Herefordshire Council

DRAFT - Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 20 January 2026 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 Harry Bramer, Barry Durkin, Carole Gandy, Dan Hurcomb, Philip Price and Pete Stoddart**
Cabinet Members in remote attendance	**None** *Cabinet members attending the meeting remotely, e.g. through video conferencing facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.*

Group leaders / representatives in attendance	Councillors Clare Davies, Liz Harvey, Terry James, Stef Simmons,
Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance	Councillors Pauline Crockett, Toni Fagan and Ben Proctor and Louis Stark
Officers in attendance:	A Campbell, H Hall, J Hobbs, C Porter, R Sanders, P Walker and D Webb, S Gregory (Secretary), D Thornton.

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies from Councillors Biggs and Powell.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

53. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

54. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 9 - 18)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

55. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 19 - 20)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

56. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no reports from scrutiny committees for consideration at this meeting.

57. 2026/2027 DRAFT BUDGET - REVENUE

Councillor Stoddart, cabinet member for finance and corporate services introduced the report. It was noted that the budget had been developed during a time of significant financial pressure, particularly due to changes in Government funding for rural areas. Despite these challenges, the council was proposing a balanced budget that protected essential services whilst investing in the county’s future.

Recent changes to the national Fair Funding Review meant that Herefordshire will see a £17.3m reduction in Government funding over the next three years. The new funding formula gives greater weight to urban pressures and does not fully recognise the higher cost of delivering services in rural areas. By 2028/29, Herefordshire's Government funding per person is expected to be 40% lower than that received by urban councils.

To help protect services, the council proposed a 4.99% council tax increase made up of 2.99% core council tax and 2% adult social care precept. For a Band D property, this would mean a rise to £2,067.63, an increase of about £1.89 per week.

To balance the budget for 2026/27, the council proposed £20m in savings across all service areas, a new Contract Inflation Fund to manage rising costs and £3.2m from the Business Rates Risk Reserve to offset reduced Government funding.

Despite the financial challenges, the council would continue to support vulnerable adults and older people, improve children's services following recent progress and a 'Good' Ofsted rating, deliver major projects and invest in the local economy, manage increasing pressure in waste services and home-to-school transport.

From April 2026, the council will introduce 30 minutes of free parking in all council-operated car parks, supporting shoppers, residents and local businesses. Parking tariffs will be adjusted by an average of 8–10% to help maintain car parks and transport infrastructure. Even with this change, prices remain below where they would have been had charges risen with inflation since 2023.
Every ward councillor will also receive £1,000 to support local community projects aligned with the Council Plan.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) highlights further pressures ahead, including an estimated funding gap of £20m in 2027/28 and £83m over the full period to 2029/30.
The council will begin work immediately on its Future Financial Strategy to address these gaps.

External auditors have confirmed that the council has robust financial management and effective arrangements in place to identify and manage risks.

Lastly, it was noted that the Fair Funding Review had resulted in a substantial reduction in Government support for Herefordshire, creating a £30m funding gap. This shortfall was attributed to decreased national investment in rural areas rather than local financial mismanagement. Members were advised that the county now receives around 40% less funding per resident compared with urban authorities, and that the reduction in the Government's contribution to core spending power has increased pressure on local taxpayers and businesses.

Despite these challenges, it was highlighted that the Conservative-led council had set a balanced budget for the year, prioritising the protection of vulnerable residents, the maintenance of essential services, and continued investment in Herefordshire's future.

Comments from cabinet members:

Members raised several points in relation to the draft budget:

- Thanks were extended to Rachael Sanders and the Finance Team for their work in achieving a balanced budget.
- Concerns regarding the future of the DSG override were noted and the uncertainty beyond 2028 which could have a serious national impact on councils. The need to continue raising this with Government at every opportunity was highlighted.

- It was noted that The Fair Funding Review did not represent a genuinely fair allocation for Herefordshire.
- A correction in the report was highlighted, stating that one reference should be to the 'garden waste service', not food waste (which was referenced twice) on page 78 of the bundle.
- The Pop and Shop scheme was welcomed, emphasising its intention to boost town-centre footfall by reducing barriers to short-stay parking.
- It was highlighted that the flood risk team had now been made a permanent part of the base budget following its temporary expansion after last year's flooding incidents.
- There was ongoing work with parish councils on drainage, public rights of way and the Lengthsman Scheme which will continue, with sufficient funding secured for all schemes for the year ahead. It was noted that these parish-led schemes remain cost-effective and contribute significantly to improved highway conditions.
- Funding of £50,000 had been identified to support a county-wide litter strategy, developed collaboratively with members of the Green Group.

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Green Group outlined their views and noted that:

- Thanks were extended to the Chief Finance Officer and Cllr Stoddart for their work.
- Strong concerns about the impact of significant funding cuts were noted, as rural areas like Herefordshire were already facing high levels of deprivation.
- The need for continued pressure on Government to address the unfair funding position was stressed.
- The lack of detailed information available before scrutiny was highlighted and more clarity on spending and delivery targets were requested.
- Concerns were raised about the Talk Community reshape, particularly the risk of reduced support for young people and youth services.
- Assurance was sought that the 16–19 bus pass pilot, previously approved by Council, would have a clear budget line.
- It was queried whether partnership working and savings proposals, particularly relating to Hoople, were realistic and deliverable.

The Independents for Herefordshire outlined their views and noted that:

- The administration's difficult financial situation was acknowledged, attributing it to the unfair outcomes of the Government's Fair Funding Review and the loss of rural-supporting grants. It was noted that producing a balanced budget without exceptional Government support was challenging and acknowledged the efforts of officers and Cabinet members.
- Concerns were raised about the deliverability of the proposed savings, citing the lack of detailed delivery plans, late publication of equality impact assessments, and limited evidence of partner engagement.
- The increase in the council's projected financial gap over the three-year period was highlighted and it was raised that the current plans did not credibly address the £80m shortfall. The need for improved transformation, better partnership working, stronger commercial skills, and more effective communication were raised.

The Liberal Democrat Group outlined their views and noted that:

- Savings often take too long to deliver or prove unachievable.

- It was stressed that, following the Council Tax meeting in February, focus must be placed on how the required savings can be achieved without causing significant difficulty for residents.

The True Independents had left the meeting.

In responding to the comments raised, the Cabinet Members noted that:

- Whilst some statements carried early-December dates, this did not reflect the true timeline of the work undertaken. It was highlighted that the finance team had acted promptly, noting that the Government's draft settlement was only released on 17 December 2025 and if more review time were required, the Government should provide it.
- It was noted that the proposed savings within Community Wellbeing formed part of a wider consultation. It was stressed that members would have the opportunity to participate in the consultation, after which the results would be reviewed and decisions made, with all options remaining open at this stage.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussions by proposing and invited a seconder for the decision before them which is that Cabinet:

a) approves the 2026/27 draft revenue budget, which includes the key pressures for each Directorate and savings proposals, for consultation with Members, the council's relevant scrutiny committees, business rate payers and the public; and

b) acknowledges that the funding assumed in this draft budget is an estimate of expected funding; to be confirmed following publication of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27 expected in February 2026

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

58. DRAFT - 2026/27 CAPITAL INVESTMENT BUDGET AND CAPITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Councillor Stoddart, cabinet member for finance and corporate services introduced the report. It was noted that the capital programme covers investment that provides benefit for more than one year, and that the baseline used was the capital programme approved by Council in February 2025, updated to reflect reprofiling undertaken in line with external audit recommendations.

It was highlighted that fourteen new capital proposals had been identified for 2026/27, totalling £44m. These proposals support priorities within the Council Plan across People, Place, Growth and Transformation. Key areas of investment included the provision of temporary and emergency accommodation, alternative school provision and Pupil Referral Units, improvements to technology to support service efficiency, infrastructure to support housing growth, resilience measures across school and property assets, improvements to public rights of way, and continued investment in the highway network.

It was reported that £10m had been added to support the delivery of affordable housing, with the intention to fund this through borrowing supported by housing benefit income, reduced temporary accommodation costs, and potential Homes England grants. A further £5m had been allocated to establish an Historic Building Fund to support major heritage assets including the Museum & Art Gallery, Shirehall and Town Hall.

It was noted that a review of the current capital programme had identified projects that were no longer required or that could be funded through alternative sources. As a result, a total of £2.65m had been removed, alongside the removal of additional allocations for employment land, public realm investment, road safety schemes and school transport fleet purchases, now to be funded or managed through other routes.

It was noted that the Government has extended flexibilities allowing the use of capital receipts to fund transformation expenditure to 2029/30. The council intends to make use of this flexibility, with £1m of eligible revenue transformation activity in 2026/27 to be funded from capital receipts, subject to funds being available.

It was emphasised that inclusion in the capital programme did not constitute approval to proceed, and that each scheme will require a detailed business case and separate governance decision. The capital strategy, developed in accordance with CIPFA guidelines, sets out the framework for how capital priorities, borrowing levels and risk appetite are determined.

