

Draft

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 1 May 2025 at 2.30 pm

Cabinet Members Physically Present and voting:	Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairperson) Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson) Councillors Graham Biggs, Harry Bramer, Carole Gandy, Ivan Powell, Philip Price and Pete Stoddart
Cabinet Members in remote attendance	None <i>Cabinet members attending the meeting remotely, e.g. through video conferencing facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.</i>

Cabinet support members in attendance	None
Group leaders / representatives in attendance	Councillors Liz Harvey (in person) and Diana Toynbee (in person). Councillor Clare Davies (online)
Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance	Councillors Pauline Crockett (in person) and Louis Stark (online)
Officers in attendance:	B Bowell, R Cook, H Hall, L Featherstone, S O'Connor, S Thompkins, R Thomas-Easton, D Thornton, S Gregory (Secretary)

Opening remarks

The Leader opened the meeting to acknowledge the passing of Phill Cutter. The Leader expressed that it was with great sadness that former councillor Phill Cutter had passed away on Monday 28th April 2025, condolences were extended to his family on behalf of Herefordshire Council. It was expressed that Phill would be fondly remembered, he was a dedicated member of the council, he served with distinction on many committees including the planning committee. He was highly regarded and served his community well, he was a trusted friend and a dear colleague.

A minute's silence was observed.

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies from Councillor Durkin.

There were further apologies from councillors Fagan, James and Proctor.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

87. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

88. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 7 - 10)
Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

89. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS
None were received.

90. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES
There were no reports from scrutiny committees for consideration at this meeting.

91. FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE
The member for environment introduced the report. It was highlighted that section 57 (8) of the Environment Act 2021 states that recyclable household waste which is food waste, must be collected at least once a week. It was noted to comply with legislation a food waste recycling service must be in place by 31 March 2026. It was anticipated that the recycling rates will increase from around 40% to 45% and once the chargeable garden waste service is factored in, this would increase to 58% which would exceed the target for 2025. It was further noted that the council were now collecting batteries and smaller electricals which also enhances the councils recycling ability.

It was confirmed that more than 1m mega watt hours of electricity had been generated from food waste collected since 2017. The new proposal was suggesting it be put through anaerobic digestion, which would create biogas to generate energy. It was highlighted that the contract contained a specific provision to ensure that none of the digestates produced would be sold into or spread into the Wye Lugg SAC to avoid increasing the nutrient loads within the catchment. It was confirmed that diverting food waste energy from waste plants to AD recycling has estimated to save £621k per annum. It was noted that utilising existing digesters in the county had been considered but the nature of food waste required a specific set up that could not be achieved without excessive expenditure on the existing installations. A commercial food waste collection and disposal service was being piloted which would merge with the domestic food waste service from 2026.

Regarding the additional recycling bins, it was confirmed each household would be provided with a small kitchen caddy and a 25L outdoor caddy, this will be supported by a detailed communications and engagement strategy.

It was confirmed that this decision will have paved the way for the service to take on the new requirements once the annual new burdens revenue grant has been agreed.

Comments from cabinet members. This was noted to be a positive step and a fantastic piece of work. It was noted as showing the council's commitment to the environment.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. It was raised that the substantive papers for cabinet were issued a day after the agenda was published and a request that this didn't occur going forward. There was full support for this initiative, and it was a positive step to have weekly collections for food waste. It was noted that anaerobic digestion management would be monitored and ensuring that the council were going beyond the statutory requirements.

There were no responses to queries.

Councillor Swinglehurst, proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

That conditional on sufficient annual new burdens revenue grant received from government that:

- a) Cabinet approves the commencement of a new food waste collection;
- b) Authority is delegated to the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment to enact the existing option to introduce a weekly food waste service within the recyclables and waste collection contract with FCC Environment for an initial term of 6 years, including options to extend by up to a further 12 years;
- c) Authority is delegated to the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment to enact the existing variation option to within the current waste disposal contract with Mercia Waste Management Ltd to recycle the food waste;
- d) To authorise the expenditure as detailed in Appendix 1 to purchase the new food waste collection fleet and to purchase and deliver the new food containers and caddy liners;
- e) To authorise the expenditure as detailed in Appendix 1 for the required depot improvements works and to mobilise the new service;
- f) Delegate all operational decisions to implement the above recommendations and to undertake the annual review of commercial food waste fees and charges to the Head of Environment, Climate Emergency & Waste.

92. **GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE**

The member for environment introduced the report. It was confirmed that the Environment Act 2021 stated that garden waste must be collected separately and composted. However, unlike the food waste service this was a discretionary service that could be charged for. Additional recycling of 14,260 tonnes of garden waste per annum was estimated and this would support delivery of the council's current recycling targets. It was noted that alongside the food waste collection, the recycling would increase from 40% to 58% against the 2025 target of 55%.

Market research indicated that there would be a 44% to 51% uptake of the service, and a full cost recovery was anticipated provided there was an uptake of just over 19% (16,000 customers). It was confirmed this would be a year-round service, with fortnightly collections using 240L bins and the subscription fee would be £60. The green sack service would cease once the service was introduced. There will be a 10-month mobilisation period, and the service is planned to go live in March 2026.

