



Chief Executive's report to Full Council, Herefordshire Council – July 2025

The recent **Corporate Peer Challenge**, delivered by the Local Government Association, was a positive experience for those involved. It examined five core areas - local priorities and outcomes; organisational and place leadership; governance and culture; financial planning and management; capacity for improvement – as well as (at our request) risk management, data use, and service transformation. The review team of experienced councillors and officers from other councils spent four days meeting members, staff, partners and community representatives. We gave a good account of ourselves in how we work together and with our partners. I am pleased to report that, overall, the outcome of the peer review was positive and our partnership working was particularly noted. The LGA's full report publishes in September, with our action plan to address the findings by November.

Ofsted visited on 17-18 June for the seventh monitoring visit to our children's services. The focus of the inspection centred around the quality of matching, placement and decision-making for children in care and the experiences and progress of children in care. Their formal letter of response was published on 17 July, which recognises the good progress that has been made with our improvement programme, the significantly improved quality of practice and the positive impact this is having on our care experienced children.

The next report from the Department for Education Children's Commissioner Deborah McMillan, which is an annual review of progress against our phase 2 improvement plan, is expected to be published in August. We appreciate the input we've received from Deborah since she took over this role from Eleanor Brazil in January.

I'm extremely pleased to announce that we've **appointed Tina Russell to the permanent role of Corporate Director of Children and Young People** services. Tina has worked tirelessly since joining us to successfully drive forward our children's services improvement programme at pace.

The next phase of our **children's services improvement plan** was presented to Cabinet earlier this month. The phase 3 plan continues to recognise the importance of working with children, young people and their families, and hearing their views. The new plan also includes the development and implementation of the government's Families First programme, as children's services staff transition to working with partners within local communities providing family help.

The improvement measures taken so far have led to a **reduction in the number of children and young people in council care**. There has also been a reduction in children subject to child protection processes, as the service and its partners have worked to support families experiencing challenge and crisis. The service has also seen an increase in permanent children's services staff that has enabled more stability of workers for children, and managers taking a clear and consistent leadership role.

We held our first ‘Visible and Valued’ **SEND Celebration Week** in June for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. More than 100 people took part in activities like outings, leisure, and sensory sessions - many free or discounted. It was a success, and we plan to make it annual.

A special event celebrated **Shared Lives** carers and those they support. These carers provide home-based support—from day care to full-time—for young adults leaving care, people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, or dementia. More details, including a new video, are on our [website](#).

The council has been pleased to fund new side-by-side bikes for Halo leisure centre's cycle track in Hereford. This facility **promotes cycling** for all abilities, benefiting health and wellbeing. The bikes enable people who are blind or visually impaired, and people with limited mobility to cycle safely with a driver, adding to the range of special needs bikes. The track offers a perfect setting for safe, fun and enjoyable cycling.

The council’s **draft accounts for 2024/25** were published at the end of May, a month in advance of the statutory deadline. I would like to thank Rachael Sanders, Director of Finance and her team for the tremendous efforts which made this possible. The timely completion of the accounts provides valuable assurance over the council’s financial management, and this is a huge achievement. The accounts are available to view on our website - [Draft Financial Statements 2024-25](#), alongside a set of Summary Financial Statements which provide a snapshot of the council’s financial position and performance for the year.

The Government’s **Spending Review 2025**, announced 11 June, outlines departmental revenue funding for 2026/27–2028/29, plus a fourth year for capital. It's the first multi-year review since 2021. Local council allocations await the Fair Funding Review, Business Rates Reset, and Settlement process, with provisional details expected in November 2025.

In her LGA conference speech, on Thursday 3 July, the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, announced a further step in resetting how government works with local government, by launching the [Local Government Outcomes Framework](#) (LGOF). The Framework sets 15 outcomes that Government expects to work with local authorities on to deliver key national priorities for local people and communities. Councils are being asked for their feedback by September, and the final framework is due to be published later in 2025.

On Thursday 10 July, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon OBE MP, introduced the [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#). The Bill builds on the government’s English Devolution White Paper, which was published in December 2024, and sets out the upcoming reorganisation of local government. It includes an outline of the devolution structures, how strategic authorities will operate and the role of Mayors.

Careful consideration is being given to what devolution will mean for Herefordshire, and we will update elected members when we are able.

Our sustainability team and Herefordshire Means Business hosted a **Big Green Business Breakfast** last month, where companies from across the county learned about better ways to build sustainability strategies into their businesses. Thanks to Elite Plastics, Ledbury Real Ale, and Allpay for sharing their experiences.

We were proud to support the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce Awards with Worcestershire County Council, which took place in June. The event **celebrated local businesses** and their achievements. It's good to hear how their successes are built on county business strengths and helping to grow the local economy.

In June we held a **bus summit** with staff, members, operators, and user representatives to discuss the future of bus travel and address challenges like rural service viability, funding and infrastructure. Our aim is for better bus connectivity between Hereford and our market towns so that bus travel becomes a viable option and additional choice for getting around. Actions from the summit are progressing.

Ross Cook, Director of Economy and Environment, will be leaving the council in September. Ross has been with us for three years and has overseen progress on a large number of major projects, schemes and developments. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his valued contribution, and we wish him well in his new role as Executive Director for Place with Telford and Wrekin Council. We have started the process of finding Ross' replacement and elected members will be involved in the candidate selection process.

The **Marches Forward Partnership (MFP)** Board's inaugural meeting was held on 16 July, including leaders and chief executives from Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys, Shropshire, plus stakeholders like health, housing, transport, and government representatives. The Board will meet quarterly to shape strategic focus and guide the work to foster more cross-border collaboration and development.

Work is continuing behind the scenes to prepare for the Local Government **Boundary Commission's 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. A first consultation phase is currently expected to take place from November 2025. The final recommendations will be laid in Parliament, with the new ward boundaries implemented for elections in May 2027.

I'd like to express my thanks to council staff for their preparation and response to the **recent hot weather spells**, supporting vulnerable residents, including distributing hot weather packs (bottled water, sunscreen, caps) to street homeless clients. To support residents more broadly, we've been sharing our Summer wellness tips via our various communications channels.

I was delighted to see two Herefordshire residents recognised in the **King's Birthday Honours** in June: Noel Manns with an OBE for Political and Public Service, and John Escott with the British Empire Medal for Services to Sporting Education. Congratulations to both.

At the time of writing we have not yet received a date from the **Care Quality Commission** (CQC) for their site visit to our services as part of their 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 site visit, which is anticipated to take place before the end of the year, will involve speaking with staff, managers and partners, and will be where we can demonstrate the great work we are doing. We have a positive story to tell.

As this is the last Full Council before autumn, I wish everyone a restful summer break.

Paul Walker, Chief Executive