



Chief Executive's report to Full Council – May 2025

I was sorry to hear of the death of former councillor Phil Cutter on Monday 28 April. Former Cllr Cutter represented residents in Ross for many years, as well as working on a number of council committees. He was well liked, well-respected and highly regarded by those who knew him and worked with him.

Following notification earlier this month, the Local Government Boundary Commission has started an electoral review of Herefordshire Council. The electoral review is to consider the number of councillors elected to the council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of councillors to be elected to each ward. It will take around 18 months to complete. The final recommendations will be laid in Parliament, with the new ward boundaries implemented for elections in May 2027.

There has been a change of administration in a number of counties in our region following the local elections this month. We are making arrangements to meet with our closest neighbours to discuss key strategic issues that affect us jointly, including understanding their position on devolution. It's important we share with them what's important to our county and contribute to the discussion, to ensure we secure the best outcome for Herefordshire.

The new Herefordshire Councils Charter, which sets out how we will work more closely together with local town and parish councils on key areas to benefit residents, is being finalised ready for publication. The aim of the Charter is to develop stronger partnership working between councils and enable community action. A new Charter Reference Group (CRG) will act as developers and guardians of the Charter, which we expect to evolve over time.

I am pleased to confirm that following a rigorous recruitment process, Rachael Sanders was appointed as the council's new Director of Finance in April. Rachael has been successfully fulfilling this role since June 2024, and I'm delighted she's taken the position on a permanent basis.

We are expecting to receive more detail of the outcome of central government's multi-year spending review, and our three-year funding allocation, in the next few weeks. We're pleased and proud of our financial performance last year, which has allowed us to manage the £7 million rural services grant cut without major cuts in service, however this is not sustainable in the longer term. We are continuing to engage with government to ensure that the council receives a fair allocation of funding which reflects the cost of providing services across a rural county.

Good progress is being made in our work to make improvements in our children's services. This month we launched the Herefordshire Families First Partnership Programme, which is part of a national programme led by the Department for Education (DfE). Families First puts children and their families at the centre of all we do and brings all key partners together with children's services (schools, health, police, voluntary, faith and community sectors) to lead on local transformation. As part of this programme our children's services staff are moving towards locality-based working which will enhance our ability to work closer with our residents and our multi-agency partners within our communities, so we can be more responsive to the needs of our children and families.

We are expecting our seventh Ofsted monitoring visit during June, following which independent children's commissioner Debbie McMillan will publish her annual review of progress against our phase 2 improvement plan. With the most recent reports indicating that improvements are being made and sustained, we are confident that these reviews will provide continued assurance of positive progress.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has started its assessment of our adult social care services. The assessment is a new requirement as part of the Health and Care Act 2022 which places a duty on the CQC to measure how well the council is performing against its statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. The assessment framework comprises four themes: working with people; providing support; ensuring safety; and leadership. We have completed the first part of the assessment which is an 'information return'. The second part is a site visit, which will take place in the next six months, where they will talk to staff, managers and partners and where we can demonstrate the great work we are doing. We have a positive story to tell.

We have recently launched a new recruitment drive for local Shared Lives carers, as we look for more individuals or couples to share their life, home and interests with an adult who needs support to live a safe, healthy and independent life. There's a fantastic new video on our website that outlines what's involved at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shared-lives-herefordshire . If you know of someone who may be suitable to be a shared lives carer, please direct them to our website for further information.

We received the fantastic news in April that we've been successful in our bid for £1.075million from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, for the Museum and Art Gallery redevelopment. The funding is provided by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to reduce direct carbon emissions from public sector buildings. The award is a major step forward in helping the redeveloped museum become one of the most energy-efficient heritage buildings in the UK, improving the warmth and efficiency with a new low carbon heating system, ventilation and insulation.

A consultation is currently underway on the proposed transport priorities for the county in our draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2025-2041. We're asking residents, partner organisations, transport providers, user groups and neighbouring councils to provide their feedback to help shape the final plan and ensure it reflects the needs and priorities of communities across Herefordshire. The consultation can be found on the council website www.herefordshire.gov.uk/consultations

We were delighted to see the first cohort of students graduate from NMITE earlier this month. This is a major achievement not just for the students and staff of NMITE but for the whole of Herefordshire. Offering a new way for aspiring engineers to link their academic knowledge with practical skills and experience with local companies is good for further education, local jobs and economic growth in our county. Many congratulations to all of the new graduates.

We held our first employee awards for many years in mid-May. The afternoon event was a great way to recognise and thank individual members of staff and teams for their efforts and achievements. It is important that we value the skills and experience of our workforce, as they work to deliver the best possible services for people in Herefordshire.

We are currently preparing for our upcoming Corporate Peer Challenge, which is taking place in June. Delivered by the Local Government Association, the Corporate Peer Challenge team will be looking at five core areas: local priorities and outcomes; organisational and place leadership; governance and culture; financial planning and management and capacity for improvement. In addition, we have asked them to also look at risk management, use of data and intelligence and service transformation. The peer team, which is made up of a total of five serving elected members and officers from other councils, will meet with elected members, staff, partners and voluntary and community representatives. Their outcome report, which will be published, will detail strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations.