Appendix A by Directorate and Service area.
3. This report presents the first revenue forecast outturn position for 2025/26 and highlights continuing budget pressures to support increases in demand across social care budgets, temporary accommodation and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transport services.
4. The Quarter 1 revenue outturn position for 2025/26 shows a forecast variance from budget of £4.3 million (1.9% of net budget), before management action. It is expected that planned management activity will reduce the forecast overspend to £1.0 million.
5. This variance represents cost pressures of £4.3 million comprising £2.9 million in-year net cost pressures and £1.4 million of brought forward Savings Targets assessed as 'at risk' as at Quarter 1.
6. The forecast outturn position for 2025/26 by Directorate, is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: 2025/26 Forecast Revenue Outturn before management recovery action

2025/26 Forecast Revenue Outturn at Quarter 1 (June 2025)			
	Revenue Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Forecast Variance £m
Community Wellbeing	90.8	93.6	2.8
Children & Young People	59.1	58.0	(1.1)
Economy & Environment	29.1	29.5	0.4
SEN/Home to School Transport	12.7	13.4	0.7
Corporate Services	23.0	24.5	1.6
Directorate Total	214.7	219.0	4.3
Central	16.8	16.8	-
Total	231.5	235.8	4.3

Management Activity and Recovery Actions

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
 Rachael Sanders, Tel. 01432 383775, email Rachael.Sanders@herefordshire.gov.uk

7. Recovery actions expected to reduce the forecast overspend in Quarter 4 include:
 - i. allocation of the Budget Resilience Reserve to mitigate the impact of cost pressures and volatility in demand in Directorate Budgets;
 - ii. continued review of the council's contract arrangements and shareholding in Hoople Ltd; and
 - iii. challenge of forecast expenditure over the remainder of the financial year through Directorate expenditure control panels.
8. The Budget Resilience Reserve was established in 2024/25 to manage the impact of in-year cost pressures and volatility in demand across social care budgets. In the financial year ended 2024/25, £4.0 million of this reserve was applied to cost pressures in the Community Wellbeing Budget, reducing the balance carried forward to the current financial year to £7.0 million.
9. As detailed in the Earmarked Reserves and General Balances Policy Statement 2025/26, allocation of reserve funding in each financial year will require application to the council's S151 Officer and Cabinet approval to ensure that appropriate measures have been taken within Directorates. At the end of each financial year, any unused balance will be considered as part of the annual review of earmarked reserves.
10. Expenditure controls first implemented during 2023/24 remain in place to support recovery activity and robust control over expenditure in 2025/26. Directorate panels will continue to review expenditure on goods and services as well as changes in staffing arrangements to maintain the increased level of rigour and challenge over expenditure for the remainder of the financial year.

Table 2: Updated forecast revenue position 2025/26

Updated 2025/26 Forecast Revenue Outturn at Quarter 1 (June 2025)					
	Revenue Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Forecast Variance £m	Mgm't Action £m	Revised Forecast £m
Community Wellbeing	90.8	93.6	2.8	(2.8)	-
Children & Young People	59.1	58.0	(1.1)	-	(1.1)
Economy & Environment	29.1	29.5	0.4	-	0.4
SEN/HometoSchool Transport	12.7	13.4	0.7	-	0.7
Corporate Services	23.0	24.5	1.5	(0.5)	1.0
Directorate Total	214.7	219.0	4.3	(3.3)	1.0
Central	16.8	16.8	-	-	-
Total	231.5	235.8	4.3	(3.3)	1.0

Savings

11. Council approved a total of £3.9 million of savings for 2025/26 comprising targets in the Children & Young People Directorate aligned to refresh of the 3 Year Financial Plan. A review of the delivery and status of the 2025/26 approved savings has been undertaken; informed by planned and actual activity in the year to date to determine savings targets at risk of in-year delivery.

12. This review **confirms £1.6 million (40%) of the total approved savings target for the year has been delivered at Quarter 1** with a further £2.3 million (60%) assessed as 'on target/in progress' for the year. No savings are currently assessed as 'at risk'.
13. A breakdown of 2025/26 approved savings is shown in Table 3 below with further detail on the status of individual saving target set out in Appendix D, Annex 1.

Table 3: Assessment of Delivery of 2025/26 Approved Savings at Quarter 1

	Target £m	Delivered £m	On Target £m	In Progress £m	At Risk £m
Children & Young People	3.9	1.6	0.8	1.6	-
Total	3.9	1.6	0.8	1.6	-
	100%	40%	20%	40%	0%

14. Savings not delivered recurrently in previous years have been carried forward into 2025/26 for continued monitoring of delivery. As set out in the 2024/25 Quarter 4 Outturn Report to Cabinet in June this year, a focused review of the original proposals and planned activity has been undertaken during Quarter 1 and revised savings plans have been developed, where appropriate, to confirm activity to deliver savings in 2025/26.
15. The status of delivery of the revised savings, which total £11.9 million, is shown in Table 4 below with further detail on the status of individual saving target set out in Appendix D, Annex 2. A reconciliation of changes in the individual targets brought forward is included in Appendix D, Annex 3.

Table 4: Assessment of Delivery of Brought Forward Savings Targets at Quarter 1

	Target £m	Delivered £m	On Target £m	In Progress £m	At Risk £m
Community Wellbeing	3.2	0.8	0.1	2.3	-
Economy & Environment	0.4	0.1	-	0.3	-
Corporate Services	0.5	0.3	-	0.2	-
Home to School/SEN Transport	0.5	-	-	0.5	-
Transformation	7.3	4.7	0.4	0.8	1.4
Total b/fwd Savings	11.9	5.9	0.5	4.1	1.4
	100%	50%	4%	34%	12%

16. At 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1), £5.9 million (50%) of the £11.9 million brought forward savings have been delivered with a further £4.6 million (38%) forecast to be delivered in year; £1.4 million (12%) remain at risk and with focused activity underway to resolve or mitigate in year.
17. The **delivery of savings in full and on time is critical** to ensure the 2025/26 revenue outturn position is balanced and to prevent further pressure on future years' budgets. Progress on delivery of savings and mitigations will continue to be monitored and reported in the next budget monitoring report to Cabinet.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Rachael Sanders, Tel. 01432 383775, email Rachael.Sanders@herefordshire.gov.uk

18. The cumulative DSG deficit is accounted for as an unusable reserve on the council's Balance Sheet, as permitted via statutory instrument, which will remain in place until 31 March 2028. This enables all local authorities to ring-fence the DSG deficit from the overall financial position in the statutory accounts. Beyond the period of the statutory override, the expectation is that any balance on the DSG Unusable Reserve will transfer back to the council's total Earmarked Reserves.
19. On 1 April 2025, the cumulative deficit brought forward was £20.0 million. A deficit budget of £20.2 million has been approved for 2025/26; if expenditure is contained within the approved budget, the cumulative DSG deficit will total £40.2 million by 31 March 2026.
20. Activity data which informs the forecast will be updated in Quarter 2, to reflect changes in demand for the 2025/26 academic year commencing in September 2025 and a revised forecast position will be reported in the Quarter 2 Report to Cabinet in November.
21. Measures to contain the deficit and mitigate future cost and demand pressures continue to be managed by the Service through the DSG Deficit Management Plan and the financial impact of agreed mitigations will be monitored and reported throughout the year as part of the council's routine budget monitoring processes.

Capital Outturn

22. The 2025/26 approved capital budget of £155.3 million has been revised to £175.4 million. The revised capital budget includes £11.7 million of unspent project budgets brought forward from 2024/25, removal of a project £6.0 million and £14.5 million additional grants. A summary breakdown is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Revised Capital budget 2025/26 to 2029/30

	2025/26 Budget £m	2026/27 Budget £m	2027/28 Budget £m	2028/29 Budget £m	2029/30 Budget £m	Total £m
25/26 Approved Capital Programme	155.3	87.5	38.6	0.2	-	281.6
Removal of Wye Valley Trust Project	(6.0)	-	-	-	-	(6.0)
24/25 Carry Forward	11.7	6.0	-	-	-	17.6
Additional Grant	14.5	11.0	10.3	7.8	8.6	52.2
Revised Capital Budget	175.4	104.5	48.9	8.0	8.6	345.4
Forecast Spend at Quarter 1	117.9					
Variance from Budget	(57.5)					

23. The forecast spend position, at Quarter 1, is £117.9 million which represents a variance of £57.5 million against the capital programme budget of £175.4 million.
24. The in-year forecast variance represents £0.3 million of underspend on project budgets and £57.2 million in respect of project budgets to be rolled forward for delivery in 2026/27. Explanations for variances from budget by individual project are detailed in Appendix B, Table a.
25. In accordance with best practice, capital budgets will be reprofiled at Quarter 2 to reflect the

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revised expected profile of project delivery. Forecast spend will be monitored by reference to the reprofiled budget from Quarter 2 for the remainder of the financial year. The full capital programme analysed by project for current and future years can be seen in detail by Appendix B, Table b.

26. Forecast delivery of the council's capital programme for 2025/26 assumes a requirement to undertake external borrowing and provision was made in the approved 2025/26 revenue budget to support this borrowing. Cashflow forecasting arrangements have been strengthened in 2025/26 to consider the cashflow requirements of the capital programme; managing the timing and affordability of loan interest payments, minimising cash balances and utilising internal borrowing where possible, in accordance with the council's Treasury Management Strategy.
27. The capital programme includes a number of projects expected to mitigate key revenue budget pressures. The **delivery of these projects on time and within budget is critical** to ensuring maximum impact on the 2025/26 revenue outturn position and to mitigate pressure in future years. These projects are detailed below in Table 6. The delivery of capital projects is monitored by individual project boards, Major Projects Forum and monthly Directorate Budget Boards.

Table 6: Capital Projects expected to deliver positive impact on revenue budgets

Capital Project	Expected Revenue Impact
Home to School / SEN Transport cost pressures	
Council school transport fleet £0.4m	An allocation of £0.4m was included in the 2025/26 Capital Programme to invest in a council-owned fleet of vehicles to deliver cost savings, informed by revised route options and efficient passenger utilisation as part of the wider review to introduce a new operating model for home to school transport services in 2025/26. Significant progress has been made to date and the review of vehicle use and future requirements is planned as part of the next stage of work to ensure maximum revenue impact.
High Needs Grant £2.1m	The lack of local special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) placement provision to meet current and future levels of demand is one of the council's corporate risks. The provision of additional SEND places within Herefordshire will mitigate increasing cost pressures for out of county placements with a corresponding impact on home to school transport costs.
Social Care demand and cost pressures	
Children's residential homes £0.4m	This project will provide a short break facility, reducing costs by increasing in-county provision.
Temporary Accommodation demand and cost pressures	
Acquisition Fund for Housing Provision £5.0m Empty Property Investment & development £0.6m	The acquisition of buildings to address the shortage of suitable accommodation for people needing emergency accommodation is expected to deliver reductions in cost pressures of around £0.6m per annum.
Repair and maintenance budgets	
Estates Building Improvement Programme works	Delivery of improvements and maintenance of the council's estate and highways network ensures efficient spend of

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28. Key risks to the capital programme include delays in delivery, limitations in market capacity resulting in a reduced number of bidders, reduced competition and choice, and inflationary increases to costs. Where capital projects are funded by external grants, there is further risk that delays in delivery mean that grant conditions and time constraints cannot be met resulting in the loss or clawback of grant. All projects are monitored robustly to mitigate the risks to project budgets, delivery of benefits and potential loss of grant funding.
29. The council projects with significant grant funding are detailed below:
- i. Local Transport Plan (LTP): an annual grant provided by the Department for Transport (DfT), regular monitoring of spend ensures maximum use of the grant in each financial year (£21.3m in 2025/26).
 - ii. Levelling Up Fund (LUF): this grant funds a number of capital projects to the north and south of the river as well as the Hereford Transport Hub. The grant allows flexibility to move the match funding between projects to ensure application of grant funding is prioritised.
 - iii. Local Transport Grant: an annual allocation to support investment in local transport maintenance and enhancements and deliver more ambitious transport projects. In 2025/26, the council is forecasting to spend the grant awarded in full, including a £3.0 million allocation to highways spend.
 - iv. Stronger Towns Fund: the Herefordshire Stronger Towns Partnership includes 3 council projects which are part-funded by the Stronger Towns Fund: Hereford Museum & Art Gallery, the Library & Learning Centre and Greening the City. For each of these projects, grant funding is used first to ensure application before deadlines to reduce the risk of grant clawback.
 - v. Bus Service Improvement Grant: the grant allocation must be spent in the financial year of award. The forecast assumes the funding will be spent in full in 2025/26; some work has already been commissioned with further delivery planned by the end of the financial year.
 - vi. Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF): the grant, to turn surplus land into new homes, must be committed by November 2025. The forecast at Quarter 1 assumes the grant monies will be utilised in full in 2025/26 to deliver flood alleviation works to support the redevelopment of Merton Meadow.

Community impact

30. In accordance with the accepted code of corporate governance, the council must ensure that it has an effective financial control framework to support delivery of services within the agreed budget. The council is accountable for how it uses the resources under its stewardship, including accountability for outputs and outcomes achieved. In addition, the council has an overarching responsibility to serve the public interest in adhering to the requirements of legislation and government policies.

Environmental Impact

- 31. The council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
- 32. This report is to review the financial outturn at Quarter 1 of 2025/26 so will have minimal environmental impacts, however consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

- 33. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
- 34. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for budget proposals where appropriate and it has been found to have a high impact for equality for some budget proposals. These are included at Appendix E.

Legal implications

- 35. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Risk management

- 36. The risks associated with the council's business are recorded on the relevant service risk register and escalated in accordance with the council's Performance Management Framework and Risk Management Plan. The highest risks are escalated to the council's Corporate Risk Register.

Resource Implications

- 37. These recommendations have no direct financial implications, however cabinet may wish to consider how money is utilised in order to meet the council's objectives.

Consultees

- 38. None in relation to this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Revenue outturn

Appendix B – Capital outturn

Appendix C - Treasury management outturn

Appendix D - Savings delivery

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Rachael Sanders, Tel. 01432 383775, email Rachael.Sanders@herefordshire.gov.uk

Appendix E – Equality Impact Assessments for revised Savings – to follow

Background papers

None Identified

Appendix A: 2025/26 Revenue Outturn Quarter 1 (June 2025)

2025/26 Revenue Outturn at Quarter 1 (June 2025)			
	2025/26 Approved Revenue Budget	Q1 Outturn	Q1 Outturn Variance
	£m	£m	£m
Community Wellbeing	90.8	93.6	2.8
Children & Young People	59.1	58.0	(1.1)
Economy & Environment	41.8	42.9	1.1
Corporate Services	23.0	24.5	1.5
Directorate Total	214.7	219.0	4.3
Central	16.8	16.8	-
Sub-Total	231.5	235.8	4.3

Community Wellbeing	2025/26 Approved Revenue Budget £'000	Q1 Outturn £'000	Q1 Outturn Variance £'000
Director and Community Services	(10,534)	(11,088)	(554)
Adult Social Care and Housing	83,086	86,731	3,645
All Ages Commissioning	17,363	16,891	(472)
Public Health	937	988	51
Directorate Total	90,852	93,522	2,670

Key variances from budget (> £250k) at Q1:

£3.3m overspend - Increase in demand for adult social care - Residential and Homecare
£0.4m overspend - General Fund Housing - Temporary Accommodation

£0.6m underspend - Increased Better Care Fund
£0.3m underspend - All Age Commissioning Provider Services

Children & Young People	2025/26 Approved Revenue Budget £'000	Q1 Outturn £'000	Q1 Outturn Variance £'000
Central Children Directorate Costs	1,680	1,645	(35)
Education Skills & Learning	3,983	4,448	465
Corporate Parenting	42,104	40,889	(1,215)
Safeguarding and Family Support	11,297	11,021	(276)
Sub Total	59,064	58,003	(1,061)

Key variances from budget (> £250k) at Q1:

£0.3m overspend - Residential Placements
£0.3m overspend - Amended DSG Corporate Recharge

£0.9m underspend - Complex Needs
£0.5m underspend - Supported Accommodation
£0.3m underspend - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Economy & Environment	2025/26 Approved Revenue Budget £'000	Q1 Outturn £'000	Q1 Outturn Variance £'000
Director Management	141	206	65
Resident Services -Environment, Highways and Waste	24,057	24,202	145
Resident Services - Regulatory and Technical	(94)	(23)	71
Commercial Services	3,151	3,339	188
Economy and Growth	1,832	1,799	(33)
Sub-Total	29,087	29,523	436
Residential Services - SEN & Home to School Transport	12,735	13,458	723
Directorate Total	41,822	42,981	1,159

Key variances from budget (> £250k) at Q1:
£0.7m overspend - Public Transport Subsidised Routes
£0.7m overspend - SEN Transport
£0.2m overspend - Commercial Properties

£0.4m underspend - Reduced Energy costs

Corporate Services	2025/26 Approved Revenue Budget £'000	Q1 Outturn £'000	Q1 Outturn Variance £'000
Transformation and Strategy Services	5,455	6,891	1,436
Governance & Legal	6,391	6,326	(65)
Strategic Finance	4,030	4,126	96
HR & Organisational Development	1,232	1,244	12
Sub-Total	17,108	18,587	1,479
Hoople SLA	6,562	6,562	0
Flexible Capital Receipts	(600)	(600)	0
Directorate Total	23,070	24,549	1,479

Key variances from budget (> £250k) at Q1:
£1.3m overspend - 2024/25 c/fwd outstanding Saving Plans considered 'at risk' of delivery

Central	2025/26 Approved Revenue Budget £'000	Q1 Outturn £'000	Q1 Outturn Variance £'000
Central Total	16,801	16,801	0

Key variances from budget (> £250k) at Q1:
£4.9m underspend - Central Budgets

£4.9m overspend - outstanding Saving Targets 'At Risk'

Appendix B

**Table A - 2025/26 Capital Programme Forecast
Position June 2025**

Table A - 2025/26 Capital Programme Forecast Position June 2025				2025/26			
Adjustments include 24/25 carry forwards and additional grants allocations	2025/26 Approved Budget £'000	Adjustments in Year £'000		Current Capital Budget £'000	Q1 Forecast £'000	Forecast Variance to Current Budget £'000	Explanation for variance
		2024/25 C/Fwd	Grant & Other changes Table B				
Disabled facilities grant	2,200	558	615	3,373	3,373	-	
Empty Property Investment & Development	600	-	-	600	580	(20)	
Acquisition Fund for Housing Provision	2,500	2,389	-	4,889	3,474	(1,415)	The council completed the acquisition of the John Haider building in August 2025. We are currently seeking a contractor to commence the refurbishment works to create 28 one-bedroom flats to support vulnerable local people. We are awaiting a fire inspection report on the Buttercross Building, prior to procuring a contractor to complete the refurbishment works.
Merton Meadow - Brownfield Land Release Fund	1,400	207	-	1,607	1,607	-	Planning permission was approved in July, we are finalising the contract and it is expected that flood alleviation works will commence in mid September.
Swimming Pool Support Fund	-	-	60	60	60	-	
Libraries Improvement Fund	19	11	-	31	26	(4)	
Stronger Towns Fund - Hereford Museum & Art Gallery Redevelopment	5,690	-	-	5,690	1,963	(3,727)	The council is working through the Pre-construction Services Agreement (PCSA) with the contractor and design team. Due to some complexities related to the Grade-II

							listed building works, there has been a delay in this process. An early works package is being explored which could accelerate spend and ensure that time is utilised effectively. Grant funding will be utilised first where possible to ensure required spend by deadlines is achieved.
Stronger Towns Library & Learning Centre relocation to Shirehall	2,063	-22	-	2,042	1,049	(993)	This project is being delivered as part of Shirehall Improvement Works project - see comments against that project line.
Community Capital Grants Scheme	1,530	116	-	1,646	195	(1,451)	The appraisal panel reviewed applications in July. The majority of applications relate to significant capital works and, in some cases, planning permission is required and this must now be factored into each programme timetable. It is expected that grant claims for works completed will be submitted towards the last quarter of 2025/26 and into 2026/27.
Total Community Wellbeing including Housing	16,003	3,261	675	19,939	12,328	(7,610)	
Windows Server Upgrades	36	1	-	37	37	-	
Device and Ancillary kit replacement programme	415	-	-	415	230	(185)	Variance represents a reduction in the number of laptops which require replacement in 2025/26.
M365 E5 Implementation	43	36	-	79	70	(9)	
Planning & Regulatory Services software	726	-	-	726	465	(261)	Contracts have been signed following some delays in final negotiations. Implementation has now commenced.
Contact Centre Telephony Replacement	-	67	-	67	67	-	
Wide Area Network (WAN) Replacement	-	121	-	121	121	-	
School Route Planning Software	50	-	-	50	50	-	

IT System Upgrades & Server Replacements 2025-26	500	-	-	500	339	(161)	
CCTV Equipment Upgrades	89	-	-	89	89	-	
Total Corporate Services (IT & Transformation)	1,859	224	-	2,083	1,468	(616)	
Schools Capital Maintenance Grant	2,795	22	379	3,196	3,196	-	
Peterchurch Area School Investment	6,595	6	-	6,601	6,523	(78)	
Brookfield School Improvements	2,570	1,070	-	3,641	3,562	(79)	
High Needs Grant	2,000	102	-	2,103	2,103	-	
Basic Needs Funding	8,000	-	-	8,000	4,000	(4,000)	Works were originally scheduled to commence at Aylestone school ahead of the summer holidays; however, delays in securing planning permission have impacted the programme timetable. The project remains a priority and will progress once the necessary approvals are in place.
Childcare Expansion Capital Grant 2023-24	296	-13	-	283	200	(83)	Twelve childcare settings in areas of identified under-provision applied for grant funding to increase capacity. Six settings have already been awarded a total of £151,000, with many delivering improvements over the summer period. The remaining six applications require additional supporting information and are expected to be confirmed at the start of the academic year. Full allocation of the grant is anticipated, with some settings completing works during Easter or Summer 2026 in line with delivery windows.

School Accessibility Works	1,143	-93	-	1,051	647	(404)	The delay in spend relates to adaptation works at Brockhampton School. The school's tender returns exceeded their available budget, and they have approached the Department for Education to secure additional funding. Confirmation of this funding is required before the works can commence.
Children's residential homes for 11 to 18 year olds	424	-	-	424	424	-	
C & F's S106	2,369	-	-	2,369	900	(1,468)	Whilst we expect another robust delivery schedule for 2025-2026, our forecasts have been adjusted to reflect the current delivery programme. Further engagement is now required to commission new projects into the 2025-2026 schedule. It's also worth noting that some projects have been rescheduled because they can only be completed during school holidays or non-term periods. Furthermore, £2.4m of S106 Education funds are currently on hold, awaiting suitable timelines to begin on-site delivery.
Total Children & Young People (Including Schools)	26,193	1,094	379	27,666	21,555	(6,111)	
Work to Shirehall Annex (Care Leavers Base)	-	15	-	15	15	-	
Estates Capital Programme 2019/22	331	432	-	763	763	-	
Residual property works identified in the 2019 condition reports	-	365	-	365	110	(255)	All 24 projects will have been completed, a number were delivered under budget and the £90k contingency and £75k for Three Elms Roofing were not required.
Estates Building Improvement Programme 22-25	1,053	26	-	1,079	750	(329)	Underspend due to a combination of projects being delivered under budget and re-programming of works to account for

							receipt of statutory approvals and delivery during seasonal restrictions. Of the 30 projects under this programme, there are 4 still outstanding to complete.
Estates Building Improvement Programme 2023-25	1,768	201	-	1,969	1,000	(969)	Budget reprofiled due to a number of projects delivering under budget and projects awaiting confirmation of scope or approvals including listed building consent.
Estates Building Improvement Programme 2024-27	1,525	212	-	1,737	800	(937)	Budget reprofiled due to a number of projects delivering under budget and projects awaiting confirmation of scope or approvals including listed building consent.
Building works from 2022 Condition Surveys	1,050	6	-	1,056	400	(656)	Budget reprofiled due to a number of projects for delivery being reviewed by new building surveyor.
Shirehall Improvement Works	2,935	-	-	2,935	1,011	(1,924)	Complexities in the procurement process have resulted in delays to contractor appointment for the PCSA. A preferred bidder has now been identified to provide the final stage of RIBA 4 pre-construction design in conjunction with the design team, focused on refining and firming up project phasing scopes, costs and programme.
Property Improvements in Care Homes	604	325	-	929	678	(251)	Works have been delivered on time and under budget. Underspend has been added to phase 2 works.
Estates Building Improvement Programme 2025-28	1,327	-	-	1,327	250	(1,077)	Budget reprofiled due to a number of projects to be delivered this financial year being under review.
Total Economy & Environment (Council Asset Investment)	10,593	1,582	-	12,175	5,777	(6,398)	
Local Transport Plan (LTP)	15,466	-	5,882	21,348	21,348	-	
Resurfacing Herefordshire Highways	10,000	81	-	10,081	10,081	-	

City and Market Town Public Realm Investment	1,200	-	-	1,200	1,200	-	
Highways Infrastructure Investment	6,485	816	-	7,301	7,301	-	
Public Realm Improvements for Ash Die Back	494	-17	-	477	477	-	
E & E's S106	3,904	-	-	3,904	1,500	(2,403)	The S106 programme forecasts have been adjusted to reflect the current delivery programme. The S106 Highways programme has encountered some setbacks including developing the necessary delivery framework, as well as adjustments required to coordinate projects with existing surface dressing and resurfacing programs. Additionally, larger schemes in the S106 Highways programme have experienced programme changes due to dependency on finalising planning applications or securing lease agreements. The S106 Off-Site Play & Sports Programmes has experienced some delays in community engagement and project scoping. Whilst we expect a robust delivery schedule for 2025/2026, further engagement is now required to commission new projects into the 2025/2026 schedule. We have been successful in recruiting two permanent officers into the team which should ensure continued strong delivery into 2026/27.
Play Area Investment	500	-	-	500	250	(250)	Realignment of capital spend over the two-year allocation, with the bulk of the spend happening in 2026/27. The decision-making process is underway to release spend, and engagement with City, Town and Parish Councils is necessary before committing capital to play improvements.

Public Realm Services Fleet	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Public Realm Mobilisation	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Road Safety Schemes	1,500	-	-	1,500	320	(1,180)	The decision-making process is underway for releasing this spend, and initial engagement is being carried out. Outline design work will be completed in 2025/26 at an estimated cost of £320k, with the bulk of the spend on scheme implementation to take place in 2026/27.
Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant and Green Light Fund	271	267	-	538	538	-	
Total Economy & Environment (Highways & Public Space)	39,820	1,147	5,882	46,849	43,015	(3,833)	
Integrated Wetlands	1,686	-	-	1,686	1,686	-	
Natural Flood Management	373	-4	-	369	329	(40)	Catchment Advisors continue to collaborate with landowners to develop and submit further applications to the project's NFM Construction Grant Scheme, and anticipate additional measures being delivered within this financial year, with a small amount being delivered in 2026/27.
Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Capital Fund (LEVI)	424	-	-	424	0	(424)	The procurement process is currently underway, with contract award anticipated by the end of 2025. The delivery of charge points is not anticipated until 2026/27 financial year so no spend is anticipated in 2025/26 from this grant.
LEVI Pilot Fund Grant	96	-	-	96	36	(60)	This is aligned to the LEVI capital fund, with the majority of the payment to the contractor being aligned to delivery of charge points in 2026/27.