The proposed service would increase recycling in line with the Council Plan 2024-28 and would support the objective to reduce carbon emissions, modelled on an uptake of 18,150 households. It was noted that over the projected 6-year period it was hoped that the service would produce a revenue positive outturn of £886k and if the customer base rose in line with benchmarking from other local authorities the income could rise to £500k per year based on 35,600 customers (43% uptake). It was highlighted that the 2023 consultation indicated that 51.2% of respondents would use the service. It was noted there would always be an element of risk, but it had been underwritten by an allocation of £890k in the waste reserve.

Cabinet members comments. It was noted that this was addressing a need, it was beneficial for residents and the environment whilst also having a positive revenue impact.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. The item was fully supported and confirmation that it would be a year-round service was very positive. It was requested

that the income from the service be ringfenced for the climate change and environmental projects. It was also queried if a campaign could take place to encourage residents to do home composting and it would be beneficial to have local support providing expertise to residents.

In response to queries it was noted that ringfencing the money would be considered.

In respect of composting, a campaign was carried out in 2016/17 where composters were provided but there wasn't a large uptake at the time. It was acknowledged that uptake may now be greater. It was noted that households could make a choice to use this service or do their own composting. The many benefits of composting were acknowledged.

Councillor Swinglehurst proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

That:

- a) Cabinet approves the commencement of a new chargeable garden waste collection from 30 March 2026;**
- b) Authority is delegated to the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment to enact the existing option to introduce a chargeable garden waste service within the Recyclables and Waste Collection Services Contract with FCC Environment for an initial term of 6 years, including options to extend by up to a further 12 years;**
- c) Authority is delegated to the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment to enact the existing variation option to within the current Waste Management Services Contract with Mercia Waste Management Ltd to recycle the garden waste;**
- d) To authorise the expenditure of up to £1,039,292 from the approved capital programme to purchase the new garden waste collection fleet;**
- e) To authorise the expenditure of up to £588,050 from the waste revenue reserve to fund mobilisation and to purchase and deliver the new garden waste containers;**
- f) To authorise the expenditure of up to £890,000 to underwrite any potential year losses as the new service establishes and grows the customer base;**
- g) Delegate all operational decisions to implement the above recommendations and to undertake the annual review of fees and charges to the Head of Environment, Climate Emergency & Waste.**

93. PROCUREMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES SUPPLIER TO SUPPORT HIGHWAYS & INFRASTRUCTURE

The member for transport and infrastructure introduced the report. It was noted that Balfour Beatty Living Places (the current provider) utilise WSP for top up professional services such as engineering design work and advising on specialist areas such as bridge maintenance or on landslip repairs. It was confirmed that the council's new operating model for public realm services would be moving away from a mostly outsourced model and will commence in June 2026. It was confirmed that the council were looking to procure a single professional services partner in a long-term contract to assist with the delivery of highways, transport and infrastructure work. The partnership

would be with a multi disciplined professional services provider, which had the capabilities to deliver a wide range of highways, transport, economy and environmental professional advice and to supplement and support Herefordshire's in-house teams.

The procurement would be completed and the professional services partner would be mobilised ahead of the new public realm contract start.

The benefits of a long-term professional services partner were highlighted which included having a provider which knew Herefordshire and the long-term relationship would mean that the provider would become very efficient in providing services to the council through knowledge of systems and processes, consistency of management and staff and early involvement in the development projects. This would help avoid additional fee costs creating a 3% to 5% saving over time.

A partnership relationship would also mean that the council could respond to bidding opportunities and changes in government approach quickly. It would also mean that the council had specialist support staff available quickly to help deal with emergencies.

It was confirmed that the expectation of the professional services provider would be to work with council officers to provide regular continuing professional development (CPD), training, seminars and other staff development opportunities. This would likely include a joint graduate development programme.

It was confirmed that the expectation would be for the provider to actively engage with employing local people, and would get involved with local charities, supporting local schools and consider supporting care leavers with work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

Comments from cabinet members. This was supported and noted that having this process and framework in place would mean relevant expertise could be called upon when needed. It would provide best efficiency and best value for money alongside enriching the knowledge base. Also, it linked well across two cabinet members portfolios with the work being carried out on growth, education and training.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. This was supported by all group leaders present. It was noted that being an intelligent customer and the move to providing in-house services, would only aid the new contract being successful. Caution was expressed regarding outsourcing all the services identified in the report (at paragraph 3) and a flexible approach was requested regarding how the council partners with the provider, a mixed model may provide the better outcome.

The advantages of a long-term relationship were recognised, and the social value element would be monitored. It was noted the importance of retaining local knowledge particularly regarding ecological advice. It was noted that the range for what the council currently spent on professional services was large and had not been refined for the report. It was raised that the reserves and future funding would be monitored going forward and breakdowns would be requested.

In response to queries it was noted that it could be a wide scope and procuring this in one supplier may be difficult, but market engagement sessions were taking place in May and June. It would be positive if this service could be procured in the way the council intended to. It was confirmed that the arrangement would mean that the expertise would only be used when required and when more technical knowledge was required.