It was noted that environmental considerations will continue to be assessed during project development, and that monthly budget control meetings and project boards provided assurance regarding delivery, risk management and financial oversight.

In summary it was highlighted that the programme represented an ambitious but deliverable set of proposals aligned to the Council Plan.

Comments from cabinet members:

Members raised several points in relation to the draft capital budget and strategy.

- It was explained that the capital allocation was intended to address a significant backlog of over 100 public rights-of-way bridges that were currently unusable or in poor condition. Some bridges had been out of action for six to seven years, and the funding will help replace as many as possible.
- It was also reported that £500k from this capital allocation had been directly provided to parish councils over the past two years, enabling repairs to be delivered locally, including notable work such as the Weobley Bridge repairs

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Independent for Herefordshire Group outlined their views and noted:

- That the national funding formula and wider Government policy continued to disadvantage Herefordshire, and efforts must persist to challenge this unfair situation.
- It was raised that the administration must act prudently and scale back plans to limit the impact on residents and statutory services.
- Concern was expressed that the capital programme lacked prudence, highlighting excessive planned borrowing and insufficient consideration of delaying locally funded schemes while alternative Government funding was pursued.
- It was raised that insufficient provision had been made for the council's obligations regarding the restoration of listed buildings, including the Shirehall, Town Hall and the Museum & Art Gallery, and noted that further funding will be required.
- Concerns were raised that there was no credible plan to deliver the much-needed county SEND provision following the withdrawal of Government funding.
- There was criticism regarding the removal of funding for employment land in market towns and the lack of progress in bringing forward development on third-party-owned land.

- The administration were challenged regarding its claim that no spending occurs without full business cases, pointing to expenditure linked to the Southern Link Road and Western Relief Road as contradictory.
- It was raised that the current approach to financial governance was inadequate and suggested external auditors should scrutinise it closely.
- It was noted that the capital programme's proposal for over £122m of borrowing over three years, alongside an existing £84m gap in the medium-term financial plan, did not reflect current realities or residents' needs and should be urgently revised.

The Green Group outlined their views and noted:

- The significant pressure on the revenue budget was acknowledged, noting that savings were already being made while the capital budget proposes further funding requirements.
- Concern was raised about the additional £5m proposed for the Southern Link Road, stating there was no evidence base to justify its claimed traffic benefits and no confidence that a full bypass will ever be delivered due to a lack of Government funding.
- There was mixed or inconsistent justification for the scheme claimed to support housing growth yet not linked to any clear development evidence.
- There was a need for a full detailed business case, including environmental and transport assessments in line with DfT Transport Analysis Guidance. It was raised that decisions were being taken prematurely. Concern that residents would be disappointed when they realised a bypass and second river crossing were unlikely, despite additional borrowing.
- It was noted that costs for the Shirehall restoration were now confirmed to exceed the original budget, resulting in additional funding requests.
- Concern was expressed about the removal of £1.2m for the Market Town Investment Strategy, replaced instead with LTP funding. It was raised that this reduced investment in rural market towns in favour of major Hereford-based projects.
- The strategic housing and emergency accommodation borrowing was welcomed, recognising that increasing council-owned temporary accommodation would reduce long-term revenue expenditure.

The Liberal Democrat Group outlined their views and noted that:

- Some members focused on financial costs without acknowledging the substantial revenue the council will receive from additional housing.
- Highlighted that for every thousand new homes built, the council will gain significant extra income.
- Stated that the council would be in a better financial position had it not been required to repay over £20m due to the previous cancellation of the link road.

In responding to the comments raised, the Cabinet Members noted that:

- The council was disadvantaged due to funded projects previously being cancelled by a former administration, resulting in lost investment, including Government and LEP funding and damaged trust.
- The need for continued economic growth was emphasised, including creating better-paid jobs and affordable homes.
- Major infrastructure was essential for future growth, housing delivery and long-term planning. It was also crucial for supporting young people, to address the DSG deficit, and enabling economic growth.
- The escalating cost of major projects was highlighted, which reinforced the need to act now.

