

Foreword:

As Leader of Herefordshire Council, I am pleased to present this latest report, highlighting the progress and decisive action we have taken since my last report in March. Once again, our shared ambition to deliver the very best for Herefordshire is reflected throughout, with clear evidence of delivery across our priorities: People, Place, Growth and Transformation.

Since December, we have taken significant steps to strengthen our financial position and invest in the county's future. Council has now approved our 2026/27 capital and revenue budgets (and associated instruments) - robust, responsible plans that respond to the funding gap created by the Government's Fair Funding Review, while investing in highways, housing, flood resilience, infrastructure and the local economy. Full Council's decision on 13 February approved a comprehensive package of measures that reflect what residents told us matters most, including the condition of our roads and the protection of vital services.

The budget includes a 4.99% council tax increase to maintain delivery of services alongside major capital investment in resurfacing, emergency accommodation, infrastructure maintenance and heritage assets and a savings programme of £20 million to be achieved through transformation of services, reduction of costs and managing demand.

We have also celebrated a significant landmark achievement for our children and young people. Ofsted has formally judged Herefordshire's Children's Services to be Good overall, with Outstanding leadership - a transformation from the inadequate rating of 2022. This is a hugely significant moment for the county, and I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Cabinet Member Cllr Powell, Corporate Director Tina Russell, the Children and Young People's Directorate, Chief Executive Paul Walker and all staff and partners involved in this improvement journey. Their dedication has made a profound difference to the lives of children and families.

Our commitment to young people remains central to our agenda. To mark National Apprenticeship Week, we released a new video celebrating the first anniversary of our Youth Employment Hub. More than 300 young people have received tailored careers, skills and employment support since the hub opened last year - an achievement we are hugely proud of. In that same week, I was delighted to attend the council's first ever Apprenticeship Awards, celebrating the outstanding dedication, ambition and talent of apprentices and employers across the county. The event showcased exactly why investing in skills matters: it strengthens our economy, supports local businesses to thrive, and gives young people the opportunities they deserve to build successful careers right here in Herefordshire.

For adults, we have approved the re-procurement of our Independent Adult Advocacy Service to ensure people who need support to make decisions about their care continue to receive high-quality, statutory advocacy. Meanwhile, our Emergency Duty Team service for children has been secured for a further three years, ensuring safeguarding support remains available around the clock. We have also taken decisions that protect vital community assets, including agreeing in principle to retain the swimming pool at Peterchurch Primary School following a strong, community-led business case.

Our determination to build a vibrant, ambitious and confident Herefordshire was further demonstrated with the announcement of our county-wide partnership bid to become UK City of Culture 2029. This bold proposal, developed collaboratively with arts, culture and creative organisations, celebrates Herefordshire's identity as "A Living Borderland" - a rural county alive with creativity, community, heritage and innovation. Should we be successful, the benefits would extend far beyond 2029.

We continue to drive forward growth and investment. February saw the launch of the new Invest in Herefordshire campaign and website - a modern, compelling platform for attracting business investment and showcasing our economic strengths, key employment sectors and development opportunities. This will support our ambition to secure new jobs, boost productivity and increase prosperity across the county.

On growth, our focus remains on unlocking housing, supporting local businesses and creating opportunities across the county. You will see in my full report, the council plans to increase the amount of social housing, speed up development on key sites, bring empty homes back into use and improve existing properties. A £10m capital programme for 2026/27 will help deliver more homes for large families, accessible housing, accommodation for young people, and additional temporary accommodation to meet growing demand and reduce long term costs. I am proud the Council (collectively with the Registered Providers) has delivered 731 dwellings in the County since 2023).

We have also supported the Hereford Business Improvement District in progressing to its third term, enabling more than £1.9 million of local investment to boost tourism, city-centre vitality and business confidence. This work sits alongside wider economic initiatives, including our new Invest in Herefordshire service, our enterprise-zone renewal efforts, and steps to secure sustainable growth in key sectors.

In response to feedback from businesses and residents, Cabinet has agreed to extend the popular 30-minute free parking scheme to include on-street bays in Hereford city centre, complementing the existing 'Pop & Shop' provision in council-operated car parks from April. This measure supports footfall, accessibility and the local economy.

Major regeneration and infrastructure projects are also progressing at pace. At Merton Meadow, construction is now underway on the innovative flood alleviation scheme - a nature-based project that will create wetlands, enhance biodiversity and unlock the potential for new homes and public spaces north of the city. Alongside this, the Hereford Transport Hub continues to take shape, with the installation of the central canopy marking a visible and exciting milestone in creating a more welcoming, accessible gateway to the county.

Progress continues on the Hereford Bypass, including the approval of the Compulsory Purchase and Side Roads Orders required to assemble the land needed for construction of phase one. At the same time, our work to protect and improve the natural environment is accelerating: we have adopted the new Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy, launched public consultation on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and continued to unlock new homes through phosphate-mitigation projects that protect river health.

The council is taking extensive action to tackle the rise in potholes across Herefordshire, with highway crews completing more than 3,000 repairs since January and carrying out up to 150 repairs each day. Recent exceptional weather - prolonged rainfall followed by freezing temperatures - has significantly accelerated the formation of potholes, but teams are working daily to inspect and prioritise the most urgent defects. Alongside reactive repairs, the council is

investing in long-term improvements to strengthen the road network, including 47 miles of resurfacing, 62 miles of preventative surface dressing, major drainage upgrades, and an additional £13.5 million committed to resurfacing, patching and preventative treatments. Residents are encouraged to support this work by reporting defects through the Report It app, with a new resurfacing and surface-dressing programme to be announced soon.

I have been continuing to actively engage with my counterparts (alongside Paul Walker) across neighbouring authorities on devolution, most recently to understand the implications and opportunities presented by the Government's recent confirmation that areas outside existing devolution arrangements may now apply to become Foundation Strategic Authorities. These discussions have focused on the practical benefits such a designation could offer in strengthening our strategic capacity, economic resilience and long-term planning across the wider region. While Local Government Reorganisation does not directly affect us as an established unitary authority, it remains important that we fully explore the options available and assess whether a coordinated approach could deliver tangible advantages for Herefordshire. As this work develops, I will ensure that group leaders and ward members are kept informed so that the emerging considerations, opportunities and risks are clearly understood and fully reflected in future decision-making.

At the time of writing, my team is currently making the final preparations for the upcoming Parish Summit (3 March), where I look forward to an evening discussing key topics, including Councils' Charter, Child Friendly Herefordshire, Public Realm and Parish Grants. As ever we will be holding a marketplace with council teams on hand to discuss services or issues with parish councillors and clerks.

Under Transformation, we continue to modernise how the council operates, deliver value for money and strengthen the resilience of frontline services. We have extended our Dynamic Purchasing System for passenger transport, allowing us to deliver home-to-school, SEND and commercial transport in a flexible, efficient and legally compliant way while we procure a replacement system under the new legislative framework. Across directorates, new service plans and strengthened financial monitoring are improving performance management and ensuring we can track progress against the Council Plan throughout the year. These changes reinforce our ambition to be an efficient, innovative and future-ready organisation.

I was saddened to hear of the death of former Councillor Roland Summers of Leominster who passed away, aged 90, in January. Former councillor Summers was Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Chair of the (related) Economic Development Programme Panel, and a member of the Central Area Planning Sub-Committee. Whilst, I did not know him personally, it is clear from the positions he held at the council, he was a dedicated public servant to the people of Herefordshire, and I would like to pass on my condolences to his family on behalf of the administration.

As always, I want to thank our officers, councillors, partners, volunteers and communities whose hard work and support continue to deliver real benefits for the people of Herefordshire. Together, we are building momentum, strengthening resilience and creating a future we can all feel proud of.