Wye Valley National Landscape (previously AONB)	-	44	889	934	934	-	
Solar Photovoltaic Panels	535	-	-	535	150	(385)	The planned spend includes the solar PV at Shire Hall and initial works at the Plough Lane car port. The Plough Lane car port will complete in 26/27 due to the requirement for further groundwork investigation.
Yazor Brook	260	-	-	260	260	-	
Waste	11,393	-	-	11,393	5,193	(6,200)	The forecasted spend in 25/26 is related to Garden Waste and Food Waste services delivery. The remaining budget is allocated to enhanced services which are not planned until future financial years and require further decisions, for example separate paper and cardboard collection.
Home Upgrade Grant	-	70	-	70	68	(2)	
Warm Homes Grant	-	-	501	501	501	-	
Herefordshire Flood Risk Mitigation	1,055	-	-	1,055	250	(805)	Work is currently progressing on a number of outstanding Section 19 flood investigations, and the findings (due autumn) will inform the efficient allocation of this funding.
Total Economy & Environment (Environmental)	15,822	110	1,390	17,323	9,407	(7,916)	
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	-	-	401	401	401	-	
HWGTA - Development of Vocational Work Based Skills Investment	2,000	-	-	2,000	-	(2,000)	We are awaiting the final business case from HWGTA before this project can commence.

Employment Land & Incubation Space in Market Towns	11,318	-	-2,053	9,265	4,913	(4,352)	<p>Ross Enterprise Park – The council has received 8 tenders from contractors through the procurement process. They are currently being evaluated. It is expected the selected contractor will be on site in November.</p> <p>Bromyard Depot Employment Land – further evidence is being sought (through tendering additional expert advice) to support the demand for the business units prior to the business case.</p>
Rural Prosperity Fund	-	-	512	512	512	-	
Total Economy & Environment (Economic Growth)	13,318	0	-1,140	12,178	5,826	(6,352)	
Hereford City Centre Transport Package	7,875	196	-	8,071	4,447	(3,624)	Procurement and contract negotiation have resulted in delays to the construction start date. Construction has now commenced and programme is set for delivery of the remaining element of HCCTP (Transport Hub). The scheme will be completed in 2026/27.
Hereford ATMs and Super Cycle Highway	711	-	-	711	-	(711)	Delivery of this project will prioritise spend of LUF grants to ensure deadlines linked to the grant award are met.
Active Travel Fund 4	-	172	-	172	172	-	
Active Travel Fund 5	-	-	99	99	-	(99)	Delivery of this project will prioritise spend of LUF grants to ensure deadlines linked to the grant award are met.
Consolidated Active Travel Fund	-	-	265	265	-	(265)	Delivery of this project will prioritise spend of LUF grants to ensure deadlines linked to the grant award are met.

Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1	8,620	-	-	8,620	2,100	(6,520)	Much of the design work has been deferred to the contractor stage as deemed better placed with the contractor and so bulk of spend will take place between Q4 2025/26 and Q1 2026/27. The securing of land has not been able to be completed as quickly as hoped and is now expected that options agreements will be triggered in Q1 2026/27.
Stronger Towns Fund - Greening the City	-	288	-	288	10	(278)	Issues with design and procurement have resulted in delays to programme. Procurement is now complete and a preferred bidder has been identified. Construction will commence in Autumn 2025.
LUF - Active Travel Measures (north of river)	3,053	-	-	3,053	1,712	(1,341)	Design issues have resulted in delays to the programme. Spend is being accelerated where possible eg 20mph resurfacing package completed through resurfacing programme.
LUF - Active Travel Measures (south of river)	5,029	3,634	-	8,663	3,128	(5,535)	Delays in the procurement have held back spend. The main work package (Holme Lacy Road) is now commissioned and construction is due to commence in Autumn 2025 once the relevant permits are in place.
Local Transport Grant	-	-	5,837	5,837	5,837	0	
Council school transport fleet	350	-	-	350	-	(350)	A business case is currently in development and due by Nov 2025 to investigate a council-led delivery model for school transport as part of the wider review of home to school transport arrangements. This business case will determine the timescale for this spend, which looks likely to slip into 26/27 working towards a delivery

							timescale of September 2026 for the start of the new academic year.
Bus Service Improvement Plan	-	-	1,108	1,108	1,108	-	
Total Economy & Environment (Transport)	25,638	4,290	7,309	37,237	18,514	(18,723)	

Total	149,247	11,708	14,495	175,450	117,890	-57,560
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Projects forecast to be delayed into 26/27, as per explanations provided	-57,211
Project forecast to deliver under budget or not spend full grant allocation	-349
Total	-57,560

Table B – Overall Capital Programme position 2025/26

Scheme Name	Prior Years	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total scheme
	£'000	budget	budget	budget	budget	budget	budget
		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Disabled facilities grant	0	3,373	2,200	2,200	0	0	7,773
Empty Property Investment & Development	0	600	266	0	0	0	866
Acquisition Fund for Housing Provision	111	4,889	0	0	0	0	5,000
Merton Meadow - Brownfield Land Release Fund	393	1,607	0	0	0	0	2,000
Swimming Pool Support Fund	0	60	0	0	0	0	60
Libraries Improvement Fund	31	31	0	0	0	0	62
Stronger Towns Fund - Hereford Museum & Art Gallery Redevelopment	2,883	5,690	10,525	1,431	0	0	20,529
Stronger Towns Library & Learning Centre relocation to Shirehall	340	2,042	624	0	0	0	3,005
Community Capital Grants Scheme	4	1,646	350	0	0	0	2,000
Total Community Wellbeing Including Housing	3,761	19,939	13,965	3,631	0	0	41,295
Windows Server Upgrades	293	37	0	0	0	0	330
Device and Ancillary kit replacement programme	0	415	578	0	0	0	993
M365 E5 Implementation	491	79	0	0	0	0	570
Planning & Regulatory Services software	3	726	667	0	0	0	1,396
Contact Centre Telephony Replacement	15	67	0	0	0	0	82

Wide Area Network (WAN) Replacement	165	121	0	0	0	0	286
School Route Planning Software	0	50	0	0	0		50
IT System Upgrades & Server Replacements 2025-26	0	500	0	0	0	0	500
CCTV Equipment Upgrades	0	89	0	0	0	0	89
Total Corporate Services (IT & Transformation)	967	2,083	1,245	0	0	0	4,296
Schools Capital Maintenance Grant	0	3,196	1,200	1,200	0	0	5,596
Peterchurch Area School Investment	953	6,601	3,299	0	0	0	10,853
Brookfield School Improvements	2,181	3,641	0	0	0	0	5,822
High Needs Grant	483	2,103	6,784	0	0	0	9,369
Basic Needs Funding	560	8,000	9,310	1,006	0	0	18,877
Childcare Expansion Capital Grant 2023-24	13	283	0	0	0	0	296
School Accessibility Works	759	1,051	693	0	0	0	2,503
Children's residential homes for 11 to 18 year olds	0	424	0	0	0	0	424
C & F's S106	0	2,369	1,297	0	0	0	3,665
Total Childrens & Young Peoples (Including Schools)	4,949	27,666	22,582	2,206	0	0	57,404
Work to Shirehall Annex (Care Leavers Base)	85	15	0	0	0	0	100
Estates Capital Programme 2019/22	5,119	763	0	0	0	0	5,882
Residual property works identified in the 2019 condition reports	957	365	0	0	0	0	1,322
Estates Building Improvement Programme 22-25	1,927	1,079	0	0	0	0	3,007
Estates Building Improvement Programme 2023-25	1,558	1,969	0	0	0	0	3,527
Estates Building Improvement Programme 2024-27	689	1,737	340	0	0	0	2,766
Building works from 2022 Condition Surveys	4	1,056	1,050	350	0	0	2,460
Shirehall Improvement Works	0	2,935	1,065	0	0	0	4,000
Property Improvements in Care Homes	225	929	0	0	0	0	1,154
Estates Building Improvement Programme 2025-28	0	1,327	2,451	526	0	0	4,305
Total Economy & Environment (Council Asset Investment)	10,564	12,175	4,906	876	0	0	28,522
Local Transport Plan (LTP)	0	21,348	15,466	15,466	0	0	52,280
Resurfacing Herefordshire Highways	0	10,081	0	0	0	0	10,081

City and Market Town Public Realm Investment	0	1,200	0	0	0	0	1,200
Highways Infrastructure Investment	7,354	7,301	6,385	0	0	0	21,040
Public Realm Improvements for Ash Die Back	581	477	240	118	0	0	1,416
E & E's S106	0	3,904	4,207	26	0	0	8,137
Play Area Investment	0	500	500	0	0	0	1,000
Public Realm Services Fleet	0	0	1,322	0	218	0	1,540
Public Realm Mobilisation	0	0	450	0	0	0	450
Road Safety Schemes	0	1,500	1,500	0	0	0	3,000
Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant and Green Light Fund	3	538	0	0	0	0	541
Total Economy & Environment (Highways & Public Space)	7,939	46,849	30,070	15,610	218	0	100,685
Integrated Wetlands	2,676	1,686	398	0	0	0	4,760
Natural Flood Management	555	369	350	0	0	0	1,274
Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Capital Fund (LEVI)	0	424	400	300	0	0	1,124
LEVI Pilot Fund Grant	24	96	0	0	0	0	120
Wye Valley National Landscape (previously AONB)	0	934	0	0	0	0	934
Solar Photovoltaic Panels	1,064	535	535	0	0	0	2,134
Yazor Brook	0	260	0	0	0	0	260
Waste	0	11,393	0	0	0	0	11,393
Home Upgrade Grant	0	70	0	0	0	0	70
Warm Homes Grant	0	501	1,003	982	0	0	2,485
Herefordshire Flood Risk Mitigation	0	1,055	1,000	0	0	0	2,055
Total Economy & Environment (Environmental)	4,318	17,323	3,686	1,282	0	0	26,609
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	0	401	0	0	0	0	401
HWGTA - Development of Vocational Work Based Skills Investment	0	2,000	0	0	0	0	2,000
Employment Land & Incubation Space in Market Towns	866	9,265	156	8,360	0	0	18,648
Rural Prosperity Fund	0	512	0	0	0	0	512
Total Economy & Environment (Economic Growth)	866	12,178	156	8,360	0	0	21,561
Hereford City Centre Transport Package	38,908	8,071	0	0	0	0	46,979

Hereford ATMs and Super Cycle Highway	0	711	289	0	0	0	1,000
Active Travel Fund 4	134	172	0	0	0	0	306
Active Travel Fund 5	0	99	0	0	0	0	99
Consolidated Active Travel Fund	0	265	0	0	0	0	265
Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1	356	8,620	21,324	10,000	0	0	40,300
Stronger Towns Fund - Greening the City	116	288	0	0	0	0	404
LUF - Active Travel Measures (north of river)	1,097	3,053	316	0	0	0	4,466
LUF - Active Travel Measures (south of river)	533	8,663	0	0	0	0	9,197
Local Transport Grant	0	5,837	5,975	6,966	7,775	8,584	35,137
Council school transport fleet	0	350	0	0	0	0	350
Bus Service Improvement Plan	0	1,108	0	0	0	0	1,108
Total Economy & Environment (Transport)	41,144	37,237	27,904	16,966	7,775	8,584	139,610

Total	74,508	175,450	104,515	48,932	7,993	8,584	419,982
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	2025/26 Budget £'000	2026/27 Budget £'000	2027/28 Budget £'000	2028/29 Budget £'000	2029/30 Budget £'000	Total
February 2025 Council Approved Budget	155,247	87,507	38,599	218	-	281,571
Removal of WVT Project	-6,000	-	-	-	-	-6,000
24/25 Carry Forwards	11,708	5,978	-	-	-	17,686
Additional Grants	14,495	11,030	10,333	7,775	8,584	52,217
Revised Capital Budget	175,450	104,515	48,932	7,993	8,584	345,474

Grant Additions since approval of Capital Programme by Council in February 2025						
	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	Total £'000
MHCLG - UKSPS 25/26 Grant	401					401

DfT - Active Travel Fund 5 Grant	99					99
DfT - Additional 25/26 LTP Grant	5,882					5,882
DfT - CATF Grant	265					265
DfT - BSIP Grant	1,108					1,108
DESNZ - Warm Homes Grant	501	1,003	982			2,485
DEFRA - Rural Prosperity Fund 25/26	512					512
Sport England - Swimming Pool Fund	60					60
DfE - Additional Schools Maintenance Grant 25/26	379					379
DfE - High Needs Grant		2,466				2,466
DfE - Basic Needs Grant		1,587	1,006			2,593
DfT - Local Transport Grant 25/26	5,837					5,837
Employment Land - unsecured grant	(2,053)					(2,053)
WVNL - Welsh Gov and DEFRA Grants	889					889
HMAG - Clore Duffield			200			200
HMAG - Salix			1,075			1,075
HMAG - NHLF			104			104
DfT - Local Transport Grant 26/27 to 29/30		5,975	6,966	7,775	8,584	29,300
MHCLG - Additional DFG 25/26	615					615
Total grant additions since approval by Council in February 2025	14,495	11,030	10,333	7,775	8,584	52,217

Funding by Capital Grants that must be spent in year (may be part funding)

APPENDIX C TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTER 1 2025/26 UPDATE

Introduction

- 1.1 Treasury Management is the management of the council's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.
- 1.2 The CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice for Treasury Management 2021 recommends that members be updated on treasury management activities at least quarterly. This report, therefore, ensures the council is implementing best practice in accordance with the Code.

Economic Context

- 2.1 The first quarter of 2025/26 saw:
 - A 0.3% month on month fall in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in April, followed by 0.1% in May – the first fall since October 2024, due mainly to a decrease in manufacturing output.
 - The 3-monthly year-on-year rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses fall from 5.5% to 5.2% in May.
 - Core CPI inflation ease from 3.8% in April to 3.5% in May as temporary Easter-related effects faded.
 - The 10-year gilt yield fluctuate between 4.4% and 4.8%, and end the quarter at 4.50%.
- 2.2 On 8 May, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted to reduce the Bank Rate from 4.50% to 4.25% and on 19 June voted to maintain it at that level.

Investments

- 3.1 At 30 June 2025, the council held investments as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Investment Portfolio

Treasury investments	Term	Maturity date	Interest rate	Amount invested £m
Instant Access Money Market Funds:				
Federated	N/A	N/A	4.31%	10.00
Aberdeen Standard	N/A	N/A	4.30%	10.00
Deutsche	N/A	N/A	4.22%	0.58
Insight	N/A	N/A	4.26%	10.00
Morgan Stanley	N/A	N/A	4.26%	10.00
Invesco	N/A	N/A	4.28%	7.00
CCLA	N/A	N/A	4.28%	5.00
95 Day Notice Bank Accounts:				
Barclays (ESG green deposits)	N/A	N/A	4.40%	5.00
Total treasury investments			Average 4.29%	57.58

- 3.2 The council applies the credit worthiness service provided by MUFG Corporate Markets (MUFG). This service employs a modelling approach utilising credit ratings from three main

credit rating agencies (Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poor's). This modelling approach combines credit ratings, credit watches and credit outlooks in a weighted scoring system to which MUFG allocate a series of colour coded bands with suggested maximum durations for investments. These are detailed in the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 as approved by Council in February 2025.

- 3.3 The council has earned interest on its investments as shown in table 2. There is a revenue budget of £0.552 million for 2025/26, resulting in an underspend of £0.072 million within the Central budget line.

Table 2: Interest earned

Month	Average amount invested £m	Average rate of interest earned	Amount of interest earned £m
Apr 25	52.1	4.54%	0.194
May 25	60.9	4.39%	0.227
Jun 25	62.7	4.28%	0.203
Total			0.624
Budget			0.552
Underspend variance			0.072

- 3.4 In addition to the investment income, the council earns interest on the provision of loan finance to the waste disposal PFI provider. This is expected to generate loan interest of £1.7 million in 2025/26 and will be credited to the waste reserve.

Borrowing

- 4.1 The council can only borrow up to its Authorised Borrowing Limit which represents the affordable limit determined in compliance with the Local Government Act 2003. It is the maximum amount of debt that the authority can legally owe. The authorised limit provides headroom over and above the operational boundary for unusual cash movements. The Authorised Borrowing Limit for external borrowing (excluding PFI and leases) for 2025/26 is £350m which was approved in the Treasury Management Strategy.
- 4.2 At 30 June 2025, the council held long-term borrowing of £137.1m; no new long-term borrowing has been secured during the current financial year. The council's Capital Financing Requirement at 1st April 2025 is £326.0m, which demonstrates that the Council has significant internal borrowing when compared to the actual long-term borrowing (excluding PFI liabilities) of £137.1m.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that further borrowing will be undertaken in the second half of the financial year, depending on actual expenditure within the capital programme.
- 4.4 The current capital financing budget position is shown in table 3, which includes interest payable forecasts for the anticipated further borrowing. The overspend will be managed through the use of the Treasury Management reserve.

Table 3: Summary of borrowing budget

	Budget £m	Forecast £m	(Surplus)/deficit £m
Minimum Revenue Position (MRP)	10.9	11.3	0.4
Interest Payable on loans	5.8	6.6	0.8
Total	16.7	17.9	1.2

Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

- 5.1 During the quarter ended 30 June 2025, the council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26. Actual values for quarter 1 are shown in table 4.
- 5.2 Treasury indicators for quarter 1 are shown as actual values as at 30 June 2025, e.g. for PI4 (authorised limit for external debt), the actual value of external debt as at 30 June 2025 of £184.9 million is shown against a Treasury Indicator limit of £420.0 million as approved in the Treasury Management Strategy. This means that actual debt is lower than the approved limit and the council is operating within agreed boundaries.
- 5.3 Prudential indicators for quarter 1 are shown as updated forecasts for the financial year 2025/26, e.g. for PI1 (capital expenditure), the forecast of spend for the financial year 2025/26 of £117.9 million is shown against a Prudential indicator value approved in the Treasury Management Strategy of £155.2 million. This means that capital expenditure for 2025/26 is now forecast to be lower than was budgeted for at the start of the year.

Table 4: Prudential and Treasury indicators for 2025/26 as at 30 June 2025

Ref	Treasury indicators	Description	2025/26 Budget/ Limit £'000	Actual as at 30 June 2025 £'000	Compliance result
PI4	Authorised limit for external debt	To set an authorised limit for its gross external debt for the forthcoming financial year (includes PFI liabilities)	420,000	184,900	Within limit
PI5	Operational boundary for external debt	To set an operational boundary for its gross external debt for the forthcoming financial year (includes PFI liabilities)	400,000	184,900	Within limit
PI8	Upper limit for principal sums invested over 364 days	To set an upper limit for total principal sums invested over 364	5,000	NIL	Within limit
PI7	Maturity structure upper and lower limits:	To set upper and lower limits for the maturity structure of its borrowing			
	Under 12 months		0-10%	5%	Within limit
	12 months to 2 years		0-10%	6%	Within limit
	2 to 5 years		0-25%	8%	Within limit
	5 to 10 years		0-35%	22%	Within limit
	10 years and above		0-80%	59%	Within limit
	Prudential indicators	Description	2025/26 Budget £000	Forecast for 2025/26 at 30 June 2025 £000	Compliance result
PI1	Capital expenditure	A reasonable estimate of the total capital expenditure that it plans to incur during the forthcoming financial year	155,247	117,890	Under budget
PI2	Capital financing requirement (CFR)	A reasonable estimate of the total capital financing requirement at the end of the forthcoming financial year	378,079	368,457	Under budget
PI3	Gross debt and CFR	To ensure that the total gross debt does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of capital financing requirement	64%	37%	Below 100%, within limit
PI6	Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream	To estimate the proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream for the forthcoming financial year	10%	8%	In line with budget
PI9	Ratio of net commercial and service investments income to net revenue stream	To estimate the proportion of net income from commercial and service investments to net revenue stream for the forthcoming financial year	1%	1%	Low reliance on this income

Appendix D: Progress against 2025/26 approved Savings as at 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1)

2025/26 Approved Savings: Total Savings of £3.9 million for 2025/26 were approved by Council on 7 February 2025.

The status of the delivery of approved savings at 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1) is noted below:

Directorate	Approved Savings £m	Delivered £m	Forecast £m	At Risk £m
Children & Young People	3.9	1.6	2.3	-
Total Approved Savings	3.9	1.6	2.3	-
	100%	41%	59%	0%

At 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1), £1.6 million (40%) of the £3.9 million approved savings for 2025/26 have been delivered with a further £2.3 million (60%) forecast to be delivered in year. The status of individual savings as per Appendix B of the Council Report approved on 7 February 2025, is shown in **Annex 1** below.

2025/26 Brought forward Savings: Savings not delivered recurrently in previous years have been carried forward into 2025/26. A focused review of the original proposals and planned activity has been undertaken and revised savings plans have been developed, where appropriate, to confirm activity to deliver savings in 2025/26.

Directorate	Savings Target £m	Delivered £m	Forecast £m	At Risk £m
Community Wellbeing	3.2	0.8	2.4	-
Economy & Environment	0.4	0.1	0.3	-
Corporate Services	0.5	0.3	0.2	-
Home to School/SEN Transport	0.5	-	0.5	-
Transformation	7.3	4.7	1.2	1.4
Total Brought forward Savings	11.9	5.9	4.6	1.4
	100%	50%	38%	12%

At 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1), £5.8 million (50%) of the £11.9 million brought forward savings have been delivered with a further £4.6 million (38%) forecast to be delivered in year; £1.4 million (12%) remain at risk and with focused activity underway to resolve or mitigate in year. The revised savings, to be monitored for delivery in 2025/26, are detailed in **Annex 2** below. A reconciliation of changes in brought forward targets is included at **Annex 3**.

Annex 1: Status of delivery of approved savings at 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1)

Children & Young People 2025/26 Saving Targets Q1 Forecast	Target £'000	At Risk £'000	In Progress £'000	On Target £'000	Delivered Recurrent £'000
S1 Reduction and redesign in workforce	1,577	-			1,577
S2 Reduction in Placements	1,567	-	1,567		
S3 Reduction in Social Work Agency posts	785	-		785	
Total Children and Young People	3,929	-	1,567	785	1,577
		0%	40%	20%	40%
Total 2025/26 Savings Targets	3,929	-	1,567	785	1,577

RAG Rating – to show confidence in delivery of savings

Red	Delivery in 2025/26 at risk. Recovery action to identify mitigations required.
Amber	Activity to deliver savings in 2025/26 is in progress.
Green	Activity to deliver savings expected to be delivered in 2025/26 is on target.
Blue	Savings achieved in 2025/26.

Annex 2: Status of delivery of brought forward savings at 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1)

Brought forward prior year Saving Targets Q1 Forecast	Target £'000	At Risk £'000	In Progress £'000	On Target £'000	Delivered Recurrent £'000
S1 (23/24)* Stable Engaged Workforce - Replaced	-	-	-	-	-
S1 (24/25)* Workforce Service Review - Replaced	-	-	-	-	-
S2 (24/25)* Deletion of vacant posts - Replaced	-	-	-	-	-
NEW target 25/26 - Additional income generation	965	-	965	-	-
S4 (24/25)* Review of high-cost packages in Adult Social Care	649	-	96	-	553
S5 (24/25)* Better utilisation of existing care contracts	200	-	200	-	-
S3 (23/24)* New Integrated Models of Care	480	-	457	23	-
S5 (23/24)* Digital and Technology	255	-	255	-	-
S6 (23/24)* Respite Provision	300	-	300	-	-
S7 (23/24)* Process efficiency: Block bed contracts	100	-	-	-	100
S12 (23/24)* Process Efficiency - Brokerage	100	-	58	-	42
S16 (23/24)* Supported Living	169	-	-	95	74
Total Community Wellbeing	3,218	-	2,331	118	769
S6 (24/25)* Inflationary Increases in Fees and Charges	267	-	267	-	-
S8 (24/25)* Transfer of functions from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	100	-	-	-	100
Total Economy & Environment	367	-	267	-	100
S3 (24/25)* Oxygen Finance solution	60	-	60	-	-
S5 (24/25)* Automation of Council Tax and Business Rate processes	100	-	100	-	-
S36 (23/24)* Transformation of Programme Management Office (PMO)	300	-	-	-	300
Total Corporate Services	460	-	160	-	300
S4 (24/25)* SEN Transport Efficiencies	200	-	200	-	-
NEW target 25/26 SEN Transport Efficiencies – Target stretched	300	-	300	-	-
Total Home to School/SEN Transport	500	-	500	-	-
S6 (24/25)* Reduction in Hoople SLA contract value and workforce service reviews	1,900	1,420	-	38	442
S1 (24/25)* Mutual Early Resignation Scheme (MERS24) - Reduced	502	-	-	-	502
S2 (24/25)* Transformation: Thrive Programme Savings - Replaced	-	-	-	-	-
S3 (24/25)* Transformation: Target Operating Model - Replaced	-	-	-	-	-
NEW target 25/26 – Directorate Budget Efficiencies	4,929	-	839	322	3,768

Brought forward prior year Saving Targets Q1 Forecast	Target £'000	At Risk £'000	In Progress £'000	On Target £'000	Delivered Recurrent £'000
Total Transformation	7,331	1,420	839	360	4,712
Total 2025/26 Savings Targets	11,876	1,420	4,097	478	5,881
	100%	12%	34%	4%	50%

(S 24/25)* - balance of 2024/25 approved savings target not delivered recurrently (no change to proposed source of activity to deliver saving in 2025/26)
[2024/25 Approved Savings Plans](#)

(S 23/24)* - balance of 2023/24 approved savings target not delivered recurrently (no change to proposed source of activity to deliver saving in 2025/26)
[2023/24 Approved Savings Plans](#)

Annex 3: Reconciliation of changes in approved savings – savings reduced and replaced in 2025/26

	Original Savings Target £'000	Balance c/fwd to 2025/26 £'000	Change in target £'000	Revised target for 2025/26 £'000	Explanation
Community Wellbeing					
S1 (23/24)* Stable engaged workforce	710	500	(500)	-	Following delivery in 24/25 of £899k in staffing savings across these 3 targets, it is no longer considered realistic to reduce staffing levels further given increasing demand and complexity of care needs. Balance of targets £965k replaced by new income generation savings target.
S1 (24/25)* Workforce Service Review	353	50	(50)	-	
S2 (24/25)* Deletion of vacant posts	801	415	(415)	-	
NEW - Additional income generation	-	-	965	965	Additional income generation through systematic reviews of financial assessments, direct payments clawback, review of fees and charges, rationalisation of systems to enable more efficient payments, strengthened controls in respect of deprivation of assets.
Total	1,864	965	-	965	
Transformation					
S1 (24/25)* MERS24	4,500	2,375	(1,873)	502	Target reduced as MERS24 scheme has now closed. £502k delivery in 25/26 represents full year impact of individuals who left part way through 24/25.
S2 (24/25)* Transformation: Thrive	2,600	2,541	(2,541)	-	Whilst transformation activity continues in 25/26, it is recognised that this may not deliver savings quickly. These targets have been reduced and the remaining undelivered balance has been incorporated into the new Directorate Budget Efficiencies target in 25/26.
S3 (24/25)* Transformation: Target Operating Model	815	815	(815)	-	
NEW - SEN Transport Efficiencies	-	-	300	300	Target stretched by £300k as a result of Phase 1 of Home to School / SEN Transport review in 25/26.
NEW - Directorate Budget Efficiencies	-	-	4,929	4,929	A focused review of individual Directorate budgets to identify opportunities to reduce/remove budgets to deliver recurrent savings.
Total	7,915	5,731	-	5,731	



Title of report: Medium Term Financial Strategy - Update to Cabinet

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 25 September 2025

Cabinet Member: Cabinet member finance and corporate services

Report by: Director of Finance

Report author: Director of Finance

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose

To provide an update on the key headlines from the Spending Review June 2025 and potential impact of local authority funding reform on the council's future financial position.

Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- a) **Notes the key estimates assumptions which inform the financial forecast and the updated projected funding gap over the medium-term period 2026/27 to 2028/29; and**
- b) **Agrees the proposed approach and timetable for revenue and capital budget setting for 2026/27.**

Alternative options

1. Cabinet may choose to review financial position and performance more or less frequently; or request alternative actions to deliver financial planning arrangements, including referral to the relevant scrutiny committee.

Key considerations

2. Council approved the 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the 4-year period to 2028/29 on 7 February 2025. The approved MTFS highlighted significant uncertainty in terms of future funding arrangements and allocations across local authorities over the medium-term period as a result of planned funding reform and reset of Business Rates during 2025.
3. Informed by assumptions and estimates of funding available at the time of preparation, the MTFS identified an estimated potential funding gap for the medium-term period 2025/26 to 2028/29 of £4.2 million and recognised the need to revise the MTFS to reflect updated levels of funding as information is received from Government.
4. This report provides Cabinet with an update on changes to the financial and economic context in which the council is required to operate, including key headlines from the Spending Review June 2025 and the potential impacts of local authority funding reform on the council's future financial position.
5. This report also sets out the approach and timetable for development of the 2026/27 budget and MTFS for the 4-year period 2026/27 to 2029/30, to be recommended for approval by full Council in February 2026.
6. Key priorities for the council in the current financial year (2025/26) are summarised below:
 - The delivery of services within the approved revenue budget;
 - Robust monitoring of in-year performance against the approved revenue budget to ensure timely identification of appropriate management recovery actions;
 - Delivery of savings comprising £3.9 million of savings in the approved 2025/26 Revenue Budget and £11.9 million of savings not delivered recurrently in prior years which have been carried forward for delivery in 2025/26; and
 - Development of the 2025/26 Revenue and Capital Investment Budgets, review and update of the MTFS.
7. The updated estimate of funding represents a potential loss to the 2025/26 baseline position of £12.0 million over the three-year period to 2028/29. Before work to challenge and review the current previous estimate of net expenditure requirement has been undertaken, the impact of this reduction in funding through the Fair Funding Review is a revised estimated funding gap of £27.3 million in 2026/27 rising to £54.4 million in 2028/29.
8. It is expected that this estimate will be subject to change over the months leading up to the publication of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, in December 2025, as a result of further expected updates to data and formulae which determine funding allocations.
9. The MTFS, and underlying income and expenditure estimates and assumptions, will be further reviewed, modelled and tested over the budget development period through to February 2026 as new information becomes available from the anticipated Fair Funding Review 2.0 and the Business Rates Reset. This work will also model and incorporate the impact of transformation and planned savings and efficiencies on the estimated funding gap in 2026/27 and future years.

Financial and Economic Outlook: Spending Review June 2025

10. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the outcome of the Spending Review 2025 (SR25) on 11 June 2025. The Spending Review sets out revenue funding allocations for each Government department over the next three years (2026/27 to 2028/29) with an additional fourth year for capital allocations. This is the first multi-year Spending Review since 2021.

11. The key announcements relevant to local authorities are summarised below:

- Local Government Funding:** The Spending Review announced an additional £3.2bn of grant funding by 2028/29 compared with 2024/25. The document notes that this is worth an average annual yearly increase of 3.1% in Core Spending Power (i.e. including council tax increases) across the Spending Review Period.
- Settlement Indications:** Core Spending Power (CSP) plans show a larger real terms increase than most Departmental Expenditure Limits (DELs). This is because it includes council tax and business rates. The Review assumes that councils will increase council tax in each year by 3% core referendum principle and 2% for the adult social care precept (the maximum increased permitted for authorities with responsibility for adult social care services without holding a referendum). Once council tax is excluded from the CSP figure the remaining grants are expected to increase by just 3.3% over the Spending Review Period in real terms. It should be noted that the MTFs approved by Council in February 2025, assumed an increase of 3.99% in each of the years 2026/27 to 2028/29 and not the maximum 5% permitted.
- Transformation Fund Allocations for Local Government:** The £3.25bn Transformation Fund includes £557m of funding for the reform of children's social care over the Spending Review Period (£79m, £271m, £207m in each year respectively). An allocation of £760m over 2026/27 and 2027/28 is included for the reform of SEND to "make the system more inclusive and improve outcomes for all children and young people". Additionally, homelessness funding of c.£87m is earmarked for 2026/27 and 2027/28. It is unclear, as yet, if any of this funding is included in Core Spending Power (CSP) figures.
- Adult Social Care:** The Spending Review suggests an increase of over £4bn of funding available for adult social care in 2028/29 compared with 2025/26. This includes an increase to the NHS' minimum contribution to Adult Social Care (ASC) via the Better Care Fund, in line with the Department of Health and Social Care's Spending Review settlement and ASC precept increases. Further details are expected in due course.
- Children's Social Care:** In addition to the £557m of funding for the reform of Children's Social Care set out in the Transformation Fund, the government has announced £560m capital between 2026/27 and 2029/30, to refurbish and expand children's homes and foster care placements.
- Pothole Funding:** The only announcement in respect of potholes and local roads refers to "£24 billion of capital funding between 2026/27 and 2029/30 to maintain and improve motorways and local roads across the country. This funding increase will allow National Highways and local authorities to invest in significantly improving the long-term condition of England's road network, delivering faster, safer and more reliable journeys".
- Council tax reform:** Despite previous suggestion that options to reform council tax would be considered, it is not mentioned in the review.
- Education:** Free school meals extended to all children with a parent receiving Universal Credit. Excluding funding for the expansion of Free School Meals, the core schools' budget will grow by an average of 0.9% per pupil in real terms each year. The government will increase the core schools' budget by £2bn in real terms over this Spending Review, a £4.7bn cash increase per year by 2028/29, compared with 2025/26.

- **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) deficits:** The SR25 announced that details of the Government's intended approach to SEND reform will be set out in a Schools White Paper in the autumn and that details in respect of support for local authorities will be set out in the upcoming Fair Funding Review (FFR) consultation. Following SR25, the Fair Funding Review 2.0 (FFR2.0) Consultation, published 20 June 2025, confirmed an extension of the DSG Statutory Override for a further two years to 31 March 2028.

Financial and Economic Outlook: Fair Funding Review 2.0 (FFR 2.0)

12. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Consultation on local authority funding reform through the Local Government Finance Settlement from 2026 to 2027 ran from 20 June to 15 August 2025. The Fair Funding Review 2.0 attempts to refresh the methodology for distributing a fixed pot of funding between local authorities covered by the Local Government Finance Settlement.
13. The last time the underlying distribution methodology was refreshed through changes to formulae and data was in 2013, at the time the business rates retention system was set up. This means that the last full assessment of relative needs and resources is 12 years old and the relationship between the assessment and actual allocations through the Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) has weakened over this period.
14. In addition, Government is considering rolling in further grants, including nearly £10 billion of social care funding, into the SFA, thus subjecting these grants to the FFR 2.0 process. This means that FFR 2.0 will have a significant impact on local authority funding which will be difficult to predict until final decisions on the funding distribution model are confirmed.
15. The full outcome of the consultation, and impact in funding for Herefordshire, will not be confirmed until the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement which is expected in December 2025.
16. The allocation of the new Settlement Funding Assessment is made up of an assessment of relative need and an assessment of the relative resources; these are the two key determinants of the outcome of FFR 2.0 for each authority.
17. The Relative Needs Assessment determines the share of 'total need' attributable to each authority as a proportion of the fixed pot available. This is driven by the results of a series of relative needs formulae which calculate the extent to which a local authority's characteristics are likely to drive demand for a particular service, relative to other authorities providing the same service. The most consequential factors include population cohort size, deprivation-linked metrics and specific metrics for highways maintenance.
18. The Relative Resources Adjustment is an assessment by central government of each authority's ability to raise income locally from council tax, informed by the attributable taxbase multiplied by an amount per unit of taxbase.
19. An authority's share of the fixed pot, allocated based on its relative need, is adjusted by the Relative Resources Adjustment to determine the Settlement Funding Assessment allocation.

Financial Context and Potential Impact of FFR 2.0 for Herefordshire

Impact of changes in funding through FFR 2.0

20. Funding received and retained by the council in 2025/26 which is subject to redistribution through the Fair Funding Review totals £79.0 million (the baseline for FFR). This represents funding excluding council tax.

21. Initial, high-level modelling of the implications for the council has been carried out in collaboration with our professional advisors. This work has identified that the 'pure' impact of the review for Herefordshire is an estimated loss of £12.0 million to the total assumed new SFA compared with the 2025/26 baseline position over the three-year period to 2028/29. This is detailed in table 1 below.
22. The Consultation proposes that allocations of the new SFA will be introduced over a three-year period with a 33% weighting of the updated SFA in 2026/27, 67% weighting in 2027/28 and 100% weighting in 2028/29. For the council, this means a reduction in the new SFA funding of approx. £3.3 million, £7.3 million and £12.0 million respectively in the financial years 2026/27 to 2028/29.

Table 1: Updating funding forecast

Updated Funding Forecast September 2025 (FFR 2.0 estimated impact)				
Detail	Budget 2025/26 £m	Estimate 2026/27 £'000	Estimate 2027/28 £'000	Estimate 2028/29 £'000
Funding:				
Council tax (3.99% increase assumed)	146.5	154.2	162.3	170.9
SFA baseline used in FFR 2.0	78.2	79.0	79.0	79.0
Estimated impact of FFR 2.0		(3.3)	(3.3) (4.0)	(3.3) (4.0) (4.7)
Local adjustments/outside of SFA:				
HEZ Rates	1.3			
Collection Fund	2.0			
Extended Producer Responsibility Grant	3.5			
Total estimated funding	231.5	229.9	234.0	237.9

Impact of FFR 2.0 changes on estimated funding gap over medium-term period

23. The approved MTFS includes an estimate of the council's net expenditure requirement for future years which represents estimated costs to support growth in demand for services, inflation and the impact of the pay award.
24. The previously estimated net expenditure requirement totals £257.2 million for 2026/27 increasing to £274.6 million in 2027/28 and £292.3 million in 2028/29. These estimates have not been updated but will be subject to review and challenge, to reflect current economic conditions, service activity levels and the impact of proposed transformation, as part of the detailed budget setting process for 2026/27 which is currently underway.
25. Reviewing this expenditure requirement in the context of the total assumed new SFA highlights an increased funding gap over the medium-term period as detailed in table 2 below.

Table 2: Updating funding gap estimate

Updated Funding Gap September 2025 (FFR 2.0 estimated impact)				
	Budget 2025/26 £m	Estimate 2026/27 £'000	Estimate 2027/28 £'000	Estimate 2028/29 £'000
Total estimated funding	231.5	229.9	234.0	237.9
Net expenditure requirement (no update)	231.5	257.2	274.6	292.3
Updated estimated gap to be funded	-	(27.3)	(40.6)	(54.4)

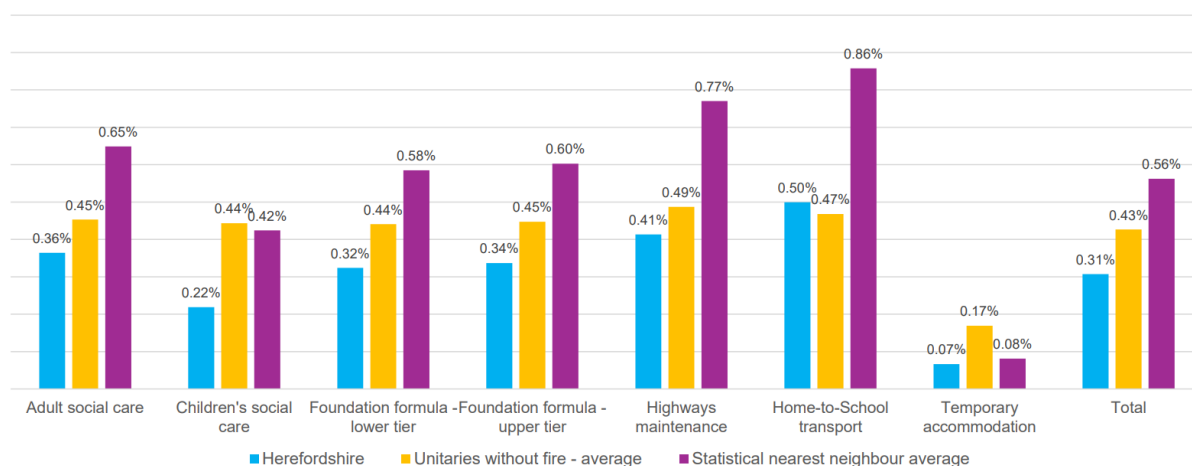
26. The estimated revised gap to be funded over the medium-term period is the result of growth in demand and costs for services increasing at a higher rate than the increase in council tax and central government funding through the new SFA as outlined in table 3 below.
27. There is an 11.1% increase in the estimated expenditure requirement in 2026/27 alongside a 0.7% decrease in estimated funding. In 2027/28 and 2028/29, the estimated increase in net expenditure requirement to deliver services is 6.8% and 6.4% respectively whilst increases in income and funding represent marginal increases of 1.8% and 1.7% respectively.

Table 3: Movement in funding and expenditure

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Movement in expenditure requirement	+£25.7m	+£17.4m	+£17.7m
% increase in expenditure	+11.1%	+6.8%	+6.4%
Movement in funding (including council tax)	-£1.6m	+£4.1m	+£3.9m
% change in funding	-0.7%	+1.8%	+1.7%

28. As outlined in paragraph 16 above, the council's share of the fixed national pot of funding is determined by Herefordshire's share of relative need. Our review of how Herefordshire's share of relative needs assessed through each formula in 2025 compared with the national average share of our statistical nearest neighbours and the average unitary authority share, suggests that the council does not fare favourably from the assessment of relative needs and therefore the allocation of funding.

Chart 1: Herefordshire Council share of relative needs assessed through each formula in 2025 compared with national averages



29. The second key determinant of the SFA is the Relative Resources Adjustment. This assessment of each authority's ability to raise income from council tax, informed by the attributable taxbase multiplied by an amount per unit of taxbase, assumes a notional council tax level of £2,199 per taxbase unit.
30. With a band D charge of £1,969.36 in 2025/26, the council's council tax level is less than that assumed in the formula which determines the Relative Resources Adjustment. The adjustment therefore assumes that the council raises more income from council tax than it is able to from current levels. This puts the council at a further disadvantage in the allocation of funding through FFR 2.0.

Approach to Closing the Estimated Funding Gap

31. Responding to the impact of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 represents a significant challenge for the council; managing a significant reduction in funding at a time of increasing costs and demand for services, alongside the additional costs of delivering services to our rural communities, places the council's financial position and resilience under pressure.
32. The council will need to prioritise resources and continue to identify efficiencies and savings to bridge this gap through transformation of service delivery, increasing opportunities to recover costs of service delivery, expenditure reviews and reviewing the size and shape of the workforce to ensure a lean and resilient council for the future.
33. The council is in strong position to respond to this challenge. In-year monitoring of performance against the approved revenue budget for 2025/26 identifies a small forecast net overspend of £1.0 million (0.4% of net budget) after recovery action, and significant progress in the delivery of approved savings, and savings brought forward from previous years, has already been made in the first quarter of the financial year.
34. There are robust, proven expenditure controls in place across the council and effective demand management has had a positive impact on the cost of service delivery. Close monitoring and financial discipline, to ensure the delivery of services within budget, is exercised through monthly Directorate Budget Boards and Directorate expenditure control panels with oversight of monthly financial position and performance by Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet.
35. As part of the budget development process, leading to the approval of the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme by full Council in February 2026, a comprehensive review of options to address the funding gap is already underway. This work will include exploration of options to maximise income from the council tax base and commercial activities, continued development of transformation opportunities, review of mandatory and discretionary service levels, review of the existing capital programme and proposed additions for 2026/27 and the identification of Directorate savings and efficiencies.

Outline Budget Setting Timetable for 2026/27

36. The table below identifies the planned activity and key dates and milestones leading to the approval by full Council in February 2026. The government has announced that the next Budget will take place on 26 November 2025.

Month	Planned Activity/Milestone
September	Review of activity data and demand/growth impact on Directorate expenditure requirements for 2026/27 and MTFS Review of Capital Programme and bids for 2026/27 Identification of savings and efficiencies Review of mandatory and discretionary services
October	Development of options to balance the budget and agree proposed Capital Programme
November	Finalisation of options to balance the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Public and Business Consultation Engagement with Political Groups and Scrutiny Management Board
December	Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement
January	Presentation of draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme by Cabinet Scrutiny of draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme by Scrutiny Management Board

February

Council meeting to approve 2026/27 Revenue Budget, MTFS for 2026/27 to 2029/20 and 2026/27 Capital Programme

Community impact

37. In accordance with the accepted code of corporate governance, the council must ensure that it has an effective financial control framework to support delivery of services within the agreed budget. The council is accountable for how it uses the resources under its stewardship, including accountability for outputs and outcomes achieved. In addition, the council has an overarching responsibility to serve the public interest in adhering to the requirements of legislation and government policies.

Environmental Impact

38. The council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
39. This report is to provide an update on the council's financial planning arrangements so will have minimal environmental impacts, however consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

40. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
41. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this activity, and it has been found to have no impact for equality. This report provides an update on estimated funding for future years with no recommendations for changes to service delivery at this time.

Resource implications

42. The financial implications of changes to the council's funding arrangements and budget requirement for 2026/27 and the medium-term period will be detailed in the draft budget report and separate governance decision reports as appropriate.
43. The council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness from its resources. This includes taking properly informed decisions and managing key operational and financial risks in order to deliver objectives and safeguard public money.

Legal implications

44. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires a council to set a balanced budget. To do this the council must prepare a budget that covers not only the expenditure but also the funding to meet the proposed budget. The budget has to be fully funded and the income from all sources must meet the expenditure.
45. Best estimates have to be employed so that all anticipated expenditure and resources are identified. If the budget includes unallocated savings or unidentified income then these have to

be carefully handled to demonstrate that these do not create a deficit budget. An intention to set a deficit budget is not permitted under local government legislation.

46. Local government legislation requires the council's S151 officer to make a report to the full Council meeting when it is considering its budget and council tax. The report must deal with the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the reserves allowed for in the budget proposals (the statement is contained within the risk management section of this report). This is done so that members will have authoritative advice available to them when they make their decisions. As part of the Local Government Act 2003 members have a duty to determine whether they agree with the S151 statutory report.
47. The council's budget and policy framework rules require that the chairpersons of a scrutiny committee shall take steps to ensure that the relevant committee work programmes include any budget and policy framework plan or strategy, to enable scrutiny members to inform and support the process for making Cabinet proposals to Council.
48. Part 4 Section 3 of the Constitution provides the mechanism used by the Council in adopting a budget and any policy framework. Cabinet must recommend a balanced budget for adoption by the Council. Any amendments to the Cabinet recommendation requires the proposer to have discussed with the relevant service director and the chief finance officer that it is achievable before submitting an amendment (para 4.3.12).

Risk management

49. The known most substantial risks have been assessed as part of the budget process and reasonable mitigation has been made where possible. Risks will be monitored through the year and reported to cabinet as part of the budget monitoring process.
50. The council's Corporate Risk Register identifies the failure to deliver a sustainable strategy that supports delivery of the Council Plan priorities as a key financial risk (Risk Ref. R5). The assigned level of risk appetite in respect of this risk is 'cautious' and control measures and mitigating actions reflect this assessment and outline the activity and arrangements in place as part of the risk management framework.

Consultees

51. None in relation to this report.
52. The council's constitution states that budget consultees should include parish councils, health partners, the schools forum, business ratepayers, council taxpayers, the trade unions, political groups on the council, the scrutiny committees and such other organisations and persons as the Leader shall determine. This consultation will be undertaken as part of the development of the 2026/27 Budget as outlined in the Budget Setting Timetable above.

Appendices

Appendix A Approved Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2028/29

Background papers

None identified.



MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025/26 TO 2028/29

Introduction

- 1.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is the council's key financial planning document and sets out the council's budget for 2025/26 and the financial plan for the years to 2028/29. The strategy sets out how the council's priorities will be funded over the MTFS period and the financial risks and pressures that must be mitigated in order to successfully deliver corporate objectives.
- 1.2 This MTFS provides the strategic framework for managing the council's finances and ensures that:
 - resources are aligned to achieve corporate objectives detailed in the County Plan over the medium/longer term; and
 - the Revenue Budget, Capital Investment Budget, Treasury Management Strategy and required Prudential Indicators are appropriately aligned.
- 1.3 The council has a gross expenditure budget of around £400 million which is used to deliver services to nearly 200,000 residents across rural villages and market towns. These services include maintenance of over 2,000 miles of roads, collection of over 89,000 residential bins, safeguarding around 1,000 children (including 400 in our care) and providing care and support to approximately 2,500 vulnerable adults.
- 1.4 The council employs over 1,200 staff and supports many more local jobs through contacts with local business. The local economy combines long-standing agriculture and food production industries alongside innovative businesses in cyber and technology, construction and engineering.
- 1.5 The council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness from its resources. This includes taking properly informed decisions and managing key operational and financial risks in order to deliver objectives and safeguard public money. Using resources wisely is a core principal of financial management and the council continues to identify efficiencies in service delivery and maximise purchasing power to ensure value for money is achieved for the residents and businesses of Herefordshire.
- 1.6 The Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-28 sets out how the council will make its contribution to achieving success across the county; delivering the best for Herefordshire in all areas of service delivery and developing a council that engages with the communities it serves.
- 1.7 The Plan sets out the vision for the future, with a focus on key priorities of People, Place, Growth and Transformation, with partnership working at the core of all activity. The themes and ambitions which underpin the Council Plan inform the financial plans including the annual budget and MTFS.
- 1.8 The MTFS proposes a balanced revenue budget which totals £231.5 million for 2025/26; achieved by a 4.99% increase in council tax and planned savings of £3.9 million. The net revenue budget for 2025/26 is detailed at Annex A.

National and Local Financial Risk

Wider Economic Context

- 2.1 The UK economy remains challenging following a prolonged period of high interest rates and sticky inflation, caused by the global pandemic and the subsequent impact of increases in the cost of living. UK growth is stagnant, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at 0.5% for quarter 2 and 0.1% for quarter 30 in 2024.
- 2.2 Domestic inflation rates are generally in decline. Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation fell to the target rate of 2.0% in May 2024, before a period of movements above and below the target (2.2% in July and August, 1.7% in September, 2.3% in October). The decline since last year has been led mainly by falling food, alcohol, tobacco and energy prices. CPI inflation is expected to rise to 2.5%, before falling back to the target rate of 2.0% by mid-2025.
- 2.3 These economic factors, alongside increases in demand for adult and children's social care and home to school travel services, place unprecedented pressures on the council's MTFS during a period of uncertainty around future funding arrangements for local government.
- 2.4 The MTFS is informed by the estimated impact of these pressures on council budgets at the time of preparation. They remain estimates which are subject to change and will continue to be reviewed over the medium term planning period.

Core Government Funding

- 2.5 The Local Government Settlement for 2025/26 received in December 2024 represents a one-year settlement with a multi-year spending review for subsequent years expected in Spring 2025.
- 2.6 Alongside the Provisional Settlement, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a consultation on funding reform. The Autumn 2024 Budget confirmed Government's intention to pursue a comprehensive set of reforms to place local government in a more sustainable position, using a deprivation-based approach in 2025-26, followed by broader reform through a multi-year settlement from 2026-27.
- 2.7 A reset of the business rates retention system is also planned for 2026/27. This reset will apply nationally but it is expected that business rates growth generated within designated areas, including Enterprise Zones, will be exempt in line with current policy. The impact of a business rates reset on the council's retained income will depend on the relative growth in business rates.
- 2.8 These plans place significant uncertainty over funding over the medium-term planning period. The MTFS for 2025/26 to 2028/29 is informed by prudent assumptions of future core Government funding to reflect this uncertainty.
- 2.9 **Council Tax:** The Provisional Settlement confirmed that the council tax referendum limits would remain unchanged for 2025/26: councils with social care responsibilities are permitted to increase council tax by up to 3% with an additional 2% to meet adult social care pressures, without a local referendum.
- 2.10 Each 1% increase in council tax represents approximately £1.4 million of recurrent funding to meet demand pressures and deliver the council's services. The proposed draft revenue budget for 2025/26 assumes the maximum increase of 4.99% in 2025/26: 2.99% increase in core council tax and a 2% adult social care precept. This increases the band D equivalent charge to £1,969.36, representing an increase of £7.80 per month (£1.80 per week).
- 2.11 At the proposed level of increase, the total Council Tax income for the council is expected to increase by £11.4 million to £146.5 million; representing £6.7 million of basic increase, £1.6

million in tax base buoyancy and £3.1 million in premiums applied to second homes and empty properties.

- 2.12 The maximum level of local Council Tax Reduction scheme discount, approved by Council in 2021/22, has been maintained in all subsequent years to ensure that eligible households receive support as the impact of the rising cost of living continues.
- 2.13 **Business Rates:** The Business Rates retention scheme was introduced on 1 April 2013. Under the scheme, the council retains some of the business rates raised locally: 50% of the business rate yield is retained locally and 50% retained by central Government. This Government share is maintained in a central pool, distributed to local government via other grants.
- 2.14 Authorities who have more business rates than their baseline funding level pay a tariff to Government. This is used to fund top-up payments to those authorities whose business rates are less than their baseline funding levels.
- 2.15 In order to maximise the value of business rates retained within Herefordshire, the council joined the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Business Rates Pool in the 2023/24 financial year 2023/24 and opted to continue in 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- 2.16 A Business Rates Pool is a voluntary arrangement between a group of local authorities in England whereby their combined business rates income and any growth is collected as one common fund or 'pool'. This pool generates a saving in the levy returned to central Government which can be distributed amongst members as determined by a Pooling Agreement; spreading the risk across a wider geographic and economic area to enable more business rate growth to be retained locally and shared by authorities within the pool.
- 2.17 As a member of this Pool, the council benefits from a reduction in levy rate and a share of the estimated increased gain to the pool, as determined by the Pooling Agreement. The Pool operates on the principal that no member authority would be worse off in the pool than if not a member. This means that amounts paid into the pool are limited to the levy amount that they would have otherwise paid to the Government and the risk to the council is mitigated.
- 2.18 **Fees & Charges:** The council generates income to fund service delivery by charging for the services it provides to residents and businesses. Aside from income generation from locally raised taxes, this is an increasingly important source of funding. Fees and charges are within the direct control of the council to set and uplift, subject to any legislative, economic and political considerations.
- 2.19 Alongside an annual review and uplift of fees and charges, work to ensure maximum service cost recovery and to identify new commercial opportunities across Directorates continues as part of wider transformation activity across the council.

Local Context

- 2.20 Despite efficiencies across the council in 2024/25, Directorate teams have continued to deliver key priorities and Delivery Plan milestones whilst providing increased support to recognise the impact of the increasing costs of living on residents and businesses in the county. In addition, the council has made significant progress in the delivery of capital projects.
- 2.21 The council continues to invest in transformation activity to support improvement of its services; of which the improvement of children's services remains a key corporate priority, and this MTFS reflects the financial commitment to deliver this transformation.
- 2.22 Transformation efficiencies and savings will be achieved through improvements to systems, processes and technology; using digital solutions and technology to improve the customer

offer and maximise opportunities to work with communities and partners alongside maximising income through service cost recovery.

- 2.23 Year-on-year timely completion and independent audit of the council's statutory accounts provide assurance over the arrangements in place to provide complete, accurate and timely financial statements and the appropriateness of the council's accounting policies and accounting estimates.
- 2.24 The council's financial position is stable with above average reserve levels compared with similar unitary authorities, low levels of borrowing, positive cashflow and high liquidity and robust financial planning arrangements to identify and manage risks to financial resilience.

Projected Funding Gap over MTFS Period

- 3.1 The MTFS develops a series of financial projections to quantify the estimated funding gap and determine the medium term financial implications must be addressed in order to continue to deliver council services and strategic priorities.
- 3.2 To develop these projections, the current year base budget is inflated to reflect estimated price increases across services and goods with additional amounts to include unavoidable spending pressures and the financial impacts of council priorities and decisions. The adjusted base budget is measured against the estimated funding available to determine the future funding gap.
- 3.3 The projections below, and detailed at Annex B, reflect a funding gap for the medium-term period 2025/26 to 2028/29 of £4.2 million. This is an estimate of the financial gap between what the council needs to spend to maintain services delivery and the funding available. This reflects inflationary costs included as base budget increases from 2026/27 which are not currently matched by increases in core Government funding.

Table 1 Projected Funding Gap to 2028/29

	Proposed 2025/26 £'000	Estimate 2026/27 £'000	Estimate 2027/28 £'000	Estimate 2028/29 £'000
Total Funding	231,508	258,976	273,651	287,281
Net Expenditure Budget	231,508	257,216	274,601	292,289
Surplus/(Gap) to be funded	-	1,760	(950)	(5,008)
Surplus/(Gap) as % of net budget		0.7%	0.3%	1.7%
Total (Gap) to 2028/29				(4,198)

- 3.4 Closing the estimated funding gap in future years represents a significant challenge for the council. Existing activity to priorities resources and deliver efficiencies will continue to bridge this gap through transformation of service delivery, increasing opportunities to recover costs of service delivery, expenditure reviews and reviewing the size and shape of the workforce to ensure a lean and resilient council for the future.
- 3.5 There is significant uncertainty in terms of future funding arrangements and allocations across local authorities over the medium-term period. Government have confirmed that there will be significant reform of funding arrangements in future years, including a Fair Funding Review and reset of Business Rates during 2025 for implementation from 2026/27 and the MTFS will need to be revised to reflect updated levels of funding as information is received from Government.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

- 4.1 The cumulative DSG deficit is accounted for as an unusable reserve on the council's Balance Sheet, as permitted via statutory instrument, which will remain in place until 31 March 2026. This enables all local authorities to ring-fence the DSG deficit from the overall financial position in the statutory accounts.
- 4.2 Beyond the period of the statutory override, the expectation is that any balance on the DSG Unusable Reserve will transfer back to the council's total Earmarked Reserves. The deficit will have a significant impact on the council's overall financial position once the override period ends and this risk is being managed alongside the assessment of the adequacy of the council's reserves, as part of the council's medium term financial strategy. The Provisional Settlement confirmed that Government will set out plans for reforming the SEND system in 2025, including a decision on the statutory override, and the MTFS will be updated to reflect the impact as plans are confirmed.

Planning Assumptions

- 5.1 The key assumptions in developing the medium term financial projections are explained below.

Table 2 Key assumptions by budget area

Budget area	Key assumptions
Contract inflation	For 2025/26 the general rate of inflation is assumed at 3% or the individual contract specific rate (all capped at 90%). For the remaining three years from 2026/27 to 2028/29, inflation is assumed at 2.7%, 2.3% and 1.9% respectively.
Employee related costs	A pay increase has been assumed for the four year MTFS period. The council is part of the Worcestershire Pension Fund, administered by Worcestershire County Council. The triennial valuation of the Pension Fund took place on 31 March 2022. Contributions included for the MTFS period ensure that the future costs to meet existing members' service benefits continue to be covered.
Council tax	An increase of 4.99% is assumed for 2025/26 with a 1.99% increase in council tax and 2% increase in Adult Social Care Precept in each of the years 2026/27 to 2027/28.
Council tax base	The council's tax base represents the estimated number of Band D equivalent chargeable dwellings for the year. The tax base is forecast to increase by 1% each year for the purpose of modelling income for the MTFS; this increase is informed by prior year increases.
Council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties	The MTFS assumes additional council tax premiums from 1 April 2025. A 100% premium will be charged for second homes and properties which have been empty and unfurnished for a period of between 1 and 2 years. A prudent estimate of expected income has been included in the MTFS; acknowledging potential reductions in revenue if homes are sold or reclassified once charges are introduced. This estimate is informed by the number of dwellings confirmed as second homes or empty dwellings and the duration of the property's status, as per billing data as at December 2024. A series of verification checks to confirm occupancy and ownership status has

	been undertaken during 2024/25 to provide assurance in respect of the value of this budgeted income.
Other Government funding sources	Government funding sources included in the MTFS reflect the assumption that the Fair Funding Review will be implemented from 2026/27. Estimates do not include the impact of planned reform of business rates funding.
Fees & charges	Any increases in fees & charges have been incorporated within the budget proposals.
Capital borrowing rates	Capital borrowing rates of 4.8%, 4.4%, 4.2% and 4.2% have been assumed in respect of financing the Capital Programme over the next 4 years respectively. This assumption will remain under constant review and will be informed by forecasts provided by our Treasury Management Advisors: Link Group.

Robustness of Budget Estimates and Key Risks

- 6.1 The 2025/26 budget and MTFS include estimated values, based on key assumptions noted above and expectations of future events that are otherwise uncertain. Estimates are based on historical experience, current trends and other relevant factors. Financial forecasts are monitored as part of routine budget monitoring arrangements to ensure that risks are identified in a timely manner and mitigation action is taken.
- 6.2 As values cannot be determined with certainty, the table below notes the potential impact of both a positive and negative impact of 1% across the key areas within the MTFS.

Table 3 Impact assessment (1% movement)

	Potential full-year impact of 1% movement (£m)
Council tax	+/- £1.4m
Employee related costs (pay)	+/- £0.8m
Inflation	+/- £2.4m
Demand	+/- £2.0m
Interest on borrowing	+/- £0.1m
Council tax premium second/empty homes	A 10% movement in the number of dwellings liable to the premium represents +/- £0.3m from 2026/27 onwards

- 6.3 The council has strengthened arrangements to identify and monitor financial risks; implementing additional measures to provide increased support to budget managers to deliver planned savings and contain expenditure within the approved budget. These measures include:
- enhanced in-year financial monitoring and reporting to identify key risks and expected financial impacts;
 - improved alignment of activity data and trend analysis to financial forecasts;
 - introduction of expenditure controls to provide increased rigour and challenge of expenditure; and
 - enhanced check and challenge of key assumptions in the outturn forecast.
- 6.4 The key financial risks that could affect the delivery of the MTFS as noted in the table below.

Table 4 Key financial risks

Key Financial Risk	Likelihood	Impact (Potential Severity)	Mitigation
Unexpected events and emergencies By its nature, the financial risk is uncertain	Low	High	The Council maintains a strategic reserve at a level of between 3 and 5% of its revenue budget for emergency purposes. The level of this reserve at 1 April 2024 was 9.6m (4.5% of 2024/25 revenue budget). Additionally, national resources have historically been provided to support national issues.
Not delivering required improvements The council must address the statutory direction and improvements across Children's Services	Low	Medium	<p>The Phase 2 Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan was endorsed by Cabinet in July 2024 introducing a Quality Assurance Framework of measures (key performance indicators, service user feedback and audit activity) to enable future progress to be monitored. Performance against the Improvement Plan is monitored and reported on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The supporting Financial Plan has been revised for 2025/26 to ensure the Children & Young People Directorate is able to continue to deliver savings whilst sustaining improvement in service delivery.</p>
Increasing demand for Adult and Children's Social Care Demand for Children's services continue and demand for adult services increases as the population ages.	High	Medium	<p>Demand led pressures are reflected within our spending plans; additional funding to support increased demand has been applied to Community Wellbeing and Children & Young People Directorate base budgets for 2025/26. In year monitoring of performance enables Directorates to forecast trends and identify changes in demand.</p> <p>Increasing demand for social care represents a key financial pressure for all councils. Robust and regular budget monitoring identifies emerging pressures and the financial impact on in-year budgets across the council. Financial monitoring is informed by activity data and trend analysis from the relevant service to ensure that forecasting is reliable and timely.</p> <p>The Budget resilience reserve represents a contingency budget for</p>

			2025/26 and future years to mitigate the risks of excessive cost pressures and volatility in demand.
Potential overspend and non-delivery of savings required to balance the budget	Medium	Medium	High risk budget areas have been identified and financial support is targeted in these areas. Robust and regular financial monitoring which is reported to Directorate and Corporate Leadership Teams and Cabinet enables the timely identification of actions to mitigate the risk of overspends.
Volatility in Government funding streams The government settlement for 2025/26 is a one-year settlement; the assumed funding for the MTFS period is not confirmed.	High	Medium	The MTFS reflects prudent estimates and assumptions in the financial planning over the medium-term period where it is acknowledged that uncertainty over future funding exists. Government have confirmed that there will be significant reform of funding arrangements in future years, including a Fair Funding Review and reset of Business Rates. The MTFS will be updated to reflect the impact for the council as further information is received.
Interest and Inflation There is uncertainty over interest and inflation rates.	Medium	Medium	The Treasury Management Strategy is informed by latest forecast, as provided by our Treasury Management Advisors. Increases in borrowing rates will be offset by increases in investment returns.
Dedicated Schools Grant The future cumulative deficit requires direct financial support from Council core budgets	High	Medium	The high needs budgets are funded by the dedicated schools grant, but any overspend becomes a council liability. This is currently being maintained within budget however the national trend is for a growing pressure. This risk cannot currently be mitigated; expenditure will be monitored as part of routine budget monitoring arrangements. The high needs deficit (£6.1 million at 31 March 2024) sits as a negative unusable reserve on the balance sheet permitted via a statutory instrument. This enables all local authorities to ringfence DSG deficits from the council wider financial position in the statutory accounts. This instrument expires at the end of 2025/26, with an implied risk to the General Fund and overall financial

			position if the council is required to fund the deficit.
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Adequacy of reserves

- 7.1 The council's useable revenue reserves are split between a general reserve (the general fund) and earmarked reserves that are held for certain purposes. The general fund is held as a strategic reserve to emergency events such as unforeseen financial liabilities or natural disasters.
- 7.2 In line with the council's policy, this reserve is maintained at a minimum level of between 3% and 5% of the net revenue budget. As at 31 March 2024 the general reserve balance totalled £9.6 million, being 4.5% of the council's 2024/25 approved net revenue budget.
- 7.3 Earmarked reserves are amounts set aside for future expenditure to support specific corporate priorities or for general contingencies and cash flow management. For each reserve established, the purpose, usage and basis of transactions needs to be clearly defined.
- 7.4 The overall level of reserves balances is reported to Cabinet at least annually; the last report to Cabinet was in May 2024 noting the total audited balance of £82.8 million comprising the general fund balance of £9.6 million and earmarked reserve balances of £73.2 million at 31 March 2024.
- 7.5 Earmarked reserve balances include £17.3 million of grant funding carried forward into 2024/25. This represents amounts of grant funding received, with no outstanding grant conditions to be met, which have not yet been applied to relevant expenditure. In accordance with the principles of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting and relevant accounting standards, these amounts are accounted for as earmarked reserves, carried forward for application in future accounting periods.
- 7.6 The council's financial strategy aims to minimise the use of reserves in the medium term and to replenish them to support future sustainability, enable the council to respond to unexpected changes and to invest in the continued transformation and improvement of its services.
- 7.7 The financial resilience reserve was established to manage risks present in the base budget, for example additional placement costs from unexpected demands. In 2023/24, the financial resilience reserve was increased from £1.2 million to £3.1 million.
- 7.8 The 2024/25 revenue budget approved use of £1.3 million of this reserve balance to remove savings in the Children & Young People Directorate. Due to the volatility of the Directorate's demand-led activity and risk of impact on the outturn position, until the full year results and achievement of savings are known, the final requirement from the reserve cannot be confirmed.
- 7.9 Any overspend in 2024/25 must be funded using the council's available reserves. It is expected that the overspend will require full utilisation of the financial risk reserve and a review of 'other reserve' balances will be required to fund any additional balance. This will reduce the reserves available to manage risk in future years.
- 7.10 A forecast of reserve balances at 31 March 2025 and 31 March 2026 will be included at Appendix E to the 2025/26 Revenue Budget Report.
- 7.11 There are robust controls in place, as part of routine budget monitoring arrangements, to monitor in-year transfers to and from reserves and resulting reserve balances and these transactions are subject to review as part of the annual audit of the statutory accounts.

- 7.12 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Financial Resilience Index is a comparative tool to support good financial management. The index shows a council's position on a range of measures associated with financial risk to highlight where additional scrutiny may be required. The data for the most recent index reflects figures obtained from the Revenue Expenditure and Financing England Outturn Report 2023/24 (RO Forms) as at 31 March 2024.
- 7.13 The reserve sustainability measure provides a measure of how long in years it will take for a council to run out of reserves if they continue to use them as they have and the associated level of risk. This data highlights the council's reserve sustainability measure to be 'lower risk' and notes the council has average reserves relative to its nearest neighbour and other unitary authority comparator groups.
- 7.14 The Local Government Act 2003 (Section 25) requires that the chief financial officer considers the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves as part of the annual budget setting process.
- 7.15 The forecast general fund balance at 31 March 2025 of £9.6 million is within the range required by the council's policy; representing 4.1% of net revenue expenditure in 2025/26. This is sufficient to ensure that the council has adequate resources to fund unforeseen financial liabilities.

Conclusion

- 8.1 The council has a record of robust and effective financial management and is committed to delivering planned savings and managing expenditure within budget in order to preserve the future sustainability of the council.
- 8.2 The planning assumptions and estimates which inform the 2025/26 budget and MTFS to 2028/29 are realistic and prudent and there are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure the council is able to identify and manage risks to financial resilience.
- 8.3 The MTFS provides a balanced budget for 2025/26 and clearly identifies the projected funding gap and risks to delivery. Whilst there are significant challenges ahead, this financial strategy ensures that the council's finances are aligned to its strategic priorities with a clear focus on transformation to ensure the future sustainability of the council and the services it delivers.

ANNEX A Net revenue budget 2025/26

Detail	2024/25 Base Budget £'000	Unfunded Pressures £'000	Mitigations £'000	Savings £'000	2025/26 Proposed Budget £'000
Community Wellbeing	75,891	14,786	-	-	90,677
Children and Young People	59,536	4,898	(1,442)	(3,929)	59,063
Economy and Environment	38,403	4,012	-	-	42,415
Corporate	21,032	3,388	(1,568)	-	22,852
Sub Total	194,862	27,084	(3,010)	(3,929)	215,007
Central	17,902	(1,401)	-	-	16,501
TOTALS	212,764	25,683	(3,010)	(3,929)	231,508
Funded by:					
Council tax	135,054				146,451
Business rates	43,249				47,567
Enterprise Zone Business rate income	-				1,282
Collection fund surplus	-				2,000
Revenue support grant	1,048				1,422
Rural services delivery grant	6,927				-
Social care support grant	17,482				20,336
Local Authority Better Care Fund	1,585				1,585
Market Sustainability/Fair Cost of Care	3,853				3,853
Services Grant	208				-
New Homes Bonus	1,055				1,605
Reserve funding	2,303				-
Employer's NI impact funding*	-				1,500
Children's social care prevention grant	-				369
Extended producer responsibility grant	-				3,538
TOTALS	212,764				231,508

ANNEX B Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2028/29

Detail	Actual 2024/25 £'000	Proposed 2025/26 £'000	Estimate 2026/27 £'000	Estimate 2027/28 £'000	Estimate 2028/29 £'000
Funding:					
Council tax	135,054	146,451	154,187	162,336	170,908
Business rates	43,249	47,567	48,518	49,488	50,478
Enterprise Zone Business rate income	-	1,282	-	-	-
Collection fund surplus	-	2,000	-	-	-
Revenue support grant	1,048	1,422	16,477	18,760	19,553
Rural services delivery grant	6,927	-	-	-	-
Social care support grant	17,482	20,336	37,917	41,183	44,450
Local Authority Better Care Fund	1,585	1,585	-	-	-
Market Sustainability & Fair Cost of Care	3,853	3,853	-	-	-
Services Grant	208	-	-	-	-
New Homes Bonus	1,055	1,605	-	-	-
Reserve funding	2,303	-	-	-	-
Employer's NI impact funding*	-	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
Children's social care prevention grant	-	369	377	384	392
Extended producer responsibility grant	-	3,538	-	-	-
Total Funding	212,764	231,508	258,976	273,651	287,281
Expenditure:					
Base Budget b/f	193,308	212,764	231,508	257,216	274,601
Pay Award	4,028	3,629	2,498	2,613	2,700
Growth – Demand & Pressures	40,514	24,357	25,502	16,214	14,988
Savings, efficiencies & mitigations	(24,886)	(3,010)	-	-	-
Children's Three Year Plan	(2,503)	(3,929)	(2,292)	(1,442)	-
Budget amendment	2,303	(2,303)	-	-	-
Net Expenditure Budget	212,764	231,508	257,216	274,601	292,289
Surplus/(Gap) to be funded			1,760	(950)	(5,008)



Title of report: Risk Management Update Quarter 1 2025-26

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 25 September 2025

Cabinet member: Cabinet member finance and corporate services;

Report by: Director of Finance

Report author: Director of Finance

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose

To provide an update on the status of corporate risks at the end of Quarter 1 2025/26 (June 2025) and provide assurance that risks are being managed effectively across the council.

Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- a) Approves the updates to the Corporate Risk Register and actions to mitigate identified risks at Quarter 1 2025/26.
- b) Notes the activity to embed the revised risk management strategy to strengthen risk management activity across the council at Corporate, Directorate and Service levels.

Alternative options

1. Cabinet may choose not to review the council's corporate risks. This is not recommended as risk management is an integral part of the council's governance arrangements and decision-making processes and is fundamental to the successful delivery of strategic objectives.

Key considerations

2. The revised Risk Management Strategy 2025/26 and Risk Appetite Statement were approved by Cabinet in June 2025. The Strategy sets out the approach and principles of risk management, outlining the council's risk appetite, to inform the management of risks by Members and Officers across the council.
3. The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) have undertaken a review of the Corporate Risk Register (included at Appendix A) at 30 June 2025 to update risk scores, consider the adequacy of control measures and mitigating actions and identify new threats and opportunities to the delivery of the objectives and priorities of the Council Plan 2024-28.
4. In addition to this quarterly update, CLT and Cabinet continue to monitor risks throughout the year to ensure appropriate and proportionate controls are in place as part of the risk management framework and internal control framework.
5. The revised Corporate Risk Register approved by Cabinet in June 2025 included 8 corporate risks. At Quarter 1, an additional risk has been identified and added to the risk register. Corporate Risk ref. R9 recognises the risk of financial failure of a major supplier to the council, resulting in disruption to the delivery of statutory services or major projects.
6. There have been no changes to the risk scores for the remaining 8 corporate risks during Quarter 1. The scores of each of these risks have been reviewed by the relevant Risk Owner, supported by discussion and oversight by CLT.
7. In addition to the review of the Corporate Risk Register, CLT members are engaged in activity to refresh Directorate level risk registers and embed the revised Strategy across the council.
8. The council's 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan has been reviewed to ensure it is aligned to the refreshed Risk Strategy and risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register. The development of a comprehensive risk-based plan ensures that internal audit activities are focused on the highest-impact risks to the council's objectives.
9. Activity to embed and strengthen risk management arrangements has continued in Quarter 1 as outlined below:
 - i. A consistent Risk Register template to record and monitor individual Directorate, Service and Project risks has been developed with automated links and escalation flags; this template aligns risks to the council's approved Risk Strategy and Risk Appetite Statement.
 - ii. Testing of populated risks registers to confirm functionality and cohesion with the Strategy.
 - iii. A SharePoint site and Teams Challenge has been established to share guidance, training and enable interaction between risk owners.
10. Further activity planned during Quarter 2 includes:
 - i. An audit of risks transferred from previously used registers to the new risk register templates will be undertaken to confirm the completeness of transfer.
 - ii. Moderation of risk scores across Service, Directorate and Project Risk Registers.
 - iii. Review and challenge of control measures and mitigating actions.
 - iv. Delivery of risk management training to the council's Leadership Group in September 2025 with workshop activity to test the application of the Risk Management Strategy and Appetite Statement to decision-making in respect of major projects.
 - v. Update of the council's Risk Management Intranet page.
 - vi. Development of Risk Management dashboard reporting.

Community impact

11. Effective risk management is essential to the delivery of the priorities set out in the Council Plan. Specially, the Council plan commits the council to 'develop a Corporate Risk Strategy to improve the process for managing corporate and directorate risks'.

Environmental Impact

12. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
13. Whilst this is a report for information and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

14. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
15. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this activity and it has been found to have no impact for equality. It is recognised that each identified individual corporate risk may have its own individual impacts on equalities or assessed as a risk due to its effect on equality. These are monitored as part of the ongoing individual service or project delivery. Effective risk management arrangements will ensure the council complies with its equality duties.

Resource implications

16. There are no specific resource implications from the report itself.

Legal implications

17. Cabinet is responsible for approving the Risk Management Strategy and is accountable for ensuring that a corporate risk register is established and maintained, including details of actions to mitigate identified risks, and that this is regularly monitored.

Risk management

18. This is a report to review the Corporate Risk Register and risk management arrangements at Quarter 1 2025/26.

Consultees

19. None.

Appendices

Appendix A Corporate Risk Register Quarter 1 2025/26.

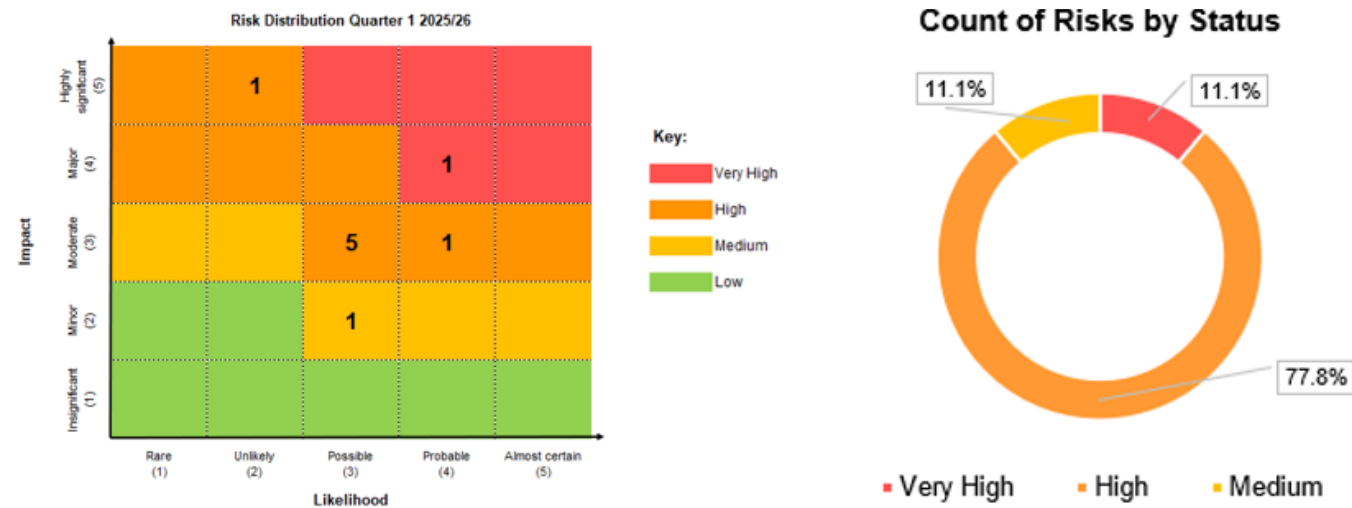
Background papers

None.

Appendix A: Corporate Risk Register Update at Quarter 1 2025/26

Ref	Corporate Risk	2025/26 Q1 Residual	2025/26 Q2 Residual	2025/26 Q3 Residual	2025/26 Q4 Residual	Current RAG
R1	Failure to discharge duty of care for a vulnerable child or vulnerable adult.	10				High
R2	Demand for client-based services continues to increase resulting in increased budget pressures and poor outcomes for those people in receipt of our services.	12				High
R3	Lack of local special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) placement provision to meet current and future levels of demand.	16				Very High
R4	Failure to deliver capital and major projects within identified resources and planned timeframes resulting in significant overspend and reduced project outcomes.	9				High
R5	Failure to deliver a sustainable financial strategy that supports delivery of the Council Plan priorities.	9				High
R6	Inability to attract and recruit candidates and retain staff leading to an inability to deliver services.	6				Medium
R7	Inability to respond adequately to a significant emergency affecting ability to provide priority services.	9				High
R8	Risks within the West Mercia community area.	9				High
R9_NEW	Risk of financial failure of major supplier.	9				High

Risk rating	Action
Very High	Immediate and significant management action and control required. Continued proactive monitoring of risk.
High	Seek cost effective management actions and controls. Continued proactive monitoring of risk.
Medium	Seek cost effective control improvements. Monitor and review risk regularly.
Low	Seek improvements to controls if cost effective to do so. Monitor and review risk regularly.



Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
R1	<p>Failure to discharge duty of care for a vulnerable child or vulnerable adult.</p> <p>Risk Owner: Corporate Directors: Community Wellbeing, Children & Young People</p>	<p>Strategic Delivery - Council Plan Priority: PEOPLE</p> <p>(Exception 1: Safety and wellbeing of residents)</p>	<p>Exception 1: Averse Limited appetite to risk. The council is responsible for providing services to those who need it most, including vulnerable adults and children and operates rigorous safeguarding measure to ensure the health and safety of residents. The council will continually seek to avoid activities that present a threat to the safety of the public and will do everything possible to prevent the loss of life.</p>	<p>Services for Adults There are clear processes in place for same-day triage of safeguarding concerns raised and action is taken for those at greatest risk. Outcomes are monitored by frontline managers with senior management oversight. All staff access training aligned to their job roles and responsibilities. The Principal Social Worker (PSW) led practitioner forums provide further support and embed practice for staff working with vulnerable adults. Daily case discussions take place and established processes for escalation are in place across the service. The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Service follows the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) guidance for case prioritisation. Continuous professional development for staff and providers, additional legal support and constant review and prioritisation of cases waiting for assessment is undertaken. Safe and well checks are undertaken for those at high risk. There are duty arrangements in place to cover emergencies and any urgent work required. Oversight and assurance of multi-agency safeguarding practice is delivered by the Herefordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (HSAB). The Complex Adult Risk Management (CARM) process has been reviewed and strengthened. There is an established process of 'Team Around Me' and 'Breaking the Cycle' forums with partners to ensure a joined-up approach by agencies to support adults with multiple complex vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Children's Services Children's Safeguarding procedures and Practice Standards in place to guide practice.</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 5 (Highly significant)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 15</p>	<p>Likelihood: 2 (Unlikely)</p> <p>Impact: 5 (Highly significant)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 10</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
				<p>An audit programme is in place to review compliance with practice standards. There is regular (monthly) supervision of social workers – KPI and Adult review compliance</p> <p>The Better Outcomes Panel is responsible for reviewing children in care placements. The Service Director receives and is the decision maker on all children received into care.</p> <p>Cases with high risk are reviewed within Legal Gateway meeting chaired by Senior Manager and attended by Legal to ensure threshold for proceedings is considered.</p>		
R2	<p>Demand for client-based services continues to increase resulting in increased budget pressures and poor outcomes for those people in receipt of our services.</p> <p>Risk Owner: Corporate Directors: Community Wellbeing, Children & Young People</p>	<p>Strategic Delivery - Council Plan Priority: PEOPLE</p>	<p>Open</p> <p>The council is ambitious in its aim to support children and young people to thrive within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. It seeks out opportunities to collaborate with partners to support residents to live healthy lives within connected and safe communities and is prepared to accept a level of risk to deliver against this priority.</p>	<p>A Budget Resilience Reserve was established in 2024/25 to manage the impact of in-year cost pressures and volatility in demand across social care budgets in 2025/26 and 2026/27. A balance of £7.0m has been carried forward at 1 April 2025 to be allocated by the S151 Officer and Cabinet approval to ensure that appropriate measures have been taken within Directorates.</p> <p>Demand for Adult Services: Demand pressures are managed through a robust 'front-door' prevention strategy including: Promotion of Technology Enabled Care (TEC), Community options via Talk Community model, Monthly review of operational performance data, Pathway Redesign and Structural Reform, Community Brokerage, Case Collaboration and Peer Challenge, Complex Care Pathway Development and a Prevention-focused Culture.</p> <p>Joint working arrangements are in place and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for complex care pathway has been established for those with high level needs.</p>	<p>Likelihood: 4 (Probable)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 16</p>	<p>Likelihood: 4 (Probable)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 12</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
				<p>Monthly Budget Board meetings are in place to monitor spend and progress in the delivery of savings, and opportunities for income maximisation, is monitored via a dedicated Savings Programme group.</p> <p>Monthly Directorate Budget Reports track spend against budget, identify cost pressures and highlight financial risks.</p> <p>Managing the market work programme will include a redesign of block contract beds to increase capacity.</p> <p>A feasibility review of a council-controlled care capacity for complex/dementia care is underway.</p> <p>Demand for Children's Services: Regular meetings between Service Directors and Finance to monitor budget throughout the year and identify cost pressures in timely manner.</p> <p>There is a strong cultural message from Directorate leadership to ensure Best Value in the delivery of services.</p> <p>The Better Outcome Panel, chaired by the Service Director, oversees placement costs.</p> <p>A Care Placement Sufficiency Strategy is expected to be completed June 2025. The Strategy will ensure value for money through sufficiency of safe and appropriate options for young people.</p>		
R3	Lack of local special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) placement provision to meet current and future levels of demand. Risk that the needs of children with SEND cannot be met in Herefordshire and/or Out of County placements will be required, leading to costs exceeding budget and poorer outcomes for children and young people.	Strategic Delivery - Council Plan Priority: PEOPLE	Open The council is ambitious in its aim to support children and young people to thrive within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. It seeks out opportunities to collaborate with partners to support residents to live healthy lives within connected and safe communities and is prepared to accept a level of risk to deliver against this priority.	<p>The Area SEND inspection was completed in December 2024 and an action plan has been developed to address the areas for improvement identified.</p> <p>A new SEND service manager was appointed in September 2024 to provide additional managerial oversight, scrutiny and direction to this part of the service.</p> <p>Business cases for increased Alternative Provision (AP) are in development to maximise inclusive education and reduce the use and cost of independent provision. The proposed additional provision will be</p>	<p>Likelihood: 4 (Probable)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 16</p>	<p>Likelihood: 4 (Probable)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 16</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
	Risk Owner: Corporate Director Children & Young People			delivered through the capital programme in 2025/26 and 2026/27. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit Management Plan is monitored by the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and S151 Officer as part of monthly Budget Boards. The plan includes detailed financial modelling of the impact of current and planned increases in provision. The Department of Education (DfE) is providing funding for a new special school in Herefordshire, expected to open in 2026/27. This school will increase the number of in-county specialist education places.		
R4	<p>Failure to deliver capital and major projects within identified resources and planned timeframes resulting in significant overspend and reduced project outcomes.</p> <p>Risk Owner: Corporate Director of Economy & Environment</p>	Strategic Delivery - Council Plan Priority: GROWTH PLACE	Open The council is aspirational and seeks out opportunities to attract investment, drive business growth and development of talent across the county and is prepared to accept a level of risk to deliver against this priority. The council is innovative and pioneering in its commitment to managing the effects of climate change across the county. It has ambitious plans to deliver learning and culture projects and to expand infrastructure, to support economic growth and housing, and is prepared to accept a level of risk to deliver against this priority.	<p>Each major project has an assigned Senior Responsible Officer, a dedicated Project Management Officer Project Manager and a Project Board of relevant representatives from across the council (relevant service area, legal, finance, property services etc) to lead delivery.</p> <p>Additional controls are in place to monitor expenditure in respect of capital and major projects linked to cashflow requirements via monthly Directorate Budget Boards.</p> <p>An external review of capacity and capability of Directorate teams including the Project Management Office and enabling, corporate functions (finance, procurement, legal) has been commissioned to ensure appropriate skills and resources are in place to successfully deliver capital and major projects. Where gaps are identified, additional resources will be allocated.</p>	<p>Likelihood: 4 (Probable)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 16</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 9</p>
R5	<p>Failure to deliver a sustainable financial strategy that supports delivery of the Council Plan priorities. (Including delivery of savings, commercial income, capital</p>	Financial	Cautious The council has a cautious appetite level towards legal and compliance risks with robust processes in place to ensure the risk of legal challenge is minimised.	<p>Council set a balanced budget for 2025/26 at its meeting in February 2025.</p> <p>An MTFS gap of £4.2m is projected for the period to 2028/29 and this is expected to be managed via transformation of service delivery, increasing opportunities to recover costs of service delivery, expenditure reviews</p>	<p>Likelihood: 4 (Probable)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
	<p>receipts and ensuring resources are available to deliver statutory obligations and fund organisational development and transformation.)</p> <p>Risk Owner: Director of Finance (S151 Officer)</p>			<p>and reviewing the size and shape of the workforce.</p> <p>The forecast outturn position against budget is reported on a monthly basis to Directorates and CLT.</p> <p>Effective budget monitoring arrangements are in place via Directorate Budget Boards to monitor delivery of services against agreed budget, achievement of savings and delivery of capital and major projects.</p> <p>Expenditure controls will continue in 25/26 via Directorate Control Panels to challenge and reduce, defer or stop spend above £500. High quality financial reporting is achieved through additional controls to ensure forecasting informed by reliable, timely activity data.</p> <p>The Finance Team adhere to statutory deadlines; an unqualified audit opinion was achieved in 2023/24 and the 2024/25 are in progress to be published by 31 May 2025 with audit testing expected to take place during Quarter 2.</p> <p>Additional controls are in place to monitor expenditure in respect of capital and major projects linked to cashflow requirements via monthly Directorate Budget Boards.</p> <p>A review of earmarked reserves undertaken in December 2024 and the Budget Resilience Reserve was established to manage demand pressures in 2025/26 and 2026/27.</p> <p>A review of third party spend is underway as part of the Transformation Strategy.</p>	Inherent Risk Score = 16	Residual Risk Score = 9
R6	<p>Inability to attract and recruit candidates and retain staff leading to an inability to deliver services. Loss of skills knowledge and experience (retention & recruitment) in relation to staffing.</p> <p>Risk Owner:</p>	<p>Strategic Delivery - Council Plan</p> <p>Priority: TRANSFORMATION</p>	<p>Open</p> <p>The council is committed to improving the use of technology across its services and will embrace new technologies, test ideas and develop a culture of innovation to improve services and deliver value for money. Transformation and</p>	<p>The council's Workforce Strategy 2024-2028 was approved for implementation in April 2024. The Strategy has been developed to recruit, retain and invest in a skilled and well-trained workforce.</p> <p>A Children & Young People Workforce Strategy, aligned to the Corporate Workforce Strategy with a specific focus on ambitions for staff in the C&YP Directorate, is in place</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 9</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 2 (Minor)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 6</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
	Director of HR and OD		Digital Strategies in place to support deliver of aims.	to support permanent recruitment and development of staff internally. The Spirit of Herefordshire recruitment brand has been developed to increase awareness of job opportunities within the council and county and provide relevant information to ensure a positive candidate experience and support strong applications. The council offers welcome and retention scheme payments to respond to challenges in the recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced social workers. Through the council's Learning & Organisation (L&OD) team, activity to identify and recruit to new apprenticeship programmes is underway. A leadership development programme (@LeadHC) has been developed and will be launched in 2025/26 to address gaps in the learning and development offer and strengthen leadership skills and capabilities. The Lead@HC Programme will aim to develop inspirational leaders across four themes: Grow, Aspire, Empower, Innovate.		
R7	<p>Inability to respond adequately to a significant emergency affecting ability to provide priority services.</p> <p>Including severe weather, critical damage to council buildings, loss of power or infrastructure, cyber security.</p> <p>Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team/Cabinet Members</p>	<p>Legal & Compliance Governance Data & Technology Security Reputational</p>	<p>Cautious</p> <p>The council has a cautious appetite level towards these risk categories with robust processes in place to ensure the impact on service delivery is minimised.</p>	<p>Gold/Silver emergency planning arrangements are in place across the council. Training has been delivered to Gold/Silver level officers in 2025.</p> <p>An Information Directory has been set up to ensure responsible individuals can provide an effective/timely response.</p> <p>Training exercises are planned in 2025/26 with partner agencies to test and review the adequacy of arrangements.</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 12</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 9</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
R8	<p>Risks within the West Mercia community area including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrorism • Cyber and fraud • Serious and organised crime (such as people trafficking) • Accidents and system failures (such as power failure or an interruption to water supplies) • Natural and environmental hazards (such as flooding or heatwaves) • Human and animal disease (such as flu pandemics or foot & mouth) • Societal risks (such as riots) <p>Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team/Cabinet Members</p>	<p>Legal & Compliance Governance Data & Technology Security Reputational</p>	<p>Cautious</p> <p>The council has a cautious appetite level towards these risk categories with robust processes in place to ensure the impact on service delivery is minimised.</p>	<p>The council is a member of West Mercia Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The member organisations meet regularly to assess the risks of accidents and emergencies and put in place plans to prevent or reduce risks. The LRF has close link to government departments to share information on local risks. Members undertake training and exercises together to prepare for emergencies.</p> <p>The aim of the West Mercia LRF is to ensure there is an appropriate level of preparedness to enable an effective multi-agency response to emergency incidents in the West Mercia area and to get partners working together to ensure that preparations and plans are in place for emergencies.</p> <p>The LRF Community Risk Register is maintained and published by West Mercia LRF. This register aims to localise some of the items included in the National Risk Register.</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 12</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 9</p>
R9	<p>Risk of financial failure of major supplier resulting in disruption to the delivery of statutory services or major projects.</p> <p>Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team/Cabinet Members</p>	<p>Strategic Delivery - Council Plan Priority: PEOPLE, PLACE, GROWTH</p> <p>(Exception 1: Safety and wellbeing of residents)</p>	<p>Exception 1: Averse</p> <p>Limited appetite to risk. The council is responsible for providing services to those who need it most, including vulnerable adults and children and operates rigorous safeguarding measure to ensure the health and safety of residents. The council will continually seek to avoid activities that present a threat to the safety of the public and will do everything possible to prevent the loss of life.</p>	<p>Procurement activity across the council includes financial assessments, credit checks and related due diligence to monitor supplier financial health and quality of service provision. These arrangements are currently under review and will be strengthened to include wider market intelligence to mitigate the risk of potential business failure by a company bidding to contract with the council for goods/services.</p> <p>Proactive relationships and effective collaboration with key suppliers encourage information sharing and joint risk planning to identify potential risks in a timely manner to enable prompt recovery action.</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 4 (Major)</p> <p>Inherent Risk Score = 12</p>	<p>Likelihood: 3 (Possible)</p> <p>Impact: 3 (Moderate)</p> <p>Residual Risk Score = 9</p>

Ref	Corporate Risk	Risk Category	Risk Appetite	Control Measures/Mitigating Actions	Inherent Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
				Contractual safeguards for major contracts and suppliers including performance metrics, delivery timelines, penalties for delays and terminations arrangements are in place to protect the council's financial and legal interests in the event of business failure.		



Title of report: Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Strategy

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 25 September 2025
Cabinet member:	Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing;
Report by:	Corporate Director Community Wellbeing
Report author:	Public Health Lead - Mental Health and Public Health Principal

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve a Suicide Prevention Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 - 2029. The strategy has been developed in collaboration with local partners and highlights our commitment to reduce the number of local lives lost to suicide. The strategy takes a whole-county, all-age approach. It is intended that partner organisations will each take forward actions and work collaboratively to reduce the number of suicides in Herefordshire.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Lindsay MacHardy, Kristan Pritchard, Tel: 01432 260554, Tel: 01432383144, email:
Lindsay.MacHardy@herefordshire.gov.uk, Kristan.Pritchard@herefordshire.gov.uk

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025-2029 at appendix 1 be approved.**

Alternative options

1. Not to approve the Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Strategy. This option is not recommended. The purpose of the strategy and proposed action plan are to reduce the number of preventable deaths by suicide which will benefit the residents of Herefordshire.

Key considerations

2. The government's Suicide Prevention Strategy for England:2023 to 2028, has the overall aim of preventing self-harm and suicide. The national strategy highlights that preventing suicide is everybody's business.
3. The development of a local strategy is a key action for suicide prevention within our Good Mental wellbeing priority area, the wider good mental wellbeing action plan supports our preventative approach. The strategy itself builds upon local intelligence, the national strategy, policy and guidance. It includes a shared vision and seven key commitment areas.
4. Partners will be jointly responsible for the delivery of the strategy. The Suicide Prevention Working Group will lead the development of an action plan; partners will be responsible for delivering their own actions within the plan. Public Health will coordinate and update the plan as required.
5. A local strategy is needed to meet the requirements set out in the national strategy. A range of multi-agency partners have worked to develop the latest suicide prevention strategy for Herefordshire, covering the period 2025 - 2029. The strategy will meet wider policy requirements and will benefit the county's residents by providing a local focus in reducing the number of deaths by suicide, complementing national strategy, policy and guidance. A summary of the relevant data is set out in paragraph 6, below.
6. The local strategy outlines seven commitments. These commitments capture the strategic engagement themes as well as aligning with national priorities. In addition, our guiding principles will support all activity.

Commitment 1 – Making suicide everyone's business

Encourage all partners to play their part in suicide prevention, work with local, national and social media outlets and support a community approach.

Commitment 2 – Strengthen mental health and early intervention support

Increase awareness of local support, training and activities, support the use of wellbeing plans for a personalised approach and create innovative ways of supporting our residents.

Commitment 3 – Improving data and evidence

Provide up to date local data to inform service delivery and use data and evidence to support those at risk.

Commitment 4 – Expanding partnership working

Maintain and build trusted relationships to improve accessibility and delivery of services, create a safer community and make better use of local intelligence.

Commitment 5 – Identify and support priority groups

Identify at risk priority groups and ensure support is available and accessible.

Commitment 6 – Provide effective crisis support

Ensure that the right support is available at the right time and enhance accessibility of crisis support.

Commitment 7 – Offer suicide bereavement information and support

Increase awareness of suicide bereavement services and support, improve understanding of those affected by suicide and ensure accessibility of support for all ages.

7. Education of the local media, role modelling positive messaging and supporting campaigns that promote good mental health requires a joined-up approach by key partners so we will work with and offer training to media and communications partners.
8. In terms of governance arrangements, the Suicide Prevention Working Group reports to the Adult Better Mental Health Partnership Board (ABMHPB), which will advise the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Community Safety Partnership on progress. An action plan will be developed with partners with guidance from the suicide prevention working group.
9. Review of progress made in meeting the commitments of the strategy will be undertaken annually, taking account of key changes in data, trends, national guidance, strategy and policy.
10. Local mental health data is listed within the Understanding Herefordshire website, based on data from the Primary Care Mortality Database and the OHID Public Health Fingertips resource. Since late 2023 we have had access to real-time data through the 'real-time suspected suicide surveillance system' (RTSSS); an early warning system for indications of change in suicides primarily to inform suicide prevention. The available data in summary:
 - The suicide rate for Herefordshire has remained consistent over the last 20 years and is not statistically significantly different from the national and regional rate.
 - The age-standardised mortality rate for suicide in Herefordshire in 2019-21 was 13.2 per 100,000 people, compared to 10.4 for England overall.
 - The majority of suicides are amongst males, accounting for approximately three-quarters of all deaths from suicide in Herefordshire in the last 20 years.
 - From 2019 to 2023, a total of 102 suicides were recorded in Herefordshire, with the highest rates among those aged 25-44. Suicide is a leading cause of death for men under 35, accounting for 1 in 4 deaths.

Community impact

11. Since 2012, councils have been responsible for developing a local partnership suicide strategy and action plan through their work of health and wellbeing boards. The Herefordshire strategy is needed to meet the requirements set out in the national strategy – to prevent self-harm and suicide.
12. The strategy will contribute to the council's delivery plan by supporting people to live safe and healthy lives by reducing their risk of suicide. Suicide has a far-reaching impact on communities, family, friends, workplaces and schools: developing the community response to preventing suicide is identified as a priority area nationally and locally. The role of the community is particularly important for those who are unlikely to be engaged in mainstream provision, for example men. Through Talk Community, the council and its partners are extending and consolidating this community capacity. Examples of support through Talk Community include community hubs, training provision and offering opportunities for group-related activities.
13. The ongoing commitment by each of the partners to deliver the actions identified in the strategy is vital in achieving the vision to 'reduce suicides in Herefordshire and make our county a place where there is hope and community connection. We are committed to ensuring that the right support is available to the right person at the right time'. Key partners from the statutory, community and voluntary sectors have contributed to the development of the strategy and will support the development of the action plan.
14. The strategy will support ongoing work to reduce the stigma around suicide, longer term activity following awareness raising through Baton of Hope and the orange button scheme.

Environmental Impact

15. The development of this strategy and associated action plan will aim to minimise any adverse environmental impact and will actively seek opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance.

Equality duty

16. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
17. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and attached as Appendix 2. The following equality considerations should be considered when making a decision about this activity:
 - a. The implementation of the strategy aims to have a positive impact on residents across Herefordshire by working with local organisations and ensuring accessible support for all.
 - b. The action plan will consider accessibility throughout the development, this will include adapting resources, information, service delivery to reduce and potential negative impacts on equality groups considered in the EIA.

- c. Priority groups will continually be identified based on local intelligence; this may include middle-aged men and people with a history of receiving mental health support.

Resource implications

- 18. There are no direct implications for the council's budget arising from this report or the strategy and implementation of the subsequent action plan.
- 19. Any potential resource requests will be considered at a directorate level in the first instance.

Legal implications

- 20. There are no specific legal implications resulting from the recommendation within this report.

Risk management

- 21. If the actions outlined in the strategy are not committed to and reviewed, there is a risk that people will continue to die as a result of suicide, where these deaths could have been prevented.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Whilst there are no direct resource implications, success in achieving the vision and reducing the number of deaths by suicide will require capacity and focus from key partners and the community.	Annual review of progress towards achieving the key commitments and responding to emerging data to make changes as required.
The strategy may be implemented in full and there may still be deaths by suicide.	Real Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance – continued oversight by the suicide audit group ensuring regular review of data including real-time data, allows for identification of possible clusters/ links and themes to focus our preventative work
The changes in the law relating to the way coroners can reach conclusions around suicide has not led to an increase in recorded verdicts of suicides locally in recent years, but this will be kept as a risk for future review.	Continued oversight by the suicide audit group ensuring regular review of data
Partner capacity and prioritisation – while annual reviews will track delivery, there is an ongoing risk that partners may have limited resources to implement or sustain actions.	Incorporate the strategy within existing multi-agency governance structures to align with other health and wellbeing priorities, thereby embedding delivery into existing workstreams.
Public perception and community confidence – there is a reputational risk if the strategy is not seen to have impact, or if specific incidents draw public criticism.	Clear communication and engagement plans with communities and stakeholders, alongside transparent reporting of progress and outcomes.
Data quality and availability – suicide prevention depends heavily on timely, accurate data, which may be limited or inconsistent.	Continue to increase the number of data-sharing agreements with partners to ensure consistent, high-quality information flows into the suicide audit process
Emerging national policy changes – shifts in health policy, coronial processes, or funding streams may impact local delivery.	Regular horizon scanning by the working group and proactive adjustment of the strategy in response to national developments

22. The strategic risks associated with the Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2029 have been reviewed and are being managed in accordance with the Council’s Risk Management Strategy. The risks and mitigations identified, together with the additional considerations set out above, are proportionate to the scope and aims of the strategy. Oversight will be maintained through directorate-level governance and the established Suicide Audit Group, ensuring risks are effectively monitored, escalated, and addressed in support of the Council’s commitment to reducing the number of lives lost to suicide.

Consultees

23. Consultation took place during 2024:

- 34 organisations as service providers participated in interviews
- 64 members of the public responded to an online survey
- 7 lived experience interviews took place
- Engagement through the Youth board

24. Appendix 1, P.19, details consultation feedback. Qualitative analysis was themed, and all feedback considered in the development of the seven commitments.

25. Consultation undertaken with political groups on 12th September 2025. Political groups were in support of the strategy and supportive of how we continue to use data and surveillance to inform targeted intervention work.

26. Feedback has been provided through the suicide prevention strategy working group and Appendix 1 within the strategy provides an overview of all consultation responses.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Herefordshire Suicide Prevention strategy 2025-2029

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None identified

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

RTSSS – Real time suspected suicide surveillance

EIA – Equality impact assessment

Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025 - 2029



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Foreword

We are pleased to publish our new Suicide Prevention Strategy for Herefordshire. This strategy has been developed in collaboration with local partners and highlights our commitments to reduce the number of local lives lost to suicide.

We believe that through collective efforts from individuals, organisations, and communities, we can effectively support our residents. This strategy and associated action plan takes a whole county, all-age approach, aligning with the priorities of the national suicide prevention strategy. Through our local engagement work, we have identified the need to explore suicide in relation to life transitions and events, as well as the unique challenges faced by a rural county, which will be recognised in our ongoing activity.

The Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Working Group will oversee the strategy's action plan, with key actions being delivered by partners within the group. Activity will be reviewed regularly and where appropriate updated to align with changes in local and national intelligence.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy and to all those who will continue to support suicide prevention work in Herefordshire, helping to make a difference for our residents.



Suicide can affect any one of us. If you are struggling with your mental health, experiencing suicidal thoughts, supporting someone who is, or have been affected by suicide in any way, there are a number of free services available to offer support:

NHS 111

Urgent 24/7 mental health support.

Call 111, option 2

Samaritans

24/7 listening support for whatever you're going through

Call 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org

SHOUT

24/7 crisis support via text, if you're struggling to cope and need immediate help.

Text "HERE" to 85258

Papyrus

Confidential support and advice to anyone under the age of 35 struggling with thoughts of suicide and anyone worried about a young person.

Call 0800 068 4141 or text 88247

Hereford Safe Haven

Open 7 days a week from 5pm to 10pm, for anyone over the age of 18, in crisis or in need of support.

Call 01432 372 407

We Are Farming Minds

24/7 support line and counselling to those involved in the agricultural industry.

Call 0808 802 0070 or text 07786 203 130

For further support and signposting please visit the Talk Community Directory website: Suicide prevention, bereavement & support - Talk Community Directory:

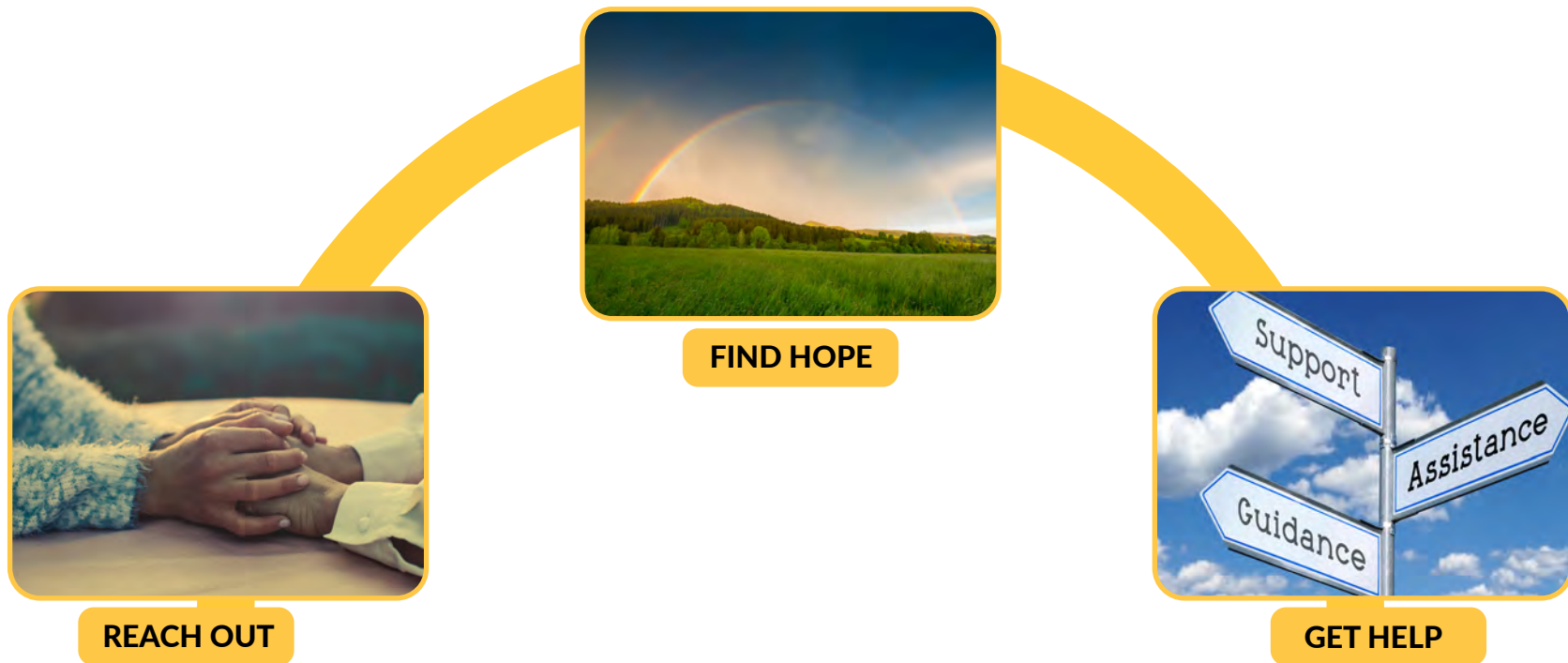
www.talkcommunity.co.uk/keeping-well-staying-healthy/mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing/suicide-prevention-bereavement-support/

If you've seriously harmed yourself or feel you are in crisis, call 999 for an ambulance or go straight to A&E. If you can't do it yourself, please ask someone to help you.