- Warned against viewing the capital allocation in isolation, highlighting the administration's wider track record of investment, including the development of Ross-on-Wye Business Park as an example of support for market towns.
- Asserted that the administration invests where it can and has a strong overall capital programme, which should be considered as a whole rather than focusing only on amendments.
- It was clarified that the £1.2m Market Town Investment replacement with LTP/LTG funding was not a cut but a reallocation to use Government funding first.
- Explained that future LTG funding (announced in September 2025) provided £29m, making it appropriate to utilise Government funds ahead of capital budget allocations.
- Highlighted the council's significant investment in highways, noting £5m for resurfacing this year and over £16m invested since May 2023 across structures and highways. It was confirmed that resurfacing investment was transformational and must be maintained.
- Stressed the importance of prioritising long-term investment over short-term fixes.
- It was stated that investment in restoring heritage assets (Shirehall, Town Hall, Museum & Art Gallery) was essential and long-term. The council's responsibility as custodians of historic buildings was emphasised.
- Noted that restoration will, in time, generate income through lettings and potential external grants.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussions by proposing and invited a seconder for the decision before them which is that Cabinet:

Recommendations:
That: Cabinet recommends the following to Council

a) **To approve the revised capital programme for 2026/27 attached at appendix C;**

b) **Approve the capital strategy at appendix D; and**

c) **Approve the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts of up to £1.0 million in 2026/27, to support transformation to generate ongoing revenue savings and reduce service delivery costs in future years.**

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

The meeting ended at 4.33 pm **Chairperson**

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

<table>
<tr><th>Question No.</th><th>Questioner</th><th>Question</th><th>Question to</th></tr>
<tr><td>PQ 1.</td><td>Mr Peter McKay, Leominster</td><td>Reply to question 1st May were advised that you would consider an addendum to the 2018-2028 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 when redrafting the plan in 2028, and on 17th July that you would consider drafting this addendum now, in consultation with Members, Officers and the Local Access Forum members. May I enquire if this is progressing?</td><td>Councillor Hurcomb</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Response:
Following an officer review, this is not something that we are able to include in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Herefordshire recorded Carriage Road Footpaths (CRFs) as footpaths and Carriage Road Bridleways (CRBs) as bridleways when the Definitive Map was created in 1952. These legal records can only be changed by submitting an application for a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) which has supporting evidence. The Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) process is legislated and is already covered in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan with each application being considered according to the Statement of Priorities on a case-by-case basis.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary Question:
The ROWIP makes no mention of CRF’s and CRB’s so an addendum is requested, with a) 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 (RUPP’s), plus b) a 'List of CRF’s and CRB’s', the LAF when asked considering that it would not be appropriate to put a document raised by a member of the public on its webpage, providing evidence base information for raising DMMOA’s, supported by additional evidence, and c) providing a base for making the case to seek any additional funding required, CRF’s and CRB’s coming about due to Government Guidance using these non-statutory terms rather than RUPP, so will you reconsider and draft an addendum as was agreed?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary Response:
As stated above, following an officer review, this is not something that we are able to include in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan currently.</td></tr>
<tr><td>PQ 2.</td><td>Merry Albright,</td><td>Given that Herefordshire Council are experiencing significant financial pressures, does the Cabinet think that it is now</td><td>Councillor Swinglehurst</td></tr>
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<tr><td></td><td>Co-Chair of the Herefordshire Construction Industry Lobby Group</td><td>prudent, and ethically fair, to review the housing ban that has been in place since 2019?
Now that agencies have confirmed in their DWPP that housing is a negligible source of the phosphorous load and that Welsh Water have reduced more than their ‘fair share’ of phosphate, would cabinet agree that the catastrophic social and economic losses caused by the long moratorium are not justified, and that these impacts should have been assessed and balanced against possible ecological gains before a moratorium was put in place almost 7 years ago?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Response:
Whilst there is not a ban or formal moratorium on housing development in the Lugg catchment we acknowledge that there has been a significant impact to planning applications, and the resulting constraints on housing development, due to the government’s necessity to demonstrate that development is nutrient neutral before planning permission can be granted.

At our meeting with you in December, we agreed to write to government (due by the end of January) to express our concerns regarding the impact of these requirements on housing development and our wider economy, whilst recognising the need to find a sustainable long term solution to protecting and restoring the health of our rivers. In the meantime the council continues to bring forward projects to create phosphate credits such as the proposed new wetland at Dilwyn, and to accept private mitigation schemes through the planning process wherever possible (in consultation with Natural England).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary Question:
Sadly, my question about whether the cabinet agree, having looked at the most recent data and documents, that the social and economic losses/costs endured by housing restrictions are disproportionate and unjustified wasn’t answered.

Nonetheless we are relieved to hear that the Dilwyn Wetland project has finally been activated, and note that there are ample funds with Herefordshire Council from grants and credits sales, to potentially accelerate other credit projects and meet the outstanding and projected need. We very much appreciate the support work that is undertaken by council officers with regard to private mitigation proposals, despite the ever changing complexities of this. And we very much appreciate the positive meeting in December and the offer of follow up meetings, thank you.