My Report to Council:

Herefordshire Council Plan – 2024 to 2028. Through the development of the Herefordshire Council Plan, four corporate priorities have been identified. These are:

- I. **People** – We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities who support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.
- II. **Place** – We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place, we will support access to green spaces and we will do everything we can to recover the health of our rivers.
- III. **Growth** – We will create the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county; attracting inward investment, building business confidence, creating jobs, enabling housing development along with providing the right infrastructure, and
- IV. **Transformation** – We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for money.

The Herefordshire Council Plan, alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, provides the overarching policy framework within which decisions will be taken and resources allocated over the next 4 years.

Delivery Plan 2024 to 2025 – turning the strategic vision in to delivery

Central to the realisation of the Council Plan is the Delivery Plan 2024-25, which sets out the milestones and progress against our priorities of People, Place, Growth and Transformation. As members of this council you will be able to mark our progress through quarterly reporting into Cabinet and routine financial monitoring against the approved revenue budget and capital programme. Alongside this we are developing annual service plans within each of the directorates which will be reporting progress monthly to the corporate leadership team.

In my report below, I have outlined where the cabinet and cabinet members decisions begin the delivery of those stated objectives.

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Theme 1 - People: We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other.
We want all children to have the best start in life.

1: Children's Services: Ofsted Inspection outcome and Improvement plan phase 3

Underpins Delivery Plan Objective: Support all children to have the best start in life

A full Ofsted inspection in November 2025 found Good overall effectiveness with Outstanding leadership impact, published in January 2026. Inspectors highlighted strong leadership, a child-centred culture, effective partnerships, a stabilised workforce, robust quality assurance, and high-quality social work practice. Services were praised for effective early help, strong safeguarding thresholds, skilled practitioners, impactful multi-agency work on exploitation, improved foster and kinship care support, and a strong care leavers' service.

Two development areas were identified: management oversight of the Local Authority Designated Safeguarding Officer (LADO) function and identification/assessment of children in private fostering, both already being addressed. Following these improvements, the independently chaired Children's Improvement Board has agreed to stand down, with future oversight returning to normal council governance arrangements. The Secretary of State's next decision will be informed by the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) outcome and a further commissioner review due in March 2026.

Cabinet has authorised the Corporate Director for Children and Young People to lead the completion of the Phase 3 improvement plan and Ofsted outcome action plan. This work will be integrated within a Children Services business plan for 2026/27 with future governance and monitoring in line with other council directorates.

2: Re-procurement of Herefordshire Independent Adult Advocacy Services

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Enable people to support themselves and each other by providing the right help at the right time

This year we will: Review all Supported Living services, offering accommodation and support to adults with a range of needs including learning disability, autism and mental health with the aim of ensuring a range of services that are fit for the future and meet changing needs

In January, the Cabinet Member: Adults, health and wellbeing approved the re-procurement of Herefordshire Independent Adult Advocacy Services, by way of an open tender process.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide independent advocacy to help people—particularly those who are vulnerable or lack mental capacity—take part in decisions about their care, treatment, and rights. Advocacy ensures that individuals' views are heard, their wishes are respected, and their rights are protected, especially where there is no appropriate family member or friend to support them. It plays an essential role in assessments, care planning, treatment decisions, safeguarding enquiries, and complaints processes.

The current contract for Independent Advocacy Services began in August 2021 and will end on 31 July 2026. An Invitation to Tender is planned for publication in January 2026, with the new contract due to commence on 1 August 2026. The proposed contract will run for a minimum of five years, with options to extend for up to a further two years (5+1+1), providing continuity and stability for both the council and service providers.