Vision

Our vision is to reduce suicides in Herefordshire and make our county a place where there is hope and community connection. We are committed to ensuring that the right support is available to the right person at the right time.



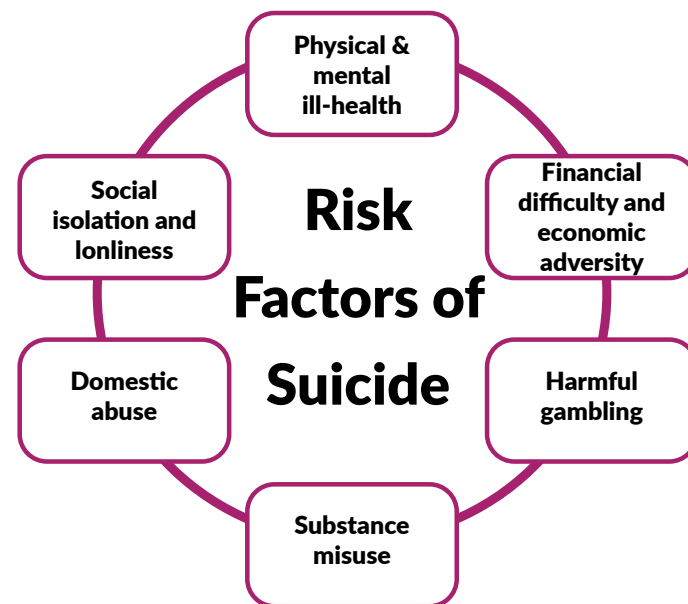
Purpose & Scope

Suicide is a global health priority, with over 720,000 lives lost annually (WHO, 2025)¹. Despite being preventable, stigma often stops individuals from seeking help. Effective prevention requires coordination across multiple sectors.

Our new strategy has been developed as a result of the 10-year Joint Health & Well-being Strategy, which highlighted suicide prevention as a core priority². The action plan outlines initial steps, including raising awareness, enhancing bereavement support, and improving suicide data in Herefordshire.

The national suicide prevention strategy, published in 2023, has helped shape our approach. The strategy aims to reduce suicide rates over five years, improve support for those who self-harm, as well as those bereaved by suicide. The strategy identifies key focus areas essential for achieving its goals, alongside key priority-groups and risk factors².

Local data guides this strategy to address the specific needs of Herefordshire, including data from the Real-Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance System, the Mental Health Needs Assessment, and partnership data.



Department of Health & Social Care (2023) Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross-sector strategy - GOV.UK

Limitations in the current data and intelligence are acknowledged and ways in which to address and fill any gaps will be identified.

In this strategy, suicide is defined as the act of intentionally taking your own life. This strategy does not in capture assisted suicide or euthanasia.

1 WHO, 2025 Suicide

2 Herefordshire Council, 2023 www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/3677/health_and_wellbeing_strategy.pdf

Understanding suicide in Herefordshire

Herefordshire is a rural county with a population of 190,000. It has a strong economy driven by agriculture and manufacturing.

Wages are lower than the national average, whilst housing costs are higher, but residents value the strong sense of community and consider it a good place to live (Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2023)¹.

Suicide data in Herefordshire is informed by national sources, including the Office of National Statistics and the Department of Health & Social Care, which provide insights into confirmed suicides, gender, and age trends. Local data, from the near Real-Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance system (nRTSSS) and the Primary Care Mortality Database, provides further details on methods, locations, and occupations related to suicides.

In 2024, the Real-time Suspected Suicide Surveillance system went live in Herefordshire, the system collects data on suspected suicides before inquest conclusions. This allows for timely bereavement support and targeted prevention efforts and is led by Public Health, West Mercia

Police, and the Coroner's Office. To complement this system we established the Herefordshire Suicide Audit Group, comprised of key stakeholders who meet quarterly to share insights and identify trends from the surveillance system. This group works collectively to develop effective prevention and postvention interventions.

To further contribute to our understanding of suicides in Herefordshire, comprehensive engagement work was undertaken across the county during 2024 to inform the strategy. This work aimed to capture the perspectives of residents, organisations, and individuals with lived experience of suicide. It included discussions with service users, providers, and the local Youth Board through one-on-one conversations, an online survey, and semi-structured interviews. For a detailed breakdown of engagement activities and findings, refer to Appendix (p19).

Monitoring data and gathering intelligence from local sources is essential in informing the work we do to prevent suicides in Herefordshire. It helps us pinpoint underlying factors contributing to suicide risk and enables us to detect early signs of potential suicide clusters and emerging trends.

1 Herefordshire Council, 2023 Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2033



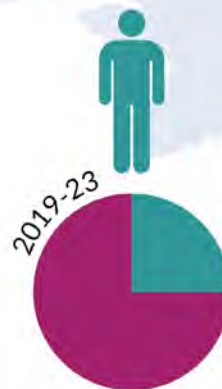
SINCE 2001



Since 2001 $\frac{3}{4}$ of suicides in Herefordshire occur in males (the same as National average).



Between a death occurring and its registration in Herefordshire



Suicide has accounted for 1 in 4 deaths in men under 35 in Herefordshire.

25-44



Highest rates of suicides in Herefordshire are in 25-44 year olds (2019-23)

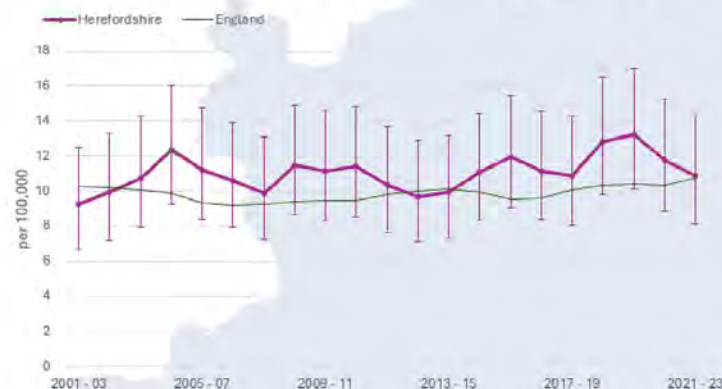
18

Number of Deaths in Herefordshire: on average

/year since 2001



Suicide rate (persons) directly standardised rate per 100,000



Combined data from: Herefordshire Council analysis of Primary Care Mortality Database, NHS Digital/ Office of National Statistics/ Department of Health and Social Care Fingerprints

To compare Herefordshire data with that of England and Wales please visit the following website: [Suicides in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/suicides-in-england-and-wales)

What have we done so far

Since the implementation of the previous Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2019-2023) and action plan, there has been significant progress in the following areas:

Partnership Working

A Herefordshire Suicide Prevention Working Group has been formed to create a collaborative, community-based approach involving those with lived experience, expert organisations and those wishing to support preventative work across the county. Additionally, a Herefordshire Suicide Audit Group has been developed, providing professionals with a platform to review local data and coordinate targeted, strategic actions.

Community Offer

Funded Suicide Awareness Training is now available for Herefordshire residents and workers, along with free Workplace Wellbeing sessions for local businesses to enhance their understanding of mental health and suicide prevention and improve their wellbeing offer. The Orange Button Community Scheme has evolved across Herefordshire and Worcestershire to provide community-based suicide prevention support, with over 850 participants wearing the button. Furthermore, voluntary organisations and community groups continue to provide essential support.

Communication

Enhanced communication around suicide prevention has been achieved through the 'Now We're Talking' campaign, a partnership between Herefordshire & Worcestershire Health and Care Trust, Herefordshire Council, Talk Community, Worcestershire County Council, and Stay Connected. Local media coverage has increased for national campaigns and promotion of local mental wellbeing services, while suicide prevention signage and information has been improved across the county.

Resources

New resources have been introduced, including the Real-Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance system, alongside the appointment of a dedicated Suicide Prevention Officer within the Herefordshire Council Public Health team. The Talk Community website has been updated to offer targeted suicide-related information, support, and signposting. Additionally, NHS Mental Health Services have revised patient risk assessments to provide more personalised support.

Postvention Support

Funded suicide bereavement support is available for individuals aged 4 and up, with options for one-on-one or group sessions available in person or via telephone. There is also access to a number of alternative bereavement support groups available across the county for all ages.



Photo credit: WCC

Guiding principles

Suicide is Preventable: Through awareness, education, and timely intervention, we can save lives.

Across All Ages: Suicide can affect individuals of any age, so prevention and postvention support must be accessible to all.

Collaborative Approach: Effective suicide prevention and support requires a coordinated effort across multiple partners and those with lived experience.

Local Needs Matter: Data and intelligence will shape our approach and reflect the unique cultural, social, and demographic needs of Herefordshire.

Relevance: Our strategy should resonate with all residents and workers in Herefordshire, ensuring it is practical and beneficial for everyone.

Shared Responsibility: Everybody has a role to play in suicide prevention.

"Things that made me happy didn't have an impact anymore, so I knew I was slipping downhill – The Cart Shed caught me before I fell and it's been a life-saving intervention.

At a point of near crisis I felt really supported here, in a safe place. It helped me focus on how to put my thoughts in order. I could have stopped work and studying, but I was able to carry on. Now I have a plan in place and am looking forwards.

It's lifted me up, being around other people and being in nature, we've all helped each other, and there's group benefit."
[Anonymous]

Our commitments

Making suicide everyone's business

Encourage all partners to play their part in suicide prevention

- Promoting open conversations and better use of language to reduce the stigma of suicide
- Support organisations to provide consistent messaging

Work with local, national and social media outlets

- Promote positive stories about mental health and help-seeking behaviours – help empower individuals
- Work with colleagues to monitor media coverage and use Samaritans guidelines for reporting on suicide

Support a community approach

- Increase individual's awareness of looking after their own wellbeing and the risk factors of suicide
- Ensuring advice and support is accessible and that people know where they can go

Strengthen mental health and early intervention support

Increase awareness of local support, training and activities

- Offer suicide prevention and mental health training, targeting those high-risk professions
- Support community activities in rural areas, and areas of need
- Create a local offer to include in education settings to target support at a young age

Support use of wellbeing plans for a personalised approach

- Make wellbeing plans, also known as safety plans, more widely recognised
- Work across multiple agencies to ensure use of wellbeing plans
- Provide support and training for professionals on how to create a wellbeing plan

Create innovative ways of supporting our residents

- Explore different ways in which support can be accessed
- Establish Partnerships to consider external funding opportunities to deliver projects

Improving data and evidence

Provide up to date local data

- Maintain and share data from our Real-time Suspected Suicide Surveillance system to stay informed of local trends and demographic characteristics of those at risk
- Regularly review the latest statistics, data and research to identify emerging trends, effective interventions, and areas for improvement
- Collaborate with our multiagency Suicide Audit Group to facilitate the sharing of data, best practice and research findings for informed decision-making

Inform service delivery

- Provide data-driven insights to inform service commissioning decisions, ensuring that allocated resources are targeted toward high-need areas and effective interventions
- Offer data and evidence to support grant applications, funding proposals, and programme evaluations

Use data and evidence to support those at risk

- Facilitate timely and secure exchange of information across partners to ensure effective support and crisis response
- Share relevant research and evidence with practitioners working with those at risk of suicide

Expanding Partnership working

Maintain and build trusted relationships

- Continue to develop and strengthen the multi-agency suicide prevention networks
- Collectively utilise community assets and programmes of work to help reduce risk

Improve accessibility and delivery of services

- Collaborate with commissioners and service providers
- Collectively understand responsibilities and boundaries of services

Create a safer community

- Work with partners to identify, intervene and respond to high-risk locations and means
- Share insights with relevant partners to create protective environments

Use local intelligence

- Continue to monitor suicide data and intelligence to identify priority groups and any emerging issues
- Work with partners to understand our local priority groups and ensure approaches are tailored to their support needs

Identify and support priority groups

Identify support for priority groups

- Understand what support is already available and identify any gaps
- Ensure that targeted support is effectively promoted and widely publicised

Make support accessible

- Ensure appropriate pathways are in place to access support.
- Consideration should be given to where, when and how support is offered.
- Co-ordinate a countywide prevention campaign aimed at groups identified as higher risk of suicide

National Priority Groups

Children and young people

Middle-aged men

People who have self harmed

People in contact with mental health services

People in contact with the justice system

Austistic people

Pregnant women and new mothers

Our Story: We Are Farming Minds

We Are Farming Minds is a registered charity founded by Sam and Emily Stables, a local farming couple dedicated to breaking the stigma surrounding mental health. We support the farming community of Herefordshire through free counselling, a confidential 24/7 support line, and bespoke mental health awareness training. In the 2022/23 period, we provided 900 counselling sessions and continue to see demand grow.

To reduce isolation that is often felt within farming, we host free social events including 'One Foot in the Grain', a monthly gathering for farmers over 50 to visit different farms across the county, enjoy good food and speak with fellow farmers. As well as 'Woman What Farm' which features varied monthly activities, ranging from paddleboarding to pampering, enabling women in agriculture to connect, recharge, and discover new interests.

Provide effective crisis support

Understand 'crisis'

- Recognise 'crisis' can mean a wide range of situations and levels of need
- Partner with key organisations to provide essential training and resources on suicide prevention and postvention for staff and colleagues

Ensure that the right support is available at the right time

- Provide up to date information on available crisis services, outlining their capabilities and how they can assist individuals in need
- Focus on reducing the time it takes for individuals to access crisis support, ensuring a prompt response to urgent needs

Enhancing accessibility of Crisis Support

- Ensure that crisis support is accessible to all individuals. This includes creating resources and services that cater to diverse populations
- Work across multi-agencies to identify gaps in services and enhance the collective response to crises



Our Story: Herefordshire Safe Haven

Safe Haven at Herefordshire Mind is a no-judgement, active listening service that can help support and signpost adults in Herefordshire who are in mental distress, whatever their situation; our aim is that no-one in Herefordshire should have to face a mental health problem alone. Since opening in March 2020, we've supported almost 1,000 individuals get the help they need during their mental health journey. We are open 365 days a year, 5pm-10pm via telephone (01432 372 407) and can offer face to face support at our HQ on Widemarsh Street by appointment.



Our Story: Bereaved By Suicide Service

Herefordshire Bereaved by Suicide Service offers free and confidential support to individuals aged 4 and over who have experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide. They understand that grief can be a complex journey, and it doesn't matter when the loss occurred, the service is open to anyone who has been affected, including family members, friends, colleagues, and more.

The service provides personalised support tailored to the unique needs of each individual. They provide a flexible approach, offering home visits to create a comfortable and familiar environment for clients. However, recognising that this may not suit everyone, they can also arrange alternative meeting locations or options to best accommodate individual preferences.

Offer of suicide bereavement information and support

Increase awareness of suicide bereavement services and support

- Continue to share information to the community on the services and support available
- Ensure services are providing effective and compassionate support and signposting for those bereaved by suicide

Ensure accessibility of support for all-ages

- Provide support to educational settings with the relevant tools and resources
- Collaborate with employers to develop initiatives that provide support to employees affected by suicide

Improve support and understanding to those affected by suicide

- Explore and develop support options for individuals who have been impacted by suicide, but who may not have directly lost someone to suicide.
- Consider training options for professionals in understanding the unique challenges faced by those affected by suicide.

Our partners

Suicide is everyone's business, and we are committed to working with partners, including those listed below, to strengthen prevention efforts and reduce suicide rates in Herefordshire:

Herefordshire Health & Care Trust	Integrated Care Board	Wye Valley Trust
West Mercia Police	Herefordshire & Worcestershire Fire and Rescue	Adult and Children's Social Care
Coroner's	Officers of Health and Disparities	HM Prison and Probation Service
Transport for Wales	National Highways	Herefordshire Safeguarding Partnership
British Transport Police	Worcestershire County Council	Turning Point
Herefordshire Primary Care Networks	Education Settings	Our Community

We also recognise that prevention efforts begin before the suicide prevention strategy, and we will work alongside other strategies that address key risk factors and priority groups, including but not limited to:

- Herefordshire Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Herefordshire Carers Strategy
- Herefordshire Community Safety Strategy
- Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Herefordshire Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Joint All Age Autism Strategy.

Call to action

Let's change the conversation around suicide.

In 1961, suicide was de-criminalised, but incorrect and stigmatising language persists. Let's choose words that heal and uplift.

Say this...

"Died by suicide" or "taken their own life"

"Suicide attempt" or 'non-fatal attempt'

"Increased rates" or "higher rates"

"[Name] is having suicidal thoughts"

Instead of this...

"Committed suicide,"
"successful suicide" or "completed suicide"

"Failed suicide" or
"unsuccessful suicide"

"Suicide epidemic"

"[Name] is suicidal"

Our Story: Baton of Hope

In Autumn 2025, Herefordshire will take part in the UK's biggest suicide prevention initiative, Baton of Hope, by hosting a leg of their second UK tour.



This event provides an opportunity to 'stand up to suicide', advocate for change, and support those affected by suicide. Education will be at the forefront of the event, aiming to empower supporters with the knowledge and tools to better understand suicide, challenge stigmas, and drive meaningful conversations.

Suicide is a critical issue for rural counties like Herefordshire and the Baton of Hope campaign provides a unique opportunity to highlight this issue, particularly amongst agricultural and rurally-isolated communities, to create a lasting legacy of support. This will be a significant step in changing the conversation about suicide in Herefordshire.

Boost your skills and knowledge by completing the Zero Suicide Alliance's free online courses:

www.zerosuicidealliance.com/suicide-awareness-training-courses



Appendices

Suicide Prevention Strategy – Engagement Analysis

Date: 31/12/2024 Author:

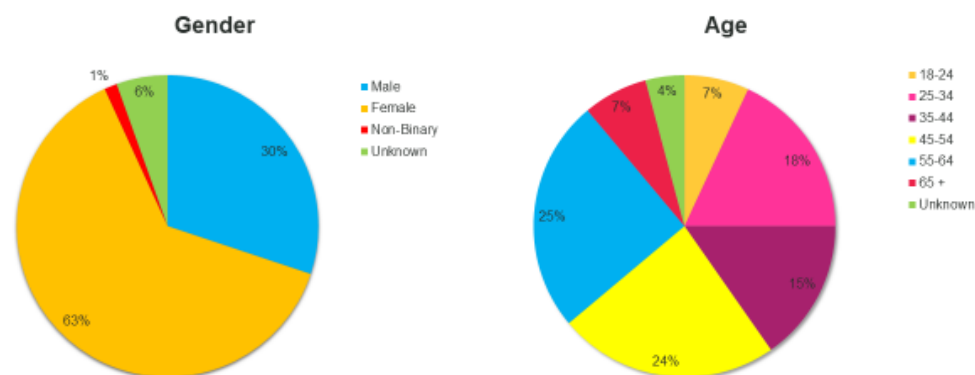
Dr Ryan Davies – Public Health Registrar.

Purpose. Outline to local stakeholders the key issues raised from the thematic analysis of public engagement and actions to guide future strategy, on the topic of suicide prevention.

Background. The engagement was completed on 8th Nov 2024 and comprised 3 key components:

- **Service Providers.** Engaged 34 organisations/services/partnerships in Herefordshire
- **Service Users.** Comprised a further 2 components:
 - Received responses from 64 participants to the public survey
 - 7 lived-experience interviews, providing greater detail to survey responses
- **Youth Board** – similar to public survey with extra 'solution focused' questions

- Service provider data was largely representative covering most available organisations. However, user surveys and interviews were limited by respondent demographics (fig 1.).



Key points – Qualitative Analysis

The survey questions included reasons for suicidal ideation and reaching crisis, awareness of services (see quantitative below) and experiences of help seeking and use. The youth board survey also included questions on anti-stigma and raising awareness initiatives. The service provider questions related to case-mix, reasons for use, degree of suicidal ideation encountered and pathways used. Finally – what is currently working and not working. These last 2 questions can also be used to analyse user responses to service experiences. Therefore, most actionable analysis may be distilled as follows:

Working	
Service Users	Non-medical / less formalised services Various success stories through: Voluntary sector Community groups Intrinsic support networks Human connections
Service Providers	Ways of working Partnership working and collaboration is frequently mentioned (especially third sector) Training (when available) & Triaging Teams who support each other Quick allocations to key workers Good support (variable by organisation) Innovative ways of working Peer led support (variable by organisation) Improved processes
Not working	
Service Users	Formalised medical services: 'Long Waiting lists', 'Impersonal', 'Overburdened', 'Labelled', 'No space', Lack of options, Crisis point – timing and availability
Service Providers	Wait times & capacity formal service > shift to voluntary All stepping up beyond initial scope – need more training and tangible guidance, risk management, oversight and support and welfare for staff Inappropriate pathways or 'nowhere to go' for patients Key marginalised groups missed – neurodivergent Lack of early intervention/ preventative services Lack of inpatient services (limited escalation measures) Lack of joint working (particularly emergency services with dedicated MH/ medical services) Need for more training at every level

Crisis Factors: Trauma, Relationships, Work/ Educational stress/ Loss, Health, Other.

Youth Survey: Greater openness on MH, hearing lived experiences, teaching in schools.

Key points – Quantitative Analysis

This comprised awareness of services and likelihood of use on a rating scale.

- 91% of people completing the survey had been affected by suicide.
- For each risk factor of suicide, outlined in the National Strategy, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants found these to be contributory. While 27% of participants also listed other factors.
- Samaritans (98%) and Herefordshire Mind (94%) were the most known services, while Border Rural Chaplaincy (10%) and Victim Support (41%) were the least known.
- While a lot of people had heard of a number of services, many had not used them.
- Primary care still remains the majority first choice for help seeking (78%).

Overall, this analysis highlights several clear themes that provide much needed context and can be built upon to guide the subsequent prevention strategy and action plans.

Distilled themes and potential actions to guide strategy

Theme	Potential Action	Impact
Loss of Human Connection	Network Building Utilise existing places & spaces	Enable Social Capital Bonding Bridging & Linking Increase chance of early intervention
Personalisation	Services: something for everyone Delivery: more humanised	Increased preferred service/ options and therefore use by those in need Early intervention
Empowerment	Self-help to improve self-efficacy	Less labelling, more enabling
Increased awareness	2 Strands – Those in need and those in deed. Build trust	Know where to go and know what to say and do. Unburden primary care as first option
Timeliness – Particularly crisis	Availability and escalation prioritised across services	Reduced potential harm
Staff training and support	Risk management oversight Upskill staff – maximise training and awareness opportunities	Improved service delivery Improved staff wellbeing Chances for collaborative working
Joined up working	Build upon previous 'Better Together' Template	Help with 'appropriate pathways' Efficiency of cross referral, training and supportive opportunities.



Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form

1. Service Area/Directorate

Name of Head of Service for activity being assessed:

Directorate: Community wellbeing

Name of lead person for this activity: Lindsay MacHardy/Kristan Pritchard

Individual(s) completing this assessment: Kristan Pritchard/Lindsay MacHardy

Date assessment completed: 31.07.25

2. What is being assessed

Activity being assessed (eg. policy, procedure, budget, service redesign, strategy etc.)

Suicide Prevention strategy 2025-2029

What is the aim, purpose, or intended outcome of this activity?

A Herefordshire suicide prevention strategy has been developed in collaboration with local partners, this is an all-age, countywide strategy.

The strategy highlights our collaborative commitments to suicide prevention in Herefordshire; the aim is to meet our vision –

Our vision is to reduce suicides in Herefordshire and make our county a place where there is hope and community connection. We are committed to ensuring that the right support is available to the right person at the right time.

Who will be affected by the development and implementation of this activity?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Service users | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visitors to the county |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communities | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Carers |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Children | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Patients |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All staff | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All part-time staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff at a particular location | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

Is this:

- ☒ Review of an existing activity/policy
- ☐ New activity/policy
- ☐ Planning to withdraw or reduce a service, activity or presence?

3. Background information and findings

What information and evidence have you reviewed to help inform this assessment? (name your sources, eg. demographic information, usage data, Census data, feedback, complaints, audits, research)

[Suicide](#) in England

Suicide is a global health priority, with over 720,000 lives lost annually. Every suicide is a tragedy that affects families, communities and entire countries and has long-lasting effects on the people left behind. Suicide is preventable, stigma often stops individuals from seeking help.

Suicide does not just occur in high-income countries but is a global phenomenon in all regions of the world. In fact, close to three quarters (73%) of global suicides occurred in low- and middle-income countries in 2021.

Effective prevention requires coordination across multiple sectors. With timely, evidence-based and often low-cost interventions, suicides can be prevented.

The link between suicide and mental disorders (in particular, depression and alcohol use disorders) and a previous suicide attempt is well established in high-income countries. However, many suicides happen impulsively in moments of crisis with a breakdown in the ability to deal with life stresses, such as financial problems, relationship disputes, or chronic pain and illness.

In addition, experiencing conflict, disaster, violence, abuse or loss and a sense of isolation are strongly associated with suicidal behaviour. Nationally suicide rates are also high among certain population groups

[Suicide - Understanding Herefordshire](#)

In September 2022, the Office for National Statistics published their [latest analysis of deaths from suicide](#) in England and Wales, registered in 2021. Herefordshire saw 16 deaths by suicide registered in 2021, slightly fewer than the 27 registered in 2020 and 21 in 2019, and the same number as in 2017 and 2018. The overall suicide rate for Herefordshire has been slightly higher than the national and regional rates, but is not statistically different to England's or the West Midlands'. The rate has shown no significant trend over the last 20 years.

Similarly to national data, suicide rates in Herefordshire are much higher amongst males than females. Around three-quarters of suicides in Herefordshire are males. The highest rates of suicides in Herefordshire are in 45-64 year olds (2018-2022). The average number of deaths per year since 2001 is 18.

[Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2033](#)

Herefordshire's joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy has identified good mental wellbeing across the life course as a priority area. Our local suicide prevention work is included within this action plan. A core Priority outcome of the Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2033 being to reduce the suicide rate.

[Suicide prevention strategy 2019-2023](#)

Statistical data referred to throughout this strategy has been obtained from the Primary Care Mortality Database and the Public Health Fingertips tool. The deaths recorded statistically for Herefordshire relate to those who had been registered with a Herefordshire GP. This strategy seeks to prevent suicides of adults and children in the county by identifying where the key areas for development are and putting these in place through a partnership approach.

The development of the latest strategy has included -

Engagement with local organisations, partners, the public and those with lived experience took place during the summer 2024. This included interviews, surveys and online engagement.

Quantitative analysis of local data was also reviewed, this included census data, mortality data, real-time surveillance data.

National information and intelligence were considered

Summary of engagement or consultation undertaken (eg. who you've engaged with, and how, or why do you believe this is not required)

Service providers engagement consisted of 34 organisations

Service users – 64 responses to public survey

7 lived experience interviews

Youth board engagement

Summary of relevant findings (it is possible that you will have gaps in your evidence. You must decide whether you need to fill in the gaps now, and if it is feasible to do so. It might be that collecting robust information forms part of your action plan below)

The commitments identified to take forward from the strategy are –

- Making suicide everyone's business
- Strengthen mental health and early intervention support
- Improving data and evidence
- Expanding partnership working
- Identify and support priority groups
- Provide effective crisis support
- Offer of suicide bereavement information and support
-

4. The Public Sector Equality Duty

Will this activity have a positive, neutral or negative impact on our duty to:

Equality Duty	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advance equality of opportunity between different groups?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foster good relations between different groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explain your rationale here, and include any ways in which you could strengthen the capacity of this activity to promote equality (remember to add anything relevant into your action planning below)

We would consider our local priority groups Targeted activity for our priority groups e.g. middle-aged men will enhance equality amongst this group
Consider how we engage, through different media to reach our priority groups and get the right information to them

5. The impact of this activity

Consider the potential impact of this activity on each of the equality groups outlined below and explain your rationale. Please note it is possible for the potential impact to be both positive and negative within the same equality group. Remember to consider the impact on staff and service users (current and potential) and partner organisations. It may be useful to include data within these sections if you know the diversity make-up of the people likely to be affected.

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
Age (include safeguarding, consent and child welfare)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This is an all-age strategy, by monitoring our local intel we will target specific high-risk groups which may be age-related
Disability (consider attitudinal, physical, financial and social barriers, neuro-diversity, learning disability, physical and sensory impairment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any disability groups will be included in training delivery and aspects of the strategy
Gender Reassignment (include gender identity, and consider privacy of data and harassment)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nationally identified as a high risk group, if identified as a local need targeted work may be delivered
Marriage & Civil Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This activity is assessed as neutral towards this group
Pregnancy & Maternity (consider working arrangements, part-time working, infant caring responsibilities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nationally a high-risk group and will be considered locally as a priority if intelligence supports this

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
Race (including Travelling Communities and people of other nationalities)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This activity is assessed as neutral towards this group
Religion & Belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This activity is assessed as neutral towards this group
Sex (consider issues of safety, sexual violence, part-time work, and single-sex provision – especially in light of the legal definition of “sex”)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This activity is assessed as neutral towards this group
Sexual Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This activity is assessed as neutral towards this group
Others: carers, care leavers, homeless, social/ economic deprivation (consider shift-patterns, caring responsibilities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Groups identified through national strategy will be considered as a local priority
Health Inequalities (any preventable, unfair & unjust differences in health status between groups, populations or individuals that arise from unequal distribution of social, environmental & economic conditions)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Opportunity to promote good wellbeing and support good mental health, support and services

Where a negative impact on any of the equality groups is realised after the implementation of the activity, the activity lead will seek to minimise the impact and carry out a full review of this EIA.

6. Action planning

What actions will you take as a result of this impact assessment? (you will need to include actions to mitigate any potential negative impacts)

Potential negative impact	What action will be taken	Who will lead	Timeframe
Inclusivity	Ensure communications, materials are accessible for all		

7. Monitoring and review

How will you monitor these actions?

Monitoring will take place through the Suicide prevention working group

When will you review this EIA?

Annually

8. Equality Statement

- All public bodies have a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to give due regard to how they can improve society and promote equality in every aspect of their day-to-day business. This

means that they must consider, and keep reviewing, how they are promoting equality in decision-making, policies, services, procurement, staff recruitment and management.

- Herefordshire Council will challenge discrimination, promote equality, respect human rights, and design and implement services, policies and measures that meet the diverse needs of our population, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others.

Signature of person completing EIA

Kristan Pritchard

Date signed

3.09.2025

9. Make this EIA available (and delete this section)

- Attach your EIA as an appendix to any decision reports so that decision-makers have all the equality data they need in order to make robust and fair decisions.
- Upload your EIA to the shared Teams site: [Equality Impact Assessment | General | Microsoft Teams](#)
- Staff, trade unions, service users or members of the public may want to see this EIA, so it must be published on our website along with the decision report.



Title of report: Corporate Peer Challenge

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 25 September 2025
Cabinet member:	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
Report by:	Corporate Director Community Wellbeing
Report author:	Corporate Director Community Wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To receive the report on the outcome of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, held 23 - 26 June 2025, and to approve the council's action plan in response to the recommendations for publication.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet receives the report and recommendations arising from the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge held 23 - 26 June 2025; and**
- b) Cabinet approves the council's action plan in response to the recommendations for publication.**

Alternative options

1. The council could choose not to develop and publish an action plan in response to the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge. However, whilst not mandatory, it is a clear expectation of the Peer Challenge process that the action plan is in the public domain and this option has, therefore, been rejected.
2. The council could choose not to accept the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge. This option has been rejected on the basis that the recommendations were shared informally at the end of the site visit and accepted.

Key considerations

3. The Corporate Peer Challenge forms part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government and is delivered by the sector for the sector. Facilitated by the Local Government Association, it involves a team of senior local government councillors and officers undertaking a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information. The Peer Challenge team spent four days at Herefordshire Council in June 2025, gathering information and views from more than 35 meetings, in addition to reviewing a range of information. In total, the team spoke to around 100 people, including a range of council employees, elected members and external stakeholders. The team comprised of:
 - i. Cllr Philip Broadhead, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (Con)
 - ii. Richard Flinton, Chief Executive at North Yorkshire Council
 - iii. Cllr Deborah Harries, Birmingham City Council (Lib Dem)
 - iv. Dean Langton, Chief Finance Officer, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
 - v. Steve Evans, Head of Corporate Affairs, Durham Council
 - vi. Maria Rotaru, Impact Graduate Greenwich Council (shadowing the review)
 - vii. Eamon Lally, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA.
4. All Corporate Peer Challenges consider five core components, which are:
 - i. Local priorities and outcomes
 - ii. Organisational and place leadership
 - iii. Governance and culture
 - iv. Financial planning and management
 - v. Capacity for improvement

In addition, the peer team considered the council's approach to risk, use of data and insight and transformation.

5. The Corporate Peer Challenge report is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. The overall message is that: *"Herefordshire is a good council that is striving hard to improve further. It benefits from a strong sense of place, a maturing political culture, and a growing confidence in its leadership. The council has developed a respected identity among partners and is seen as a constructive and increasingly strategic player in the region. There is a clear recognition of the challenges ahead, particularly in relation to transformation, capacity, and financial sustainability, and the council is approaching these with determination and a willingness to learn."*

The peer team found a council that is self-aware, committed to improvement, and increasingly outward facing. There is a shared understanding of the importance of transformation, and while the journey is still at an early stage, the council is laying the

groundwork for long-term change. The latest Ofsted monitoring visit confirms that children's services are improving at pace, and performance in most other service areas is broadly in line with statistical neighbours. The council's finances are currently in a good base position. There is a need to refresh the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) and undertake more robust scenario planning to prepare for future uncertainties."

6. The Corporate Peer Challenge recognised that Herefordshire is a rural county with demographic challenges, such as an ageing population and inequalities in service access, housing, and education. The Council Plan, with its focus on people, place, growth, and transformation, was noted as being well understood and shaped through engagement with residents and partners.
7. The peer team reflected that the council's leadership - both political and managerial - is increasingly confident and respected. There is a level of political maturity, with members working constructively across party lines and a strong emphasis on consensus-building. The chief executive and leader are seen as visible and accessible, and their leadership has contributed to a positive shift in organisational culture. Staff and partners spoke of a more open, listening council that is focused on delivery and collaboration.
8. Partnership working was noted as a strength with the council engaged in a range of strategic partnerships. Partners were positive about the council's leadership and the peer team cited the phosphate credit scheme as an example of innovative, place-based leadership. Partnerships with the voluntary and community sector are positive, with a desire on the part of the sector for deeper collaboration and involvement in strategic commissioning.
9. Governance is generally strong with clear structures and ongoing improvements in risk management. Audit and scrutiny have been strengthened. However, while performance management is embedded across the council, there is a need for better data integration and corporate-level insights to drive transformation. Transformation underpins the council's future ambitions, but internal capacity needs strengthening to deliver change at scale, especially in digital transformation.
10. The council's financial position is stable with a positive outturn in 2024-2025 and a healthy level of reserves. There is a recognition that future years' financial settlements may be challenging, and the council is reviewing the Medium Term Financial Strategy alongside scenario planning to test different assumptions. The team noted an ambitious capital programme with the need to keep management and capacity to deliver the programme under review.
11. The team noted that the council has traditionally operated a thin-client model with many services outsourced but that this is being rebalanced with investment in in-house capacity to support change and ensure more effective oversight.
12. The conclusion of the peer challenge was that: *"Herefordshire Council is a good council with a strong foundation and a clear ambition to improve. It has made significant progress in key areas, particularly children's services, and is increasingly confident in its leadership and identity. The council is self-aware and understands the scale of the transformation required. With continued focus on capacity, data, and financial planning, it is well-placed to deliver on its ambitions and improve outcomes for its communities."*
13. The team identified five key recommendations which form the basis of the council's action plan, attached at Appendix 2. They are:

Recommendation 1: Transformation

Now need to focus on corporate transformation and provide the resources needed to deliver.

Recommendation 2: Data and Insights

Use of data must be improved so that insights can flow to support service improvement and framing the scope of the transformation programme. There are lots of examples where this is taking place elsewhere and the council should draw on the experience of others to support this development.

Recommendation 3: Medium Term Financial Planning

Carry out planned refresh of Medium Term Financial Strategy and provide some scenario planning for future years.

Recommendation 4: Internal Capacity

Strengthen and stabilise the internal capacity to overcome challenges in the thin-client model of delivery.

Recommendation 5: Working with partners to deliver

Partners are very supportive, and the council can build on this to develop strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and others to help deliver services.

14. It is proposed that progress against the action plan is monitored through the quarterly performance reports to Cabinet.
15. In addition, the peer review team undertakes a one-day follow up progress review visit. Not all of the team will visit but the purpose is to review progress against the action plan and a follow up letter is then issued by the team. The progress review visit is provisionally agreed for week commencing 23 March 2026.

Community impact

16. There is no direct community impact as a result of the Corporate Peer Challenge Report. However, the action to develop more strategic engagement with the voluntary and community sector responds to the vision of Delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do and will have a positive long term impact on the sector in terms of genuine co-production and involvement in strategic commissioning.

Environmental Impact

17. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
18. The decision to receive the corporate peer challenge report and publish an action plan to respond to the recommendations will have no environmental impacts.

Equality duty

19. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
20. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this decision and it has been found to have no impact for equality.

Resource implications

21. There are no resource implications arising from the decision to receive the Corporate Peer Challenge report and publish the action plan in response to the recommendations. Any resource implications associated with individual activities within the action plan will be subject to the normal governance processes.

Legal implications

22. There are no direct legal implications arising from this recommendation.

Risk management

23. The risk of not responding to, and progressing, the recommendations made by the peer challenge team is that opportunities for improvement are not taken which may have an adverse effect on the council's longer term strategic plans.

Consultees

24. Consultation on the action plan has been undertaken with the Corporate Leadership Team and the wider Leadership Group to shape the responses to the recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge: Herefordshire Council, 23 – 26 June 2024

Appendix 2 – Herefordshire Council Corporate Peer Challenge action plan, September 2025

Background papers

None identified.

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Herefordshire Council

23 June -26 June 2025

Feedback report



Corporate Peer Challenge

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Chief Executive: Joanna Killian

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson

1. Introduction

Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a highly valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officers undertaking a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information and then spending four days at Herefordshire Council to provide robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support.

CPC forms a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. It is underpinned by the principles of Sector-led Improvement (SLI) put in place by councils and the Local Government Association (LGA) to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. These state that local authorities are: Responsible for their own performance, Accountable locally not nationally and have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector.

CPC assists councils in meeting part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years.

Peers remain at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

This report outlines the key findings of the peer team and the recommendations that the council are required to action.

2. Executive summary

Herefordshire is a good council that is striving hard to improve further. It benefits from a strong sense of place, a maturing political culture, and a growing confidence in its leadership. The council has developed a respected identity among partners and is seen as a constructive and increasingly strategic player in the region. There is a clear recognition of the challenges ahead, particularly in relation to transformation, capacity, and financial sustainability, and the council is approaching these with determination and a willingness to learn.

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The peer team found a council that is self-aware, committed to improvement, and increasingly outward facing. There is a shared understanding of the importance of transformation, and while the journey is still at an early stage, the council is laying the groundwork for long-term change. The latest Ofsted monitoring visit confirms that children's services are improving at pace, and performance in most other service areas is broadly in line with statistical neighbours. The council's finances are currently in a good base position, .There is a need to refresh the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) and undertake more robust scenario planning to prepare for future uncertainties.

Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county with a dispersed population and significant demographic challenges, including an ageing population and low natural population growth. Despite good overall health and employment rates, the county faces deep-rooted inequalities, particularly in access to services, housing affordability, and educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

The council's strategic priorities - people, place, growth, and transformation -are well understood and have been shaped through engagement with residents and partners. The council is focused on unlocking housing and employment land, with the Hereford Western Bypass a central element of its growth strategy. The bypass is a totemic issue locally and has consumed significant political capital. The council's commitment to this project is clear, but its success is heavily dependent on future government funding.

Performance management is embedded across the organisation, with regular reporting at both corporate and directorate levels. The council has invested in tools such as PowerBI and InPhase to support this work. However, the peer team found that the council lacks sufficient corporate capacity and technical architecture to

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analyse data and generate insights. While directorates understand their own performance, there is limited evidence of a joined-up, insight-driven approach at the corporate level. Improving the use of data and insight will be critical to supporting transformation and service improvement.

Children's services have been a key area of focus following an inadequate Ofsted rating in 2022. The council has responded with determination, and recent monitoring visits have noted significant progress. The July 2025 visit reported that the quality of practice for children in care had improved at pace. This improvement reflects the commitment of senior leaders and staff across the council and the impact of recent appointments. The trajectory is positive, and the council is well-placed for a future full inspection.

The council's leadership - both political and managerial - is increasingly confident and respected. There is a level of political maturity, with members working constructively across party lines. The council is led by a Conservative administration without overall control, and there is a strong emphasis on consensus-building. An innovative approach to political group consultation has helped to ensure that decisions reflect a broad political perspective.

The chief executive and leader are seen as visible and accessible, and their leadership has contributed to a positive shift in organisational culture. Staff and partners spoke of a more open, listening council that is focused on delivery and collaboration.

Herefordshire is not currently part of a devolution deal but is actively engaging in regional discussions. The council is playing a constructive role in shaping the emerging landscape, despite the complexities of working with neighbouring two-tier

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areas. The devolution agenda is particularly important given the council's ambitions around transport and housing infrastructure, and its need for future capital funding from central government.

Partnership working is a strength. The council is engaged in a range of strategic partnerships, including the Marches Forward Partnership and the Integrated Care System. Partners spoke positively about the council's leadership and its growing ability to articulate a clear vision. The phosphate credit scheme, which enables housing development while protecting the River Lugg, is an example of innovative, place-based leadership.

Governance is generally strong, with clear structures and a commitment to continuous improvement. The council has recently refreshed its risk management strategy, drawing on good practice frameworks. Risks are identified and evaluated in the context of the council's appetite for risk and the risk management framework. The strategy appropriately reflects a low appetite for risk in relation to vulnerable people, but a higher tolerance for innovation. The corporate risk register is focused on key areas such as children's services, financial sustainability, and workforce. The council will need to embed the recently approved risk management strategy and keep it live in the organisation.

The audit and governance committee plays an important role, and the council has taken steps to strengthen its effectiveness, including the appointment of an independent expert. However, there is scope to make the committee more challenging and proactive in pursuing good governance outcomes.

The council's culture has improved significantly in recent years. Staff survey results show increased engagement and a stronger sense of organisational values. Staff

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spoke positively about internal communications and the visibility of senior leaders. The council's workforce strategy supports the development of staff networks and flexible working practices, and there is a strong commitment to equalities, both as an employer and in service delivery.

Scrutiny arrangements are in place, and a recent review has made recommendations to strengthen the function. However, some scrutiny members expressed concern about the impact of their work on decision-making. There is an opportunity to improve engagement with scrutiny members and clarify how their recommendations are considered in a timely manner.

Herefordshire's financial position is currently stable, with a positive outturn in 2024/25 and a healthy level of reserves. The finance team is well-regarded and has won national recognition for excellence in governance, reporting and assurance. The council has taken steps to ensure adequate funding to deliver services in areas of high demand and costs, such as children's and adults' services, and this has contributed to a more sustainable base position.

However, the council has faced challenges in delivering savings, particularly from transformation programmes. In 2024/25, only 56 percent of planned savings were achieved, with shortfalls in corporate transformation and voluntary redundancy schemes. The council has responded with a focused review of the original proposals, developing revised savings plans to deliver savings recurrently in 2025-2026, and it will need to ensure that savings plans are robust and deliverable.

The MTFS assumes the most likely scenario, informed by best information available at the time of preparation, based on modelling undertaken in January 2025. Given the uncertainty in future funding, the council is reviewing the MTFS and is

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undertaking scenario planning to test different assumptions. This will help to ensure that the council is prepared for a range of financial outcomes.

The capital programme is ambitious, with significant investment planned in highways, waste infrastructure, and employment land. However, recent years have seen substantial underspends, suggesting potential issues with programming of projects and delivery capacity. The council has reviewed each of its capital projects and has an understanding of the reasons for the underspend in each case. The council should consider whether additional resources are needed to manage the capital programme effectively.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) high needs deficit is a significant financial risk, with a projected cumulative deficit of £40.2 million by March 2026. The council is taking steps to mitigate this, including investment in local provision and the development of a new special free school, and monitored via a robust DSG deficit management plan. However capital investment will take some time to turn the dial on this issue.

Transformation is central to the council's ambitions for service improvement and financial sustainability. The council has developed a transformation strategy and is working with Society for Innovation Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM) to assess its current position and identify resource gaps. Digital transformation is a key element, but the council currently lacks the internal capacity to deliver at scale.

The transformation programme has delivered some early savings in children's and adults' services, but corporate transformation has been slower to progress. The council recognises that it needs a more stable and empowered leadership for transformation, along with a clear delivery plan that sets out the required investment

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and expected savings.

The voluntary sector is supportive of the council and wants to play a more strategic role. There is a desire for genuine co-production and better commissioning arrangements. The council's talk community model provides a strong foundation for this, and further work is needed to build capacity and trust.

The council has traditionally operated a thin-client model, with many services outsourced. While this has delivered benefits, it also presents challenges for transformation and service integration. Strengthening in-house capacity will be important to support change and ensure effective oversight of commissioned services.

Herefordshire Council is a good council with a strong foundation and a clear ambition to improve. It has made significant progress in key areas, particularly children's services, and is increasingly confident in its leadership and identity. The council is self-aware and understands the scale of the transformation required. With continued focus on capacity, data, and financial planning, it is well-placed to deliver on its ambitions and improve outcomes for its communities.

Recommendations

There are several observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

2.1 Recommendation 1: Transformation

Now need to focus on corporate transformation and provide the resources needed to deliver.

2.2 Recommendation 2: Data and Insights

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Use of data must be improved so that insights can flow to support service improvement and framing the scope of the transformation programme. There are lots of examples where this is taking place elsewhere and the council should draw on the experience of others to support this development.

2.3 Recommendation 3: Medium term Financial Planning

Carry out planned refresh of MTFS and provide some scenario planning for future years.

2.4 Recommendation 4: Internal Capacity

Strengthen and stabilise the internal capacity to overcome challenges in the thin-client model of delivery.

2.5 Recommendation 5: Working with partners to deliver

Partners are very supportive, and the council can build on this to develop strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and others to help deliver services.

3. Summary of peer challenge approach

3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected by the LGA on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Cllr Philip Broadhead, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (con)
- Richard Flinton, Chief Executive, North Yorkshire Council
- Cllr Deborah Harries, Birmingham City Council (Lib Dem)
- Dean Langton, Chief Finance Officer, Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council

- Steve Evans, Head of Corporate Affairs, Durham Council
- Maria Rotaru, Impact Graduate, Greenwich Council
- Eamon Lally, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities? Is there an organisational-wide approach to continuous improvement, with frequent monitoring, reporting on and updating of performance and improvement plans?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - **Does the council have a grip on its** current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges? What is the relative financial resilience of the council like?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to bring about the improvements it needs, including delivering on locally identified priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

As part of the five core elements outlined above, every Corporate Peer Challenge includes a strong focus on financial sustainability, performance, governance, and assurance.

In addition to these themes, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on the organisation's approach to risk, use of data and insight, and transformation

3.3 The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. This included a position statement prepared by the council in advance of the peer team's time on site. This provided a clear steer to the peer team on the local context at Herefordshire Council and what the peer team should focus on. It also included a comprehensive LGA Finance briefing (prepared using public reports from the council's website) and a LGA performance report outlining benchmarking data for the council across a range of metrics. The latter was produced using the LGA's local area benchmarking tool called LG Inform.

The peer team then spent four days onsite at Herefordshire Council, during which they:

- Gathered evidence, information, and views from more than 40 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 120 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

4. Feedback

4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county with a population of 189,900 spread across 840 square miles, making it one of the largest and most sparsely populated upper-tier authorities in England; 223 people per square mile, with 53per cent living in rural areas and one-third in areas classified as 'very sparse'. It has an aging population with 27per cent of residents aged 65+, compared to 19per cent nationally and only 16per cent are under 16, down from 20per cent in 2013. 91per cent identify as White British. The largest minority groups are from Eastern Europe, with a notable Gypsy and Irish Traveller population (0.2per cent, double the national average). Natural population growth is negative, with more deaths than births annually and so migration is the sole driver of population increase.

Despite overall good health and high employment rates (81.9per cent), Herefordshire faces significant inequalities. Nine lower super output areas (LSOAs) are in the 25per cent most deprived nationally for health and disability. Life expectancy is 4.2 years lower for men and 3.0 years lower for women in the most deprived areas compared to the least. 72 of 116 LSOAs are in the 25per cent most deprived nationally for access to services - three-quarters of these are rural.

Herefordshire has the lowest county-tier productivity (gross value added per hour) in England. Average earnings are 13per cent below the national average. High house prices and low wages contribute to rising homelessness and housing insecurity. Broadband and mobile coverage remain inconsistent, particularly in rural areas, exacerbating inequalities in access to services. Herefordshire is in the bottom 20per cent of local authorities for social mobility, with low-income children facing significant barriers to educational and economic success.

The Herefordshire council plan priorities are people, place, growth and transformation and these have been developed with significant input from residents and partners. The plan is supported by several key themed strategies, a new annual delivery plan and a set of performance measures.

Partners are looking for greater consistency and leadership in the prosecution of the

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growth priority. The council has put in place the [Herefordshire big economic plan](#), a long-term strategy for the county's economic development and the new business board is tasked with overseeing its delivery. With these foundations in place the council is well placed to be more visible in its leadership and focused on the actions needed to deliver.

The council is aware of the opportunities and challenges of meeting its housing delivery targets and is working to open up land for building through investment in infrastructure. The Hereford bypass is a totemic issue for the council. It was mentioned in almost every meeting that the peer team attended during its onsite visit and the council has expended a lot of political capital on the project. In 2023, the council revived the western bypass plan, citing: the need to unlock housing and employment land; the strategic importance of relieving city centre congestion; and the opportunity to use reallocated HS2 funding for infrastructure. The revived plan includes a two-phase approach: the Southern Link Road (SLR) – 2.3 miles from the A49 to the A465 (Belmont Road) and the Main Western Bypass – 5 miles from Holmer to Belmont, crossing the River Wye. In July 2025, the council approved procurement and land acquisition for the SLR, aiming for construction to begin soon and completion by 2026–27. The council is funding the first phase of the project. The full bypass is targeted for completion by 2033, subject to funding from central government and planning approvals. The bypass is part of the Western Growth Corridor, which supports the delivery of over 27,000 new homes and major employment land. The focus on and commitment to the bypass to unlock the mandated housing target is commendable but is heavily reliant on large scale future government financing.

4.1.1 Performance

The biggest performance challenge faced by the council has been in children's services. Since the 2022 Children's Service Ofsted inspection report, which identified the overall effectiveness of the service as inadequate, the council has worked to address the service issues and to improve outcomes for children and young people in Herefordshire. Over the last 18 months the service has started to show improvement. In its letter to the council in December 2024, following a monitoring

visit in the previous October, the inspector noted that *‘a new interim director of children’s services (DCS) has been appointed, who has brought renewed focus to areas of the service which need to improve. A refreshed improvement plan is being implemented and there are some early signs of improvement’*. In March 2025 the inspector noted that the *‘local authority has started to build up some pace in the improvement of services to vulnerable children’*. And in July 2025 the inspector noted that *‘the quality of practice for children in care in Herefordshire has improved at pace since the last monitoring visit’*. This improvement has been hard won and reflects the doggedness of the leadership and staff across the council in addressing this issue and the effectiveness of more recent appointments into senior positions. The improvement to date bodes well for a future Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s services (ILACS).

The council seems self-aware of its wider performance position. The peer team heard and saw a significant amount of performance management and reporting at various tiers of the authority. The performance management framework recognises the need to bring the performance cycle together with business planning, performance monitoring and risk management. Quarterly performance reports for each directorate are provided to the corporate leadership team and departmental leadership teams consider performance reports monthly. The reports provide updates on key indicators, both internally and externally facing, provide RAG rating and comparisons with the previous reporting period and year on year changes in performance. In the view of the peer team, it would improve the reporting of performance if reports included more comprehensive trend data and comparisons with the performance of statistical neighbours where appropriate.

In addition to the reporting of service performance data, the cabinet receives a quarterly performance report which provides information on progress in meeting the council plan (2024-28) and annual delivery plan priorities and goals, including milestones in the capital investment programme.

The council is committed to improving its reporting systems and it has already introduced new tools such as PowerBI and InPhase. However, the peer team heard that currently there was little corporate capacity or technical architecture such as a

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corporate data lake, data matching tools, machine learning, AI or data science capabilities to analyse data and form insights. The central performance team is small and while directorates have a good grasp of performance in their areas and can feed relevant data into government as required, it was not clear to the peer team that insights were being drawn corporately from the performance data and other data that the council will gather through its services. [Advice and self-assessment tools](#) are available from the LGA and this should be a significant feature of the work that the council has commissioned from SOCITM.

4.1.2 Equalities

The peer team found that there was a strong commitment to equalities within the council. The council has an up-to-date equalities policy 2024/27. The policy recognises the need to tackle social inequalities that impact on health, homelessness and sexual violence as well as ensuring that the council provides an inclusive workplace environment. Equalities run as a thread through key strategies such as the homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy, where it is noted that specific groups are disproportionately affected including young people, people with disabilities and mental health needs, victims of domestic abuse and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

As an employer the council takes equalities seriously. It undertakes regular equalities surveys and can demonstrate progress both in terms of data and information gathered and outcomes. The council publishes regular reports on workforce diversity, which include gender and ethnicity data, pay gap analysis, recruitment outcomes and actions to improve representation and inclusion. In several meetings with staff, the peer team heard that the values were lived in the council and that this came from strong leadership from the top of the organisation.

In addition to the key recommendations on data and insights, we recommend the following actions:

- **Strengthen corporate insight and data capability.** While directorates demonstrate strong performance monitoring, the council should invest in

corporate capacity to analyse data and generate cross-cutting insights. This will support more strategic decision-making and enable a clearer line of sight between performance, risk, and improvement.

- **Clarify and communicate growth leadership.** The council should provide clearer and more visible leadership on its growth agenda, ensuring alignment across strategies and partnerships. This includes strengthening the role of the Business Board and clearly articulating the council's role in delivering the Herefordshire Big Economic Plan.
- **Embed equalities across delivery and leadership.** The council's commitment to equalities is evident, and there is an opportunity to further embed this across all service areas and leadership levels. This includes using equalities data to inform decision-making and ensuring that inclusive practice is consistently applied in both internal culture and external service delivery.

4.2 Organisational and place leadership

Confidence in the council officer and political leadership is strong and growing.

The peer team heard that the council is not currently part of a devolution deal and has not committed to joining a combined authority (CA) or accepting a directly elected mayor. It is currently assessing the implications of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill which proposes, amongst other matters, the creation of Strategic Authorities (SAs). There will be three levels of SA which will have distinct powers: foundation strategic authorities – includes all non-mayoral CAs and CCAs; mayoral strategic authorities – includes all mayoral CAs and CCAs; and established mayoral strategic authorities.

Some of Herefordshire's more obvious potential partners in any strategic authority are still two-tier areas and are currently going through local government reorganisation. This adds a level of complexity and potential delay for Herefordshire in any negotiations.

Devolution is important to the council. A significant element of the council's agenda is concerned with transport and housing infrastructure as it seeks to unlock land to

deliver much needed housing for its communities. The devolution agenda places the competencies for strategic transport and strategic housing with strategic authorities and the allocation of competencies has the potential to influence the allocation of government funding, particularly capital funding which in the future could also flow to strategic authorities. This is of interest to the council as it seeks up to £300 million in capital funding from government for phase 2 of the Hereford bypass. Everyone recognises that the opportunities for Herefordshire to influence devolution at the moment are limited, but the peer team heard lots of praise from partners about the role that the council is playing in informal discussions on devolution and in communicating to other public sector partners on this issue. It will be important for the council to lead, shape and seize opportunities on devolution in the sub-region.

Herefordshire recognises the importance of partnership working and the peer team was pleased to hear other organisations and their leaders value the partnership working undertaken by the council. Some of the significant partnerships are the Marches Forward Partnership, which tackles shared economic and infrastructure challenges across the English Welsh border; the Integrated Care System, where the council is a statutory partner and a member of the Integrated Care Partnership. It also contributes to the work of the Integrated Care Board through joint commissioning, data sharing, and strategic planning.

The council is to be commended for its efforts to manage cross border administrative challenges in relation to different approaches to English and Welsh devolved powers. The Council and its partners should continue to lobby government for a more flexible and sympathetic approach to supporting the opportunities associated with closer cross-border relationships which more directly represent the nature of communities, health, infrastructure and economics within the area.

The council also operates partnership working through the community safety and safeguarding boards and through its engagement with education bodies such as the local university, the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE). The peer team heard that in recent months partners have noticed an improvement in the way the council communicates its identity and its vision.

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It is in the nature of partnerships that they change and evolve. Changes to the Integrated care systems is an example where 50 per cent cuts in administration costs mean that Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB is set to join a strategic cluster with other West Midlands ICBs (Warwickshire and Coventry) to share leadership and management functions. The peer team learnt that Herefordshire council is already engaging with partners in Warwickshire and Coventry to seek to make the most of these changes.

The council has established new partnership structures and is also engaging with new partners such as NMITE. The peer team was told that the council has convened a board consisting of senior leaders across the public sector with chief executives and chief officers from West Mercia Police, Integrated Care Board, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue, Wye Valley NHS Trust and Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Healthcare Trust, to focus on the key strategic priorities for the county that can be delivered collectively and have the greatest impact. This group meets regularly and the leaders we spoke to found it a very helpful vehicle for engagement and building relationships. This board has the capacity to really shape service delivery in Herefordshire. Similarly, the business board has a strong membership and is valued. It has benefited in its establishment from support and guidance from the council and it would welcome the ongoing leadership of the council. The peer team heard that in some cases partnership working was not very deeply embedded in the council. The working relationship was great at chief executive and council leader level, but some organisations were finding it harder to connect with managers within the council. This meant for example that partners were having to come to the council's chief executive to get issue resolved. There are strong individual senior relationships but this needs to translate into a more structured approach to partnership working across the organisation

The council has shown significant place leadership and demonstrated innovation in tackling issues through novel solutions. An example is the River Lugg phosphate credit system which seeks to address the nutrient neutrality requirement in an area where Natural England has determined that the council must ensure that new developments do not increase phosphate pollution. The council has invested in

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integrated wetlands that naturally absorb and reduce phosphate levels in the River Lugg catchment. These wetlands are modelled to remove a quantifiable amount of phosphate, which is converted into credits. Income from credit sales is ring-fenced to maintain the wetlands; administer the credit scheme; and invest in further phosphate reduction projects. The phosphate credit scheme has enabled the council to release housing development that had been stalled due to nutrient neutrality requirements.

In addition to key recommendations above, we recommend the following actions:

- **Lead the devolution debate locally.** The national move is towards a greater focus on the role of strategic authorities, which is the route through which the government is pursuing devolution. It will be important for the council to lead, shape and seize opportunities on devolution in the sub-region. In doing so it should also continue to lobby government for a more flexible and sympathetic approach to supporting the opportunities associated with closer cross-border relationships.
- **Focus the chief executives' board on delivery.** It is relatively new but is well regarded and the council should take the opportunity to use to group to improve services through a focus on delivery and public service reform.
- **Embed partnership working across the council.** The council has a strong commitment to partnership working and it should build on the strength of individual senior relationships to develop a structured approach to partnership working across the organisation

4.3 Governance and culture

Governance is in general a strength in Herefordshire council. The council seeks to operate to the core principles of good governance and has the governance arrangements in place to deliver on these principles. The council also displays self-awareness. In its latest annual governance statement, it notes risk management, performance reporting, public engagement and governance of new technologies as areas where it is seeking to improve arrangements.

4.3.1 Risk Management

The council has progressed with its approach to risk and it has published a new risk management strategy for 2025/26. The strategy is informed by good practice sources including the CIPFA/SOLACE Good Governance Framework.

Risks are identified and evaluated in the context of the council's appetite for risk and risk management framework. This approach identifies a low appetite for risk as it applies to vulnerable people, but a higher tolerance for risks related to innovation. Strategic risks are overseen by the cabinet and corporate leadership team (CLT). Directorates and service areas maintain their own risk registers. The corporate risk register has a focus on children's and adult services, financial sustainability and workforce and is in line with other similar authorities.

In developing the new approach, the council has sought to address issues of aggregating risk, understanding accountability and action planning. The council noted in its annual governance statement for 2024/25 that it would be working with officers to improve the systems documenting decision-making to align with the revised risk management strategy and risk appetite statement. The risk management strategy is new and the peer team would encourage the council to embed and keep it live in the organisation and review the approach regularly through the audit and governance committee.

The peer team has regard for any value for money issues raised by the external auditors. However, the auditors have not raised any significant weaknesses in arrangements for financial sustainability or governance. The external auditor has continued to raise the issue of children's social care, which the peer team has discussed in this report.

The peer team heard that there was a good working relationship between the external auditor and the S151 officer and also the chief executive, who meets with the auditor every six months.

The council continues to strengthen its governance arrangements. In line with the recommendations of the Redmond Review and subsequent CIPFA guidance the

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council has appointed an Independent Member to the audit and governance committee. The council has also appointed a number of independent people for the purposes of the code of conduct arrangements. The audit committee has a very important role to play in the successful governance of the council. The role of the committee is to track progress on key recommendations, to hold officers accountable for implementing improvements and to ensure that governance weaknesses are addressed. The external auditor, Grant Thornton, reported that the committee is seen as a constructive forum for discussing audit findings and governance issues. The council will want to ensure that as well as being a constructive forum for discussion the audit and governance committee is proactively pursuing good governance outcomes for the council. The council has an opportunity to ensure that the audit committee can be more challenging and confident in providing appropriate assurance.

The peer team was pleased to note that the council's statutory officers meet regularly to maintain governance standards and financial oversight.

The peer team heard from staff and partners that there has been a significant positive change in the culture of the organisation in recent years and the peer team noted that the council had a 'really nice feel about it'. Employee relationships are in a good place. This improvement in culture is evidenced in the most recent staff survey results. The council saw a significant increase in the percentage of staff responding to the survey and significant improvement in the numbers responding positively to key questions including a 26 percentage point increase in those that feel the council celebrates staff success and an 18 percentage point increase in those who agree that colleagues behave in line with the council's behaviours.

The peer team was told that the Chief Executive was very visible in the council and that he together with the Leader were moving the council in the right direction. Staff valued the open internal communication and referenced the weekly bulletins from the chief executive.

Partners too have felt the change in culture with a number commenting on the council becoming more open and that the council was more in listening mode than it had been, again recognising the influence of the chief executive and leader. This

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was felt in the newly reformed business growth board which was engaged and enthusiastic and talked about the good support received from the council.

As set out in the council's [workforce strategy](#), the formation and development of employee networks is encouraged. The networks have opportunities to shape policy development within the council and are particularly supported to help shape the council's diversity and inclusion initiatives and embedding flexible working practices and policies. The peer team was told by staff that the staff networks were working well.

Both councillors and staff, spoke of the good working relationships within the council. Politically the council is led by a conservative administration, but there is no overall control. The council seeks where possible to move forward by consensus, and a particularly innovative practice to manage this is political group consultations to inform decisions with financial or community significance; this approach provides a political viewpoint for officers to capture in key decision reports and ensures transparent political choices for the electorate. Councillors indicated that this approach was generally working well.

There are five scrutiny boards with discrete remits. In early 2025 a [review of scrutiny](#) was undertaken by the statutory scrutiny officer. A range of recommendations were proposed, and if implemented in full, these will strengthen the function. Scrutiny committees may make recommendations to cabinet and when they do there is a requirement that the cabinet will make an executive response. In this way, recommendations are formally integrated into the decision-making process. However, the peer team heard from some scrutiny councillors that there is a lack of clarity and timeliness about how their recommendations influence council decisions. It is not immediately obvious to the peer team why this might be the case, but there is an opportunity to strengthen the engagement with scrutiny members on the outcomes of the decision-making processes. More generally the peer team heard that improving training for backbenchers and engagement with opposition could further strengthen member-officer and member-member relationships.

In addition to the key recommendations above, we recommend the following actions:

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- **Embed and keep live the risk management strategy.** The risk strategy is new and is built on solid foundations, but it must now be embraced and actively managed across the organisation.
- **Ensure that the audit committee is** delivering robust challenge and appropriate assurance.
- **Strengthen the feedback to scrutiny on decisions.** Scrutiny members are concerned about the timeliness of feedback on decisions.
- **Review training for councillors.** The peer team heard that councillors might benefit from new training options aimed at improving the relationships between members and officer-member interactions.

4.3 Financial planning and management

The senior finance team is well regarded and the peer team heard praise for its clarity and presentation. In December 2024 the Herefordshire council finance team won the excellence in governance, reporting and assurance award at the public finance awards, for the work in overhauling the content and presentation of internal financial reporting during 2022/23 and 2023/24; the council is right to be proud of this achievement.

The current financial base is positive, when many other councils are in financial difficulty. The general fund outturn for 2024/25 was a £0.5million underspend (after a planned use of £4 million from the budget resilience reserve). The current position reflects recent activity to address overspends. In 2022/23 the overspend was £5.6 million on a £175.9 million budget, with the key pressure being children and young people (CYP) where the overspend was £9.6 million (18.1 per cent of its budget). In 2023/24 the council's overspend was £8.7 million on a £193.3 million budget again with pressures coming from CYP which overspent by £11.7 million, mainly on placements and special educational needs (SEN) transport.

The 2025-2026 budget responded to continuing cost pressures, ensuring adequate funding to support service delivery in areas of high demand and increasing cost pressures. Significant rightsizing of the children's and adult's budgets occurred in

2024/25. The base budget for children's services was increased by £17.6 million to fully fund the £10.8 million underlying overspend from 2023/24 and to address additional pressures from pay and price inflation and demand growth. Similarly in adult's, the 2024/25 budget included £17.2 million for unfunded pressures covering increased demand and complexity, pay inflation, and care market cost pressures. This was a substantial uplift, reflecting the scale of underlying pressures to ensure adequate funding to deliver services.

4.4.1 Savings expectations

In 2023/24 the council set a savings target of £20 million and delivered £15.8 million (79per cent). Children's services only delivered £0.3m of its £4.5m target in that year.

For 2024/25 the savings target for the council was £19.5 million in total. A three-year financial plan was introduced for children's services, targeting £11.2 million cumulative savings by 2027/28 (originally 2026/27). For 2024/25 Children's Services savings requirement amounted to £2.3 million and this was achieved. Overall the council delivered £10.9 million (56per cent of its target) in [savings in 2024/25](#). The shortfall came from the non-delivery of savings from transformation (the thrive programme and the target operating model) as well as under-delivery of the savings target associated with the mutual early resignation scheme 2024 (MERS24).

[The budget proposals for 2025/26](#) contain savings and efficiencies of £6.9 million, of which just under £4 million is savings from children's services. The budget did not include any other directorate savings, recognising the requirement to deliver savings not delivered in the previous financial year. This review has continued and revised savings plans for savings not achieved in 2024-2025 have been developed. The review identified £10.5 million of savings due in 2024/25 assessed to be at risk and to be delivered in 2025/26. Within this work there is recognition that savings of just under £6 million from transformation might not be delivered in the short term. In response to this, the corporate leadership team has agreed to an average reduction of 2per cent across all directorate budget lines in 2025/26 which the council expects will deliver savings of £5.4 million. Additional savings will come from community wellbeing (£3.2m); Home to school/ SEN transport (£0.5 million); and Hoople SLA/Efficiencies savings (£1.4 million).

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Given the challenges that the council has faced in delivering savings in the past it will want to ensure that programmes are robust and that the savings earmarked for 2025/26 are delivered.

4.4.2 Reserves

The reserve position has improved from £82.8 million on 31st March 2024 to £90.8 million on 31st March 2025. In general the CIPFA reserve sustainability measure, as reported in the [council's section 25 statement](#), is considered 'lower risk' with the council having average reserves when compared to its statistical neighbours. Pre-covid, as of March 2020, the council's reserve position was closer to the upper quartile for unitary authorities.

At a time, when there is a significant backlog in audit opinions for England, Herefordshire has a very good record of publishing its audited accounts. The council's external auditors issued an unqualified audit opinion for the 2023/24 accounts in September 2024. Herefordshire council was the first and only local authority to receive an audit opinion, including value for money opinion, by this date. The council [noted](#) that this outcome was 'the result of high-quality financial statements and supporting audit evidence and an effective relationship between the council's finance team and external auditors'. In addition, the draft accounts for 2024/25 were published on 30 May 2025, a month ahead of the statutory deadline.

4.4.3 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

High needs budget issue is one of the most pressing financial challenges facing local authorities in England, with demand surging in recent years. The council is expecting the cumulative deficit to be around £40.2 million by 31 March 2026. This is a very significant sum, although many councils have much larger deficits. The DSG deficit is currently held in a ring-fenced unusable reserve, protected by a statutory override which was due to end in March 2026. The government is acutely aware of the challenges and has taken some steps to ease the immediate pressure including extending the DSG statutory override until the end of 2027/28. However, it is still not clear what will happen to the deficit when the statutory override comes to an end. The Peer Team was pleased to see that Herefordshire council is taking steps itself to

mitigate the pressures on the system including continued investment in nurture hubs, autism hubs, and Widemarsh Explorers and plans to repurpose buildings and open a new 80-place special free school to reduce reliance on costly independent placements. However, the capital investment will take some time to turn the dial on this issue.

4.4.4 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

The MTFS is a critical document in helping the council plan, prioritise, and manage its finances over a multi-year period. Herefordshire's MTFS for 2025/29 was agreed in February 2025. The peer team considered the assumptions in the MTFS and noted that the levels of increase in government grants, expected in future years, appeared to be out of line with and more optimistic than the forecasts from other statistical neighbour authorities. See [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29](#). Appendix B.

Since the publication of the council's MTFS the government has published its [spending review outcomes](#) as well as a consultation on [local government funding reform](#). These provide additional opportunities for the council to review its financial position in future years, recognising that this will still only be an estimate. The council should start its scenario planning work to review its MTFS as soon as possible.

The capital programme is ambitious. It includes significant investment in highways, and continuing investment in the Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1 ([£30 million over the period 25/26 to 27/28](#)), waste infrastructure, and employment lands. The total budgeted spend over the five-year programme (2024/25 to 2028/29) is £378.2 million. There is a recent history of budget reprofiling and underspends in the capital programme. In 2023/24 the actual spend was around £21 million lower than the reprofiled budget. In 2024/25 the final spend position represented an underspend of £23 million. The council has reviewed each project and has an understanding of the reasons for the underspend in each case. In the view of the peer team the council should consider if it has the right level of capacity and resources to manage the capital programme.

In addition to key recommendations above, we recommend the following actions:

- **Tightly manage the delivery of savings in 2025/26.** The council has not delivered all planned savings in the past and it will want to ensure that programmes are robust and that the savings earmarked for 2025/26 are delivered.

4.4 Transformation

The Peer Team found that the council recognises that transformation is central to both service improvement and financial sustainability. The council has developed a strategic transformation programme set out in its [transformation strategy 2005/28](#) and there is an appetite for change. The strategy's goals include ensuring financial sustainability for the council and delivering modern and innovative approaches to quality service delivery. The transformation strategy notes that in 2024/25 the council has made good progress in delivering significant savings through service transformation through children's services (e.g. reducing agency staff, stepping down high-cost placements) and adult social care (e.g. reassessing high-cost care packages). The peer team heard that in items of its corporate transformation the council had had a 'stop start' approach in the past, with instability in leadership in this area being a factor. The council is aware that it does not yet have a full strategy or the skills and resources in place to deliver on the corporate transformation agenda and now needs stability and empowered leadership to deliver improvements in the use of technology to support demand management, deliver efficiencies and inform decision-making across the council's services and strategic priorities.

Digital transformation is a key part of the strategy, and the council is working with SOCITM on understanding what needs to change, the current resource gaps and what the action plan will look like going forward. The work being undertaken with SOCITM builds on the council's [digital, data and technology strategy](#) which sets out clearly what the council wants to achieve but is light on the details of how it will get there. The LGA regularly publishes cyber, digital and technology [resources for councils](#), and provides training courses, workshops and events for councillors and officers that Herefordshire council might wish to explore. The council is aware that it

lacks internal resources for the delivery of digital transformation,

One of the keys aims of transformation is financial sustainability. The [MTFS](#) states that the *'financial strategy ensures that the council's finances are aligned to its strategic priorities with a clear focus on transformation to ensure the future sustainability of the council and the services it delivers'*. But as stated earlier, the savings from corporate transformation activity has been slow to materialise. Transformation will require significant financial investment.

In addition to key recommendations above, we recommend the following actions:

- **Provide a clear transformation delivery plan.** More work is needed to communicate the balance between future investment in, and savings from transformation and how this is tied in with the MTFS. A clearly articulated delivery plan is needed which sets out the investment required and the profile of savings from that investment.

4.5 Capacity for improvement

As the peer team has set out above, success in transformation will be critical for the council. The council is at an early stage in its transformation journey and can learn from others' success. The work it is doing with SOCITM is important. Several councils have emerged as leaders in digital transformation, with the LGA and Local Partnerships documenting a wide range of case studies that highlight innovation, impact, and lessons learned.

The potential scope of the transformation journey provides a real opportunity to make substantial improvements to services and achieve longer term efficiencies. Councils are increasingly using AI and data-driven insights to transform public services, improve efficiency, and enhance resident experiences. These service improvements include AI powered case management; real time translation; automated drafting of early help care plans (EHCPs); automation of meeting notes and streamlining planning workflows; predictive analytics to predict demand for services like children's social care and homelessness prevention; and the use of AI to support automated

procurement processes. The council will be exploring many of these approaches, but the scope is large, and the council can be bold.

Staff retention and stability at senior levels, and in key posts, will be increasingly important in delivering: transformation; improvement; and greater confidence and stability in how the council works with partners. Recent appointments to senior posts have been successful such as the impact of the interim director of children's services. It is also attracting good candidates for posts, such as the recent appointment of a new head of communications. The council has good onboarding, staff training and development.

The voluntary sector is very supportive of the council and its more accessible leadership. It wants a strategic relationship with the council and is looking for opportunities for genuine co-production and to be seen as a resource for improved service delivery. Some of the concerns raised by the voluntary sector representatives in discussion with the peer team are perennial. These included: funding pressures and capacity constraints, especially among small volunteer-led groups; a need for stronger voice and influence in strategic decision-making; and a desire for more consistent support and recognition from statutory partners. In its latest [assessment](#) of the sector, Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support Service (HVOSS) noted that *'Whilst there have been attempts at co-production in some service areas these have not been successfully rolled [out]and [there is] a perception that the sector is not 'commissioning ready'. Currently partnership structures are not in place to provide opportunities across the sector i.e. the establishment of consortia which opens possibilities for smaller organisations. Alongside this the VCSE feel that their voice isn't always heard and the lack of a formal advocacy route is recognised by both public sector and the VCSE'*. Talk Community is Herefordshire council's approach to early help, prevention, and community resilience. As a delivery model, it brings together the council, voluntary sector, health partners, and residents to support people to live well and independently in their communities. It is a key route through which the voluntary sector engages in service delivery. There is an opportunity for the council to build on the voluntary sector's appetite for engagement in service delivery and to ensure that the value it can bring is recognised across the

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organisation.

For many years the council has operated successfully with outsourced central and resident facing services under a thin client model. Services that have been outsourced include waste management, the management of the council's housing stock, the public realm and highways services, back office and support services, and adult social care and children's services, the latter being provided by a mix of in-house and commissioned services. This has generally been a successful approach, although in some cases the outcomes have been mixed. However, as the council seeks to transform and improve its service offer and achieve a long term sustainable financial position the council should consider strengthening its in-house capacity to oversee transformation, contractual and service change and improvement.

The peer team heard from partners and staff that there are issues around clarity of branding of services. Some of the challenges with branding arise from service fragmentation across delivery models which in some cases can hinder resident's recognition and trust of council services. The council's transformation strategy 2025–2028 identifies branding and communication as key enablers of change as the council seeks to: promote a 'one council' approach to achieve resident-focused, outcomes-driven services; emphasise data and intelligence to guide service design and encourage a culture of trust, teamwork, and collaboration across departments and partners and we understand that this is to be addressed and this should include a review of internal and external communications

The council has rightly begun to have informal conversations with other areas on the question of devolution and the establishment of a strategic authority. We have highlighted this elsewhere in the report, but the way the devolution is shaped locally will be very influential in enabling or hindering the council's ambitions. On many of the big socio-economic issues it will become increasingly challenging for the council to operate on its own. The establishment of strategic authorities will influence how decisions are made. Early leadership on this is key.

In addition to key recommendations above, we recommend the following actions:

- **Strengthen in-house capacity to deliver change.** As the council seeks to

transform and improve its service offer and achieve a long term sustainable financial position the council should consider strengthening its in-house capacity to oversee transformation, contractual and service change and improvement.

- **Take advantage of the Voluntary sector's appetite to deliver.** The council can ensure that the value of the voluntary sector as a delivery partner is recognised and acted upon across the council.
- **Improve branding review communications.** A new senior appointment in communications provides the opportunity to strengthen the councils brand and to review both its internal and external communications to achieve this end.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings. The LGA will continue to provide on-going support to the council. Following publication of CPC report you need to produce and publish an Action Plan within 5 months of the time on site. As part of the CPC, the council are also required to have a progress review and publish the findings from this within twelve months of the CPC. The LGA will also publish the progress review report on their website.

The progress review will provide space for a council's senior leadership to report to peers on the progress made against each of the CPC's recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and receive feedback on the implementation of the CPC action plan. The progress review will usually be delivered on-site over one day.

The date for the progress review at Herefordshire Council is proposed to be w/c 23 March 2026.

In the meantime, Helen Murray, Principal Adviser for the West Midlands, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. As outlined above, Helen is available to discuss any further support the council requires.

Helen.Murray@[local.gov.uk](mailto:info@local.gov.uk)

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Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

Chair: Councillor Louise Gittins

Chief Executive: Joanna Killian

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson



CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE 2025

ACTION PLAN

The action plan sets out the response to the key recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge team – denoted by the reference 'KR'. It also includes the other actions identified by the peer team in their report, all of which have been included within the actions under the relevant key recommendations.

Ref.	Recommendations from the corporate peer team	Actions	Timescale	Lead officer
KR1	Now need to focus on corporate transformation and provide the resources needed to deliver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Corporate Transformation Board to drive direction for transformation and ensure delivery. Commission review of the council's transformation resources to ensure the right skills and resources to deliver our transformation ambitions. Develop a clearly articulated transformation delivery plan which sets out the investment required and the profile of savings to be delivered 	March 2026	Director of HR and OD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the timeliness of feedback to scrutiny on decisions. Review training for councillors. 	March 2026	Director of Governance and Legal Services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the council's brand and to review both its internal and external communications to achieve this end. 	March 2026	Director of Communications
KR2	Use of data must be improved so that insights can flow to support service improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the council's Corporate Intelligence & Performance function to strengthen its role in 	March 2026	Director of Finance

Ref.	Recommendations from the corporate peer team	Actions	Timescale	Lead officer
	and framing the scope of the transformation programme. There are lots of examples where this is taking place elsewhere and the council should draw on the experience of others to support this development.	supporting strategic planning, service improvement and transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver planned improvements to data quality at source. • Improve self-service, empowering staff to access insight directly through dashboard and drill-down tools. • Upskill staff in data literacy and visual analytics. • Proactively use equalities data to inform decision-making and ensure that inclusive practice is consistently applied in both internal culture and external service delivery 		
KR3	Bring forward refresh of MTFS and provide some scenario planning for future years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to Cabinet in September 2025 on the impact of local authority funding reform on the council's future financial position. • Continue to review the financial position through the 2026-2027 budget setting cycle. • Continue to tightly manage the delivery of the 2025-2026 savings. • Embed the risk management strategy across the council and its activities. • Ensure that the audit committee is delivering robust challenge and appropriate assurance. 	March 2026	Director of Finance
KR4	Strengthen and stabilise the internal capacity to overcome challenges in the thin-client model of delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen internal capacity in relation to the public realm contract • Strengthen contract management across the council 	December 2026	Corporate Director Economy and Environment
KR5	Partners are very supportive, and the council can build on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a co-produced commissioning framework with the voluntary and community sector. 	June 2026	Corporate Director

Ref.	Recommendations from the corporate peer team	Actions	Timescale	Lead officer
	this to develop strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and others to help deliver services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-produce a robust social value approach as part of the council's wider commissioning and procurement, initially with the public realm contract. 		Community Wellbeing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the growth agenda, ensuring alignment across strategies and partnerships. Strengthen the role of the Business Board. Articulate the council's role in delivering the Herefordshire Big Economic Plan. 	June 2026	Corporate Director Economy and Environment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead, shape and seize opportunities on devolution in the sub-region. Continue to lobby government for a more flexible and sympathetic approach to supporting the opportunities associated with closer cross-border relationships. Use the Herefordshire Chief Executives' Group to improve services through a focus on delivery and public service reform. 	December 2026	Chief Executive

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