Would it be possible to prepare an overview of the council credit situation and any long term credit delivery plans (including timescales, credit costs, allocation processes and the catchment area served by each council project) given that there is sadly still no meaningful or compliant wider catchment restoration plan from agencies, and that private mitigation projects are increasingly difficult?</td></tr>
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Supplementary Response: Thank you for the question. The details of current and future phosphate credits (as they become available) are published on the council website which is currently being updated ([Phosphate credits Lugg catchment - Herefordshire Council).]() We are progressing as quickly as possible the development of the phase 2 schemes, for example we completed the acquisition of the land required for Dilwyn wetland scheme in November 2025. We intend to bring an update on all of the phase 2 schemes to a cabinet meeting in March, with information therefore in the public domain as to progress and timescales. The Council is also exploring options to work with Private Mitigation Developers to increase the supply of credits. Similarly, the Council is also in discussions with Natural England regarding the recently announced Environmental Delivery Plans which we hope will improve the situation. The council welcomes the on-going discussions and information being shared by housing developers, in helping our understanding of the impacts and to seek identify solutions with government to unlock future growth while protecting our outstanding local environment. Thank you.			
PQ 3.	**Ben Albright, Border Oak Design & Construction Ltd**	**“Herefordshire has a very strong tradition of producing and supporting successful small and medium family businesses which serve the local area and operate further afield - representing the county and creating jobs, making products, delivering services and generating inward investment. Trading conditions for small business and family firms has become increasingly difficult - with government changes to inheritance tax, business rates, national insurance, minimum wage etc negatively impacting upon small and family businesses and placing intolerable strains upon the Herefordshire business network. Would Herefordshire Council be able to write to the Government in support of your small, medium and family owned businesses, to make clear that the burdens are unsustainable and are most keenly felt in small rural counties such as Herefordshire?”**	**Leader of the Council**
Response:			

Yes, I will gladly write to government to highlight how the changes to inheritance tax, business rates, national insurance, and minimum wage are all having a detrimental impact on local businesses. The Herefordshire Business Growth Board has raised with government through the national business board network, and I will encourage the Board to write to government (and other relevant parties) to directly to raise their concerns as well.

Supplementary Question:
Thank you for your positive response and the offer to write to the Government on behalf of the SMEs and family businesses that are proud to call Herefordshire home. It is very disheartening to hear such despondency from a diverse range of sectors that have historically served our rural areas so well - and who are integral to one another, the county economy and rural communities - especially tourism, hospitality and housing.

Is there anything that we can collectively do to help Herefordshire Council, the Economic Development Team and the Herefordshire Business Growth Board amplify and communicate our concerns to the Government?

Supplementary Response:
We would encourage any businesses negatively impacted by these changes to also write directly to government to explain and to demonstrate how this was having a negative effect. It would also be helpful for businesses to share their specific experiences with the council and the Herefordshire Business Growth Board, so we can better explain the cumulative impact on the economy. Businesses impacted should please contact the Herefordshire Growth Hub Team on 01432 383343 or email business@herefordshire.gov.uk to raise these very important issues.

PQ 4.	**Jeremy Milln, Hereford**	***The Capital Strategy 2026-31 at Appendix D under item 8 of today's agenda proposes a capital investment of just £1.7m to bring our network of footways and cycleways back to a 'new condition' over the five year period. It is less than proposed for traffic signals alone and only about 1% of the figure for motor road infrastructure. BCRs typically confirm that these comparatively tiny sums for footways and cycleways represent far better value in view of their environmental, financial and health benefits over motor roads. How will the cabinet member apply this knowledge to re-assessing his proposed SLR now that its cost has ballooned by another £5m to be funded by local tax-payers at a time of intense cost pressure, so will he add the missing foot and cycleways, discontinue the scheme or ignore advice and carry on regardless?***	**Councillor Price**

Response:
Maintaining and improving our footways and cycleways is essential to ensuring safe, convenient and accessible travel for everyone. This year we will invest £50 million in Highway Maintenance programme (£23.9 million funded by the Department for Transport), including for footways and cycleways.

Alongside this, we are investing £1 million in the Public Rights of Way network next year, with a further £250,000 available to parish councils to support locally identified improvements.