Councillor Price proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

That:

- a) Cabinet agrees to the procurement of a professional services partner to support the new public realm services model and the wider highways, transport, infrastructure, ecology, environment and economic development teams.**
- b) Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to undertake the procurement and award of contract of a professional services partner.**

The meeting ended at: 15:22

Chairperson

Agenda item no. 4 - Questions from members of the public

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1.	Peter McKay, Leominster	<p>Will this years 'Professional services supplier to support Highways and Infrastructure' work programme include:-</p> <p>a) identification of Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads on Highways Map by change of line colour,</p> <p>b) identification of Unadopted Highways Not Maintainable at Public Expense on the Street Works Register, especial those that are through routes or link to public paths,</p> <p>c) showing open spaces on the Public Rights of Way Map,</p> <p>d) an addendum to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan comprising an amplification of the Public Right of Way Glossary that says CRF's and CRB's were intended to be shown as Roads Used as Public Paths, but in fact were shown as Footpaths and Bridleways, identifying them as being prospective upgrades, along with other identified anomalies, and</p> <p>e) showing long term defects in red on the road and path problem webpage?</p>	Cllr Price
<p>Response:</p> <p>Thank you for your question. We have no current plans to use any Professional Service Support for the items that you have raised. I have provided an update on each item that you have raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. At the 26th April meeting of the Local Access Forum, the council provided the forum with a copy of a list of Herefordshire's unsurfaced, unclassified roads and made a commitment for these to be displayed in an appropriate place on our public website. B. Unadopted Highways Not Maintainable at Public Expense are available on our website via the Street Works Register tab on the Highways and Public Rights of Way map. C. A search facility for Parks, Open Spaces and Sports Pitches is available on our website. The council have no current plans to include this information on the Public Rights of Way map. D. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is in place until 2028. The council will consider this amendment when redrafting the plan. E. We are currently making improvements to our public rights of way defect map and I have asked Officers to consider your suggestion. We have made additional funding available for investment in the PROW network during 2025/26 in order to re-open paths and address as many long term defects as possible. 			

Supplementary question:

Thank you for your reply to my question. I will not be attending the meeting and ask re item 'A' will these be shown with a different line colour on the Highways and Public Rights of Way Map, and re item 'B' very few if any are shown on the Street Works Register, with reply to my question 16 May 2024 being that those you are aware of and shown on the Local Street Gazetteer would be added to the Street Works Register and enquire for any progress regarding this, and re item 'C' the Highway and Public Rights of Way Map webpage provides a link to your Parks, play area and sports pitches webpage but not to your Commons and village greens webpage, or any other open space webpage you have so could these links be added?

Supplementary response:

Thank you for your supplemental question. Following on from the last meeting a few days back, we've had lots of discussions about many of the things that were raised, and as you're unable to attend today, I will provide a written response to your supplementary question.

PQ 2.	Nigel Shaw, Bromyard	Is the Cabinet Member responsible aware of the number of applications for Tree Protection Orders received by the Council in the last quarter and the Council's inability to consider applications because of a lack of resource in the appropriate department?	Cllr Swinglehurst
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Response:

Yes, I am - so far in 2025, we have received 10 applications for Tree Preservation Orders.

The applications were dealt with in a timely manner and there is no inability to deliver the service. Each of these applications were reviewed by the Natural Environment Team and desktop assessments of each were undertaken.

Of these, 5 applications were considered appropriate for a site visit using the national Tree Evaluation Method for Preservation Orders. Of these, two applications were deemed appropriate for a provisional TPO to commence the consultation process for a full TPO.

Whilst we are seeking to recruit a new Tree Officer the team is supported by specialist interim resource and is performing well.

Supplementary question:

I am much heartened by Cllr. Swinglehurst's reply.

An application I submitted over ten weeks ago met with a prompt but cursory response that ended, "given the resources available to us."

Cllr Swinglehurst and I have discussed council staff recruitment and retention issues in the past. Is she aware of current significant salary differentials between public and private sector roles in the specialist posts that deal with these and related issues? What does she think the Council can do to improve the recruitment and retention of qualified and enthusiastic staff for these vital roles?

Supplementary response:

Thank you for the supplementary question.

Yes, I am aware that there can be large differences in salaries between different organisations, although it is important to note that this is only one part of the overall employment package, so for example all Council employees are eligible for a number of wider employee benefits such as flexible working and the Local Government Pension Scheme which is typically much more competitive than most private sector pension offers.

Recognising the importance of recruitment and retention, particularly for some of these hard to recruit specialist posts, the team is currently working with our Learning and Organisational Development team to explore further opportunities such as career graded posts and increased investment in learning and development.

PQ 3.	Will Vaughn, Hereford	Are there processes and criteria within the proposed food-waste collection and disposal contracts that will allow the Council to vary its scope. or appoint a sub-contractor, to accommodate any innovative or future improved ways of collecting or processing food-waste?	Cllr Swinglehurst
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Response:

Yes. Both the waste collection contract with FCC Environment and waste disposal contract with Mercia Waste Management Ltd include change mechanisms to ensure that we can continue to drive service improvement and innovation through our waste management services.

Supplementary question:

None

Supplementary response: