



Chief Executive's report to Full Council, Herefordshire Council – 5 December 2025

Officers and teams continue to work at pace supporting the administration and responding to the needs of members, residents, partners and stakeholders across Herefordshire. I am pleased to update Council on some key highlights of our delivery, investment and engagement, as well as setting out key challenges and issues we are facing.

We **recently welcomed Ofsted** for their inspection of our children's services, and the initial feedback on the completion of their visit was very positive. They have rightly recognised the significant progress we have made and the positive impact our teams have had on the lives of children and young people in Herefordshire.

The final report is set to be published on 12th of January 2026. I want to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to Tina Russell and all the dedicated teams in the Children and Young People's directorate for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts throughout this inspection. And to thank Cllr Powell for his strong leadership and to all elected members for their continued challenge and support. The inspection is the latest step in our long-standing improvement journey on behalf of Herefordshire's children and families.

We are still **awaiting the outcome of the Care Quality Commission (CQC)** assessment of our adult social care services. The on-site review concluded a few weeks ago following months of preparation and evidence submission. Initial feedback from the visiting team was positive, noting the warm welcome and the passion and commitment shown by staff and partners, including those with lived experience. We expect the draft report soon, which will provide a clearer picture of our performance and next steps, which will be presented to members as soon as possible.

An area of particular focus at this time is **developing our budget** for next year and addressing the funding gap. As mentioned in my last report, in spite of delivering a balanced budget this year, we face significant financial pressures going forward. 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.

However, with the important contributions of members, we have a strong track record of financial discipline. Thanks to your support, we balanced our budget this year and have secured £40 million in savings over the last five years while maintaining and enhancing key services for residents. This is why we approach the funding gap from a position of strength – but we must also consider taking some decisive action. Our ongoing financial planning includes options for:

- Generating more income locally — through tradable services; reviewing fees, charges and rates;
- Reviewing expenditure on capital projects — prioritising essential infrastructure while potentially deferring low-impact spending;
- Driving efficiencies across services — finding smarter and more efficient ways to deliver outcomes;
- Reviewing the viability and value of non-discretionary functions — while boosting the efficiency of statutory services;
- Investing in our estate, technology and AI — to reduce long-term costs and enhance service delivery.

I am pleased to say we are on track with our 2025/26 **delivery plan**: 206 of 240 KPIs (85.8%) are complete or progressing well across the People, Place, Growth and Transformation objectives. £1.6m of this year's £3.9m savings target is delivered, with the remainder on course, and over half of £11.9m carried-forward savings achieved.

Officers have delivered significant **progress across our place-based functions** since my last report. Work is advancing on the Holme Lacy Road improvement scheme, which will widen carriageways, upgrade junctions and add new cycling and pedestrian facilities to make a vital eastern route into Hereford safer and smoother. Our extensive 2025/26 resurfacing programme continues at pace with many schemes completed on or before time and to a high standard. Responding to local concerns, we have reviewed speed limits in priority areas and introduced a temporary 40mph limit on the A465 at Locks Garage crossroads while longer-term safety measures are designed. Investment in public rights of way continues, with the popular Weobley-to-Dilwyn footpath reopened thanks to a new bridge, restoring an important rural link and encouraging walking and cycling.

Alongside these initiatives, **enforcement teams have stepped up action** against fly-tipping, illegal waste carriers and anti-social behaviour, issuing fines and removing tonnes of waste from verges and lay-bys. Recent prosecutions, including a £43,000 fine for an illegal scrap metal gang, penalties for caravan dumping in a beauty spot, and action against persistent offenders in Bromyard. These prosecutions send a clear message that environmental crime will not be tolerated.

We are **continuing to invest in new and expanded school facilities** to create inclusive learning environments across Herefordshire. The £2.4m redevelopment of Hampton Dene Primary School is underway, delivering modern classrooms and improved outdoor spaces. Trinity Primary has introduced an innovative support service for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, offering tailored interventions in a safe setting. At Holmer CE Academy, flood resilience measures are being designed alongside leisure centre upgrades to protect education and community activities during severe weather.

We've launched the **Safer School Streets** initiative at five schools, introducing timed vehicle restrictions, better signage and community engagement to make journeys safer and healthier. The scheme reduces congestion, promotes walking and cycling, and supports cleaner air and improved health for children. We've also extended bus travel concessions so older residents, disabled people and students can stay connected at lower cost. Free travel now starts earlier and finishes later, helping people attend appointments, access education and take part in community life - reducing isolation and supporting independence.

As well as delivering on our core functions we continue to **meaningfully engage our communities**, partners and stakeholders. In November, the council hosted the Third Rivers Conference in Hereford, bringing together farmers, landowners, environmental groups, academics and government agencies to tackle nutrient challenges in the River Wye and its tributaries. The event shared updates on restoration projects, national research and practical pilot schemes to reduce phosphate levels through sustainable land management and innovative farming practices, reinforcing Herefordshire's leadership in collaborative river recovery.

October's **Employment & Skills Conference** brought together employers, training providers, schools and young people for a day of workshops, keynote sessions and success stories showcasing careers in engineering, digital technology, green construction and health care. The event concluded with the launch of the Herefordshire Apprenticeship Awards - an annual celebration of outstanding apprentices and the businesses that support them.

During October, a number of Council teams participated in **Exercise Pegasus**, the UK's largest-ever national pandemic preparedness exercise led by the UK government. Staff from across the Council contributed significantly, either by actively role-playing in the simulated response with regional and national partners or by supporting the organisation and facilitation of the local

elements of this complex, multi-phase exercise. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone involved, with particular gratitude to our Emergency Planning Team and Public Health Team for their expertise, dedication and many hours of hard work. Their efforts during this major national undertaking will have directly strengthened Herefordshire's resilience and will significantly bolster our ability to prepare for, and respond effectively to, any future pandemic threats.

On 20 November, Cabinet approved the **draft Local Transport Plan (LTP 5)**, which comes to Full Council today for adoption. Covering 2025–2041, this forward-looking strategy replaces the 2016 plan and aligns Herefordshire with national priorities while expanding travel choices. Adoption of LTP 5 provides a strong policy framework for delivering the Hereford Bypass as part of our wider investment to enhance the scope, quality and choice of transport while helping to enable economic growth.

I would like to thank members and officers for their preparations and response to **Storm Claudia**. I know many of them worked tirelessly alongside emergency services, parishes and voluntary groups to protect vulnerable people, households and businesses – and then help the process of recovery while being prepared for future adverse conditions.

In accordance with the council's ambitious plans for the future I was pleased we were able to appoint **John Hobbs**, a seasoned public sector leader with extensive expertise in infrastructure, economic development and environmental services, as our new Corporate Director of Economy and Environment. In his new position, John will spearhead key initiatives such as fostering economic growth, advancing capital projects like the Hereford bypass and Shire Hall restoration, and overseeing environmental protections, waste management and enforcement all in alignment with the council's County Plan priorities. I am grateful to members of the Employment Panel for their support in the process.

I was also pleased to welcome Stacey Carter as our new Head of Strategic Finance and deputy Section 151 officer – a critical role, supporting Rachael Sanders, as we navigate a challenging budget setting process and economic landscape.

I am continuing my work in convening my counterparts as part of the **Herefordshire Chief Executives Group (HCEG)**, comprising chief officers from the Wye Valley Trust (WVT), Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and West Mercia Police. This important group sponsors key collaborative work strands where in coming together we can address the root causes of some shared challenges. At the last meeting, we shared insights about the Ledbury Local plan and the proposal for additional health facilities in the area. We also approved the 'Herefordshire narrative' - a joint position statement on our county, its people, places, strengths, challenges and future to help articulate our shared ambition to enable individuals to live their best life here in Herefordshire. And, we approved our priority work strands for the next quarter, namely: vulnerable people with complex needs, access to housing, resilience of services and healthy communities. In response to the Child Friendly Herefordshire policy – unanimously adopted by Council in October 2025 – HCEG are keen to adopt this as a joint work strand, which I believe can help with our ambitions towards ensuring every child in Herefordshire is safe, heard, supported and able to thrive.

More broadly, I have continued, alongside the Leader, to engage our counterparts in our neighbouring local authorities and **key regional partnerships**, such as the Marches Forward Partnership, covering key challenges such as transport, housing and devolution.

In November, I was proud to represent the council to **support the Poppy Train initiative** for Remembrance Day - a moving reminder of our community's strength and the importance of honouring those who served.

The **Local Government Boundary Commission** for England has now launched a public consultation (from 25 November 2025 to 2 February 2026) to shape new electoral wards in Herefordshire. The review aims to "ensure fair representation", with each councillor representing approximately the same number of electors and ward boundaries reflecting local communities. Following an earlier phase, the Commission concluded Herefordshire should retain 53 single-member wards, maintaining its current number of councillors. Residents are invited to contribute views online, by email or via post to help refine proposed patterns of representation. This consultation marks the second phase in the Commission's review process. Once complete, draft recommendations will be published ahead of final decisions later this year. I am grateful to members and officers for their support in this review.

We were deeply saddened by the **death of Andzie Stanik**, a valued member of the FCC Environment team. I was honoured to visit the site to lay flowers and met with his colleagues, who spoke warmly of his dedication and character. Our thoughts remain with his family and friends, and with the two colleagues injured in the incident - we wish them a full recovery. My sincere thanks go to the emergency services, council staff and responders for their professionalism in such difficult circumstances.

In summary, this report highlights continued progress against our delivery plan, proactive financial management in challenging circumstances, and steps forward on infrastructure, education and community investment. It also reflects our commitment to resilience, partnership working and value for money for Herefordshire residents. I ask members to note these updates and the themes they represent: financial discipline, strategic planning and investment, and high-quality services for residents.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or want any further information on any of the items in my report.

Paul Walker
Chief Executive
Herefordshire Council