However, our commitment to active travel extends well beyond maintenance. The development of the Holme Lacy Road and Quiet Routes programme is a strategic part of the wider bypass plans. From the outset, the approach has been to enhance key active-travel corridors ahead of the construction of phase one of the bypass, ensuring that safe, attractive alternatives for walking and cycling are in place as the road scheme progresses. This is why the council has been delivering major active-travel improvements across Hereford in parallel with moving the bypass forward. As previously set out, phase one of the bypass does not include footways or cycleways; instead, the strategy has been to focus investment where it will have the greatest benefit for everyday local journeys - such as Holme Lacy Road - while ensuring new strategic road infrastructure can be delivered efficiently.

Supplementary Question:
The Cabinet member misleads himself. The Holme Lacy Road and Quiet routes programmes were initiated by, and funded during, the previous administration for a completely different part of the City and have nothing whatever to do with his proposed bypass, let alone were they intended as excuses for its lack of active travel provision as he seems to think.

The Department for Transport's Manual for Streets and the Departments Manual for Roads and Bridges, by placing pedestrians and cyclists at the top of the user hierarchy, require dedicated footways and cycleways for new peri-urban roads. How then will vulnerable non-motorised users needing safe and connected infrastructure be considered to avoid severance, inequality and exclusion caused by his bypass now that his administration has redefined it as a housing growth corridor and how will he persuade National Highways to adopt it as the A49 trunk as he promises when it is obviously deficient?

Supplementary Response:
Thank you Mr Milln for yet another complex question. I'm afraid we're going to continue to disagree on this subject. The phase one has planning permission as was the rules and regulations at the time of getting that planning. We are coming up with the business case later this year as I've previously said to you and at that point we will explain entirely as to why in my view and the view put forward to the Department of Transport with regards to the A49 that it is not necessary to have active travel measures as part of the road. We will continue to disagree on this, so you can ask me this question every council meeting if you like but my answer will be the same. We have taken onboard the active travel measures for the Holme Lacey Road and that is deemed to be sufficient for active travel measures to support building of the phase one bypass. Thank you.

PQ 5.	**Karen Ennis, Ledbury**	***The budgeted project development costs of the Hereford Bypass Phase 1 are now shown as £9m, and the previous costs written off were £20m. I***	**Councillor Price**

		would like to ask whether bringing Phase 1 to fruition before Phase 2 (which is a long time in the future, if ever) will in fact increase traffic in the City Centre; traffic will increase due to development around the Phase 1 road, and this is only 'balanced' by the minimal reduction (which will only be at the 'Asda' roundabout and not in the City Centre) of traffic travelling between the A465 and the A49; can you provide the data to show that traffic in the City Centre will reduce when Phase 1 is built?	

Response:
The Hereford Bypass is more than just a road – it is the key infrastructure that will unleash Herefordshire's future. Phase one, in the south, is the prerequisite to the full bypass to the west. This completes the southern relief, directly serving Rotherwas employment area, connecting key industrial sites to the south of the city. Our initial modelling indicates that construction of Phase One will see improvements in transport resilience; it does not indicate increased traffic in the city centre. At the same time will reduce traffic on portions of Belmont Rd, Walnut Tree Ave and Holme Lacy Road.

Supplementary Question:
None

Supplementary Response:

PQ 6.	**Mrs Morawiecka, Brienton, Hereford**	**At the last cabinet meeting to confirm the CPOs for the Southern Link Road, Cllr Price was unable to confirm that the road would be built within the budget of £40.3million.** **We now see that just one month later the road cost is now budgeted at £45.3million with £40million to be secured through Prudential Borrowing.** **Para 3.4 of the borrowing strategy says that " If borrowing is required, then the council will favour short term loans because the interest rates on long term loans are relatively high".** **In view of Cllr Lester's October 2025 letter to the Dept of Transport and the £30million funding gap what is the impact on the Council's revenue services of the increased cost of this road?**	**Leader of the Council**

