

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Management Board held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Monday 13 April 2026 at 2.00 pm

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

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

In attendance: Councillor(s) Councillor Barry Durkin (Cabinet Member Roads and Regulatory Services, *attended remotely*), Elissa Swinglehurst (Cabinet Member Environment), Councillor Carole Gandy (Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing), Councillor Peter Stoddart (Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services).

Officers: Roger Allonby (Service Director Economy and Growth), Simon Cann (Democratic Services Officer/Committee Clerk), Hilary Hall (Corporate Director Community Wellbeing), Rachael Sanders (Director of Finance), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There had been no named substitutes.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Ben Proctor (Chair) pointed out he was a city councillor and represented Hereford City Council on its Stronger Towns Board, which administered some capital funding.

Cllr Frank Cornthwaite highlighted a potential interest in small business rates, as a part director of a business affected by them.

Cllr Toni Fagan pointed out she was a trustee for Llanwarne Village Hall, which was in receipt of the Capital Spaces Grant.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received from members of the public.

6. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No questions had been received from councillors.

7. Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. Members questioned why rough sleeping numbers regularly breached the target and whether the target itself remained realistic. Officers explained that the nationally defined measure included people on private and council land, including some non-engaging individuals, and that while daily outreach continued, engagement could not be compelled. It was suggested that local projections or targets should be reviewed to better reflect circumstances.
2. Clarification was provided on counting arrangements, including daily welfare checks, weekly internal counts and the annual national snapshot, and members were assured that all rough sleepers were treated as the council's responsibility regardless of land ownership.
3. Members raised concerns about delays to alternative provision for children and SEND services. Officers explained these were due to site issues, changes in central government decisions and capacity constraints, but confirmed capital investment to improve in-county provision. A new sufficiency plan was being developed to support future planning. Officers agreed to review whether the amber RAG rating remained appropriate.
4. It was confirmed that a special free school project had been paused following withdrawal of Department for Education funding. Members queried the consistency and application of RAG ratings; officers explained the governance process but acknowledged that clearer guidance could improve consistency.
5. Concerns were raised about report presentation, including unclear chart legends and the use of Q1 data for Q3 waste ratings. Cabinet members acknowledged reporting delays and the need for clearer narrative, particularly in light of forthcoming food and garden waste services. It was noted that food waste collection was a statutory requirement, with unresolved revenue funding issues and limited environmental benefit locally, but unavoidable implementation.
6. Members discussed wetlands delivery, Section 106 delays, contractor performance issues, and care accommodation planning. Officers confirmed mitigation and staffing arrangements, agreed to investigate specific schemes raised, and outlined a revised focus on smaller in-county provision for adults with complex needs.
7. Officers confirmed that an outcomes framework would be introduced in 2026/27, and that "top 10" indicators were locally agreed following the removal of national requirements. The use of projections rather than explicit targets for performance assessment was explained, with agreement that clearer labelling would improve transparency.

8. Q3 2025/26 BUDGET REPORT

The Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services provided a brief overview of the report. The Director of Finance, attending cabinet members and directors were also

present to respond to questions from the committee; The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. Members asked whether cost pressures in Adult Social Care and homelessness were routinely underestimated and whether an “optimism bias” should be applied to budgeting. Officers responded that budgets were developed jointly with service leads using the best available evidence at the time, including client numbers and activity forecasts, but future changes in demand and care complexity could not be precisely predicted. They emphasised that reports were intended to be transparent rather than optimistic and already highlighted known pressures and mitigation plans.
2. Members questioned why Adult Social Care continued to overspend year on year. Officers explained this was driven by an ageing population with increasingly complex needs, hospital pressures affecting discharge, severe flu impacts, capacity constraints in home care, and rising package costs due largely to national wage policy. Work was underway to improve discharge pathways, expand reablement, strengthen partnerships with providers, and reduce reliance on spot purchasing.
3. Members asked what action was being taken to address homelessness and the loss of private landlords. Officers outlined investment in temporary accommodation, targeted homelessness prevention work, and proactive engagement with landlords through briefings, regulation support, and partnership approaches. They acknowledged that wider national legislation and market conditions were the primary drivers of landlords leaving the sector and that the council could not resolve these issues alone. Members raised concerns regarding the apparent absence of a robust action plan to help support and increase the number of landlords in the county.
4. Members sought clarity on the long-term plan for managing Adult Social Care costs. Officers described a focus on major transformation programmes centred on prevention, demand management, assistive technology, and alternative care models, alongside longer-term partnership contracts with providers. They stressed there was no single solution and that managing demand was as critical as managing expenditure.
5. Members asked whether Cabinet was confident that delivery plans adequately responded to recurring overspends. Cabinet representatives confirmed that overspends were robustly challenged in detail, that forecasting accuracy was improving, and that emerging tools such as AI-supported modelling were strengthening projections. While dissatisfaction with recurring overspends was openly acknowledged, members were assured that all feasible options were tested regularly.
6. Members questioned whether agreed savings remained achievable. Officers reported that approximately 40% of total savings had been delivered by Q3, with a further majority of legacy savings already achieved. Some savings had been delayed due to timing or operational factors, such as academic-year delivery, but were still expected to be realised, with overall performance described as positive but cautious due to volatility.
7. Members asked how additional income from treasury management was governed and allocated. Officers explained that this income was reported through the central budget line and was offset against other financial pressures such as borrowing costs and MRP. It was not separately allocated to services but managed corporately through established financial governance processes.

8. Members questioned why capital projects were frequently reprofiled and how inflation risks were managed. Officers stated that reprofiling usually reflected delivery delays rather than lack of control, with inflation risks managed at project level and through corporate oversight. They acknowledged global economic uncertainty but said strong governance, challenge, and risk management arrangements were in place.
9. Members queried delays to active travel schemes funded through the Levelling Up Fund. Officers explained that delays were due to managing cumulative disruption in the city and responding to business and resident concerns about traffic impacts. They confirmed continued commitment to active travel and advised that no immediate risks to grant funding had been identified.

At the conclusion of the debate on item 7 and item 8 the committee discussed and agreed the following recommendations.

That the executive should:

- 1. Review the method by which the council counts the number of people sleeping rough, to take into account local factors.**
- 2. Urgently review the application of the RAG status to reassure themselves it is a realistic picture of the current position on Delivery Plan items. In doing so, they should also develop guidance for senior responsible officers (SROs) and service leads in line with the outcome of this review.**
- 3. Ensure that delivery reports display RAG ratings for each quarter (Q1-Q4), to provide a transparent record of progress and to highlight risks or declining performance as they occur.**
- 4. Develop an action plan to support and increase the number of private landlords in the county.**

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The meeting was extended by ten minutes to allow discussion of the work programme.

1. Members emphasised the importance of the new performance framework being implemented and scrutinised during the current financial year, and sought clarity on how this would be scheduled.
2. While improvements in corporate risk management were acknowledged, members noted that scrutiny committees did not routinely review corporate or directorate risk registers, identifying this as a potential gap. The role of Scrutiny Management Board in coordinating consistent scrutiny, including recommending regular risk reviews across committees, was discussed.
3. Concerns were reiterated about the timeliness of financial scrutiny. Members proposed revisiting the establishment of a working group to review financial performance reports quarterly as they are published, to strengthen oversight.
4. Members discussed different approaches to developing the work programme, balancing the benefits of dedicated informal sessions against the need for transparency and public engagement.

Resolved: That a Scrutiny Management Board work programming session be scheduled at the earliest convenient opportunity.

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Friday 3 July 2026, 10am

The meeting ended at 17:08

Chairperson