



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

I am pleased to present this update to Council after what has been a period of progress, challenge and collaboration across our organisation and county.

We recently welcomed the final Local Government Association's **Corporate Peer Challenge** (CPC) report after their visit in the summer. I'm proud to say their report described us as a "good council striving to improve further". They recognised our strong leadership, governance, member-officer relations and commitment to transformation. The team highlighted our ongoing improvements in children's services, financial management and partnership working. Their recommendations – including accelerating our transformation programme, strengthening our data capabilities and refreshing our Medium-Term Financial Strategy – will help shape our strategic priorities going forward.

In spite of delivering a balanced budget this year we face significant financial pressures going forward. Following the publication of a **refreshed medium-term financial strategy** (MTFS), in September, we raised concerns about proposed changes to government funding that could leave us with a £27.3 million gap in 2026/27 – this was exacerbated by the loss of the £7 million Rural Services Delivery Grant. While we do have a sound financial base – as pointed out by the CPC – we are losing out to the way in which funding is allocated. We are actively engaging with government and partners to advocate for fairer funding for rural councils like ours, while at the same time we are developing plans for savings – building on the £40 million saved over the last five years, more income generation and strategic investment to ensure we can continue delivering vital services.

I am very proud of the Finance team, led by Rachael Sanders, after Herefordshire Council became the first local authority in the UK to have its **statement of accounts** — detailing financial performance, management and bookkeeping — formally approved for the previous financial year. This is an outstanding achievement and speaks to our strong financial stewardship.

After weeks of detailed preparation we recently welcomed the **Care Quality Commission's inspection** team to Herefordshire to review our Adult Social Care Services. The inspectors spent three days at Plough Lane, interviewing members and officers. Their assessment framework comprises four themes: working with people; providing support, ensuring safety and leadership. Their preparation and professionalism were exceptional, and the inspectors commented on the warm welcome and energy they experienced throughout their visit. We expect the findings of their inspection to be published in the Autumn.

We have appointed a **new Chief Technical and Data Officer** to lead our digital transformation work. Ed Garcez will take on this new role, which will be pivotal in helping us deliver better and more accessible services to residents while working smarter and more efficiently. A key enabler of our transformation agenda will be the adoption of new technologies that can bring real benefits to residents, and I am confident that Ed will help us to achieve that. At the same time we are mindful of the need to ensure an integrated approach to service delivery, especially for those who are digitally excluded or where in-person or more locally-based service provision is necessary.

As mentioned in my last update, work continues 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 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.

Herefordshire has been selected as one of 43 areas in England to join the **National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP)** - a part of the Government's Ten-Year Health Plan. The initiative aims to shift care closer to home, prevent illness and support people with complex needs through integrated services. Herefordshire's inclusion highlights the strength of its existing One Herefordshire Partnership, which already brings together NHS providers, GPs, local government, and the voluntary sector to deliver joined-up care. The programme will support local innovation and help scale successful approaches.

We are pleased that Hereford has been selected to receive up to £20 million of funding as part of a Government programme called **Pride in Place** Strategy to "support and empower communities at the hyper-local level". This programme was previously known as the Plan for Neighbourhoods, and in September the government announced a further 169 "left-behind" communities being added. We will be working with the government and members on how best to invest this funding.

We hosted over 100 delegates at a fantastic **Herefordshire Employment & Skills Conference**. The event brought together businesses, training providers, and educators to address skills gaps, workforce planning, and apprenticeships. Keynote speaker, and former SAS member, Mark Billingham MBE QCB inspired attendees with his journey and message of resilience. This conference is part of our commitment to supporting better-paid jobs and economic development across Herefordshire.

Officers and members have been working hard to facilitate the welcoming the **Baton of Hope** to Hereford (on 2 October), raising awareness of suicide prevention. The procession will be the only one of its kind in the West Midlands region and is expected to see thousands of residents – some of whom have personal experience – taking part. Members will also have seen our updated Suicide Prevention Strategy was presented to Cabinet in September.

Congratulations to the council's **fostering team** for their nomination at the West Midlands Children's Services Team Excellence Awards 2025 in the Regional Team Excellence category. The team have all worked so hard to ensure our fostering service is second to none, and they were rightly recognised by their regional professional peers in Children's Services.

More broadly, Herefordshire is now part of a **newly formed Integrated Care Board (ICB)** cluster, which includes NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB and NHS Coventry and Warwickshire ICB. This move is part of a national strategy to strengthen leadership and collaboration across neighbouring systems while maintaining local accountability. Simon Trickett has been confirmed as the permanent Joint Chief Executive of the cluster. Crishni Waring, Chair of NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB, will also take on the role of Joint Chair for both boards from 1 October. Although the two ICBs remain separate statutory bodies, the shared leadership model is designed to improve strategic alignment, deliver efficiencies, and support more integrated care across the region.

**Jane Ives**, Managing Director of Wye Valley NHS Trust, retired in September 2025 after nearly a decade leading the organisation and a long career in the NHS. She has been succeeded by Sarah Shingler, former Chief Nursing Officer at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. Sarah brings extensive leadership experience across acute and community services, and her appointment reflects a move toward more integrated leadership across the region. I would like to thank Jane for her collaborative and engaging work with Herefordshire Council.

We were saddened to hear of the passing of two distinguished public servants in recent weeks. **Mark Yates**, Chair of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, died on 23 September 2025 after a short illness. Mark was a widely respected leader whose career spanned decades of public service, including his time as Chief Fire Officer of Hereford and

Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. Since becoming Chair of the Trust in 2021, Mark brought compassion, clarity and unwavering dedication to improving care and supporting colleagues across the system. His legacy will be felt for years to come, and our thoughts are with his family, friends, and all who had the privilege of working alongside him.

Former Mayor of Hereford, **David Fleet** passed away at home on 16 September. Former Councillor Fleet, who was also a Freeman of the City, was a well-respected and liked public figure who worked tirelessly for the people of Hereford.

Finally, you will have seen that I will be stepping down as Chief Executive in March 2026 after 43 years in public service. It has been an honour to serve Herefordshire and work alongside such dedicated colleagues. I remain committed to supporting a smooth transition and ensuring our momentum continues. There are a number of big challenges ahead and I am determined to help us navigate through them all.

In the meantime, I'm looking forward to the Parish Summit on 7 October, where officers and members will come together with clerks and councillors from town and parish councils to discuss how we can strengthen our partnerships in the interests of the residents we all serve.