Response:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">The Hereford Bypass will unlock economic growth, housing and jobs. It will unleash Herefordshire’s future – a future we must invest in. The £5.0m proposed addition to the capital programme for Hereford Bypass Phase 1 will have an annual impact of £0.4m on the council’s revenue budget from 2028/29 onwards. This proportionate and responsible investment represents 0.2% of the proposed net revenue budget of £234.1m in 2026/27.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary Question:
On the basis of the information supplied in the answer, if borrowing £5m has an annual impact of £400k per annum on the revenue budget from 28/29 onwards, then the full cost of borrowing £40m will be circa £3.2m per annum or 1.4% of the proposed net revenue of 26/27. At paragraph 2.7 of the Medium term Financial Strategy it says each 1% increase in council tax generates approximately £1.5m of recurrent funding to meet demand pressures and deliver the council services. It is proportionate or responsible for this council to either increase future council tax for all residents of Herefordshire by over 2% per annum or alternatively to cut services across the county by a further £3.2m per annum to fund a road where the claimed benefits are not supported by any factual evidence particularly information such as the traffic modelling report.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary Response:
Thank you for your question. I would answer that in several ways. One of them is that it is a proportionate amount of investment. When you see that it is absolutely imperative given the financial picture of funding for local government that we grow our economy and we increase the council tax base so that we are sustainable for the future. What we will see over the next few years in terms of budgeting for this council, we will be making sure that we reprofile the services that this council delivers so that we maintain those key services that our Herefordshire residents rely on whilst at the same time growing our council tax base so we can be sustainable for the long term.</td></tr>
<tr><td>PQ 7.</td><td>Hayden Osborne Brooks, Leominster</td><td>"The Council says that it is making difficult choices to address the £30million funding gap in its budget. At the same time borrowing for the Southern Link Road (Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1) has increased by £5million, bringing total borrowing for the road to over £45million. In October Cllr Lester told the Department for Transport that the prudential borrowing would “significantly impact our revenue budget at a time when we face substantial cost pressures in social care, temporary accommodation and home-to-school transport”.

With no detailed evidence, how has the Council assessed that a £45million road scheme is better value for county taxpayers than say reopening stations such as Pontrilas, which this administration said was a priority, improving bus services and safe active travel to reduce congestion and improve access for all, including those accessing education?"</td><td>Councillor Price</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Response:
In relation to borrowing costs, I refer you to the answer given at PQ6. For your substantive question: The Hereford Bypass is more than just a road – it is the key infrastructure that will unleash Herefordshire’s future. As well as more jobs, housing and employment land, it will unlock opportunities to</td></tr>
</table>

integrate existing - and new - transport connections. Officers are working on commissioning a rail study looking at potential stations across Herefordshire so that future investment can be prioritised. This administration continues to invest in improving roads, rail, bus and active travel and this is clearly demonstrated with the work that is currently taking place on the development of the Transport Hub, active travel improvements on Holme Lacy Road, improvements to the Great Western Way, school streets scheme and quiet routes development.

Supplementary Question:
The answer to PQ6 explains that the extra £5m needed for the Southern Link Road phase 1 will have an annual impact of £400k on the council's revenue budget from 2028/29 onward. Despite the answer saying this road will unleash Herefordshire's future, on the basis of the figures provided borrowing over £40m for this road could require over £3m in service cuts over future years. And following an estimate for the cost of the entire bypass at over £300m, cuts of over £24m could be required in future years for the entire bypass, that's over 10% of the council's revenue budget. The council is already struggling enough to provide basic services thanks to the Government's failure to fund local authorities properly. Therefore, I repeat my initial question. How has the council determined that it is better to cut future services including public transport, active travel finding etc. to repay the cost of the southern link road alongside the cost of the entire proposed Hereford Bypass.

Supplementary Response:
The Leader answered - Thank you for your question. I think I've answered it pretty much in what I said just before but over to you Cllr Price.

Cllr Price – I was going to say exactly the same thing, so thank you for your supplementary question. I think the answer that the Leader has just given would suffice in exactly the same way to answer your question. So thank you for that but you must understand that we are as a council are committed to grow the economy of Herefordshire and to do that there are a number of capital projects that will unleash that potential and this is one of them. So, between the Leader and myself the answer before should answer your question.

PQ 8.	**Jim Smith, Herefordshire Headway**	***What impact in relation to the budget cuts will this have on our council funded clients with ABI, will any of the qualifying criteria for funding change and is so, how?***	**Cllr Gandy**

Response:
Herefordshire Council greatly values the excellent work undertaken by Herefordshire Headway, supporting adults living with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). I can reassure those with this condition that the qualifying criteria for funding will not change, and that council-funded clients with ABI will continue to receive the care and support they require. The council remains committed to working with specialist organisations like Headway to ensure high-quality, person-centred support for those living with ABI in Herefordshire.

Supplementary Question:

None

Supplementary Response:

PQ 9.	**Carole Protherough, Clehonger**	***The Capital budget for the Western Bypass Phase 1 shows that additional borrowing of £5million is needed to fund this road scheme, taking the current estimated cost to £45.3Million. In the written answer to a public supplementary question at the last Cabinet meeting the public were told "The construction of Phase One could potentially lead to some of the constraints on the Bloor Homes site being reduced allowing for more houses and the potential for S106 funding to be sought to support the costs of construction of Phase One".*** ***If this road will unlock land for housing, why do the capital budget and the MTFS not show the borrowing costs to Herefordshire taxpayers being reduced by contributions from developers for this road scheme rather than increased borrowing?***	**Cllr Price**

Response:
The construction of the bypass will release some additional housing sites in the future, but these are not known at this point and can't be estimated or accounted for in the current budget setting. As and when developments come forward the Council will seek appropriate contributions to support the bypass and these will help to reduce budget pressures in future years.

Supplementary Question:
If the Hereford Southern Link Road does not unlock land for housing and help the county to meet the new increased housing demand from central government, why is the Council not investing in other roads or infrastructure in the County, such as infrastructure that will unlock over 1,400 new homes South of Leominster and result in developer contributions towards the cost of the new infrastructure, reducing the impact of service cuts arising from this Council borrowing £40million for the Hereford Southern Link Road which may or may not open up land for housing?

Supplementary Response:

Thank you for your supplementary. Phase One of the Hereford Western Bypass is the first section of the wider bypass which will unlock additional housing and employment land growth. It is an important first step which clearly communicates the commitment to the delivery of the full bypass. The strategic outline business case for Phase Two will be published later this year.

Agenda item no. 5- Questions from councillor

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1.	**Cllr Hitchiner**	***The outline business case for Phase 1 of the bypass (page 137) sets out anticipated benefits. A claimed benefit is a reduction of traffic in the city centre. What evidence is in the public domain to support this claim? What evidence does the Council have to support this? If such evidence exists why is this not being made public?***	**Cllr Price**
Response: Our initial modelling indicates that construction of Phase One will see improvements in transport resilience; it does not indicate increased traffic in the city centre. At the same time will reduce traffic on portions of Belmont Rd, Walnut Tree Ave and Holme Lacy Road. The traffic modelling that underpins these forecasts is still going through our formal validation and verification processes. It would not be appropriate to publish this data until those checks are complete, as the results need to be robust, accurate and fully assured. The modelling will form part of the investment and business case documentation, which is scheduled for publication in July 2026. However, we expect the modelling work to be completed ahead of that date and will look to make the information public as soon as it has been fully verified.			
Supplementary Question: None			
Supplementary Response:			
PQ 2.	**Cllr Ben Proctor**	***Given the "deeply concerning reports of the Grok AI chatbot account on X being used to create and share undressed images of people – which may amount to intimate image abuse or pornography – and sexualised images of children that may amount to child sexual abuse material (CSAM)" (I am quoting the OfCom news release of 12 January 2026). Will the Cabinet close all council accounts on X and ensure that the X or Twitter logos are no longer used on council communication materials?"***	**Cllr Hurcomb**
Response: We fully acknowledge the seriousness of the recent misuse of Grok's image generation capabilities, which has enabled the creation of non-consensual and harmful deepfakes - an issue that has rightly drawn widespread condemnation. xAI has responded by imposing restrictions on creating sexualised images for all its users, and the government has confirmed the changes bring the platform into compliance with UK laws. We will			

continue to monitor developments closely and will reassess our use of the platform should substantive improvements not materialise. In the meantime, maintaining a presence on X, alongside a range of other channels, allows us to communicate with the public, especially at times of crisis where it often becomes the go-to place for breaking news and updates.

Supplementary Question:
Thank you for the answer. I'd just like to take issue with a couple of statements in it. It talks about users misusing Grok but in fact they were using an explicit feature of the service that had been demonstrated by the owner of the company and it still offers this feature, it merely doesn't offer it to UK IP addresses and it has found that it is such an attractive feature its made it a premium product. Even though he accepts in his answer that Grok is generating deeply harmful images, he argues that the fact we can reach some people with council press releases on the platform outweighs this harm. But we don't simply use X, we heavily promote the service, we put it on every page of our website, its appeared on every slide in public questions and he said that we will reassess our use of the platform should substantive improvements not materialise. He may not have been familiar with the history of the company, but what improvements does the cabinet member anticipate X delivering and by when?

Supplementary Response:
Thank you Councillor Proctor. I don't actually think your assessment of what I've said is accurate. We said that it has rightly drawn widespread criticism and condemnation. So, we're certainly not supporting the activities of X in this instance. The ICO has published a statement on 7th of January investigating X. Since then X have banned that particular provision from UK services. So, as you've identified, you can no longer do that. Now, if that ban does not hold then we will certainly review our position. One thing I should point out is I've taken the advice of colleagues in communications team on this, this is not my decision, this is their decision that I'm fronting. So, they will continue to review it and should the promised changes not materialise then I'm sure that we will reconsider our decision.