The service delivers statutory advocacy in line with key legislation, including the Mental Capacity Act 2005, Mental Health Act 1983 (as amended), Care Act 2014, and Health and Social Care Act 2012. Alongside statutory duties, the service also provides community advocacy, reflecting the wider principles of the Care Act. The advocacy service offer includes:

- Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA) for people aged 16 and over who lack capacity to make serious decisions and have no one appropriate to support them.
- Relevant Person's Representative (RPR) support for individuals subject to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards who lack capacity and have no suitable representative.
- Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) for people detained under the Mental Health Act, including those on Community Treatment Orders, provided on an opt-out basis.
- Care Act Advocacy to support people who would otherwise struggle to engage in social care assessments, planning, reviews, and safeguarding.

- NHS Complaints Advocacy to help individuals raise concerns about NHS-funded care.
- Community Advocacy, offering non-statutory support, information, and signposting to adults who have difficulty expressing their views.

Together, these services ensure that individuals are supported to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives and that statutory responsibilities are met.

3: Retaining of the swimming pool at Peterchurch Primary School

Contributes to Delivery Plan Objective: Support all children to have the best start in life

This year we will: Continue to deliver the schools capital investment programme, which will include commencing construction at Peterchurch Primary School

In October 2022, the Cabinet agreed to give Peterchurch Primary School and the Parish Council 12 months to produce a viable business case to retain the school swimming pool. If no viable case was provided, demolition would go ahead. The school's business case shows that the pool can be retained with essential renovations costing £80,500. These works would address roofing, electrics, lighting, safety systems, flooring and changing facilities. The business case also indicates that the pool could operate with a small annual surplus.

In December, the Cabinet Member: Community services and assets, approved the decision to retain the swimming pool at Peterchurch Primary School, in principle, as part of the new school site.

There is very limited alternative swimming provision locally, and travelling elsewhere would increase costs, reduce curriculum time and create barriers for pupils. Retaining the pool supports statutory Key Stage 2 swimming requirements and provides clear educational, health and wellbeing benefits for both pupils and the wider community. The pool has been used for decades and is valued locally, with consultation confirming strong community support for its retention.

The council would not be responsible for funding the renovation. Delivery would depend on Section 106 contributions from a nearby housing development, any available budget within the school rebuild project, and decisions made by the school's governors. The recommendation is to retain the pool as part of the site, allowing future planning without committing the council to carrying out or funding the works.

4: Children's Emergency Out of Hours Duty Team (EDT) Service

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Support all children to have the best start in life

This year we will: Ensure sufficiency of local care placements

In January, the Cabinet Member: Children and Young People approved the direct award of the Children's out of hours Emergency Duty Team (EDT) social care service contract to the incumbent service provider for a further 3 years with the option to extend for up to an additional 48 months.

The Council has a legal duty under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need, including outside normal working hours. To meet this responsibility, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) provides an out-of-hours service for children and young people at risk of significant harm where waiting until the next working day would be unsafe.

The EDT responds to urgent statutory matters such as child protection assessments, emergency child-in-need assessments, decisions about accommodating children, applications for emergency protection orders, joint visits with the police, and coordination following sudden unexpected child deaths. The service ensures immediate safeguarding actions are taken when required.

Since 1998, the EDT service for Herefordshire has been delivered by Worcestershire County Council and is staffed by a service lead, nine part-time social workers and an administrative assistant. Inspections by Ofsted over several years have consistently recognised the effectiveness of the out-of-hours service, noting timely, proportionate decision-making and appropriate responses to urgent need, even where wider children's services were judged to require improvement.

Herefordshire Council is satisfied with the quality of the service, which operates under clear joint protocols and regular contract monitoring. Although the current contract cannot be extended, legal advice confirms that a new contract can be directly awarded without a full procurement exercise because it qualifies as an exempt "horizontal" contract under the Procurement Act 2023. Funding has already been approved through the Council's budget, and no political group consultation was required.

Theme: Growth - We will create the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county; attracting inward investment, building business confidence, creating jobs, enabling housing development along with providing the right infrastructure.

5: Housing Delivery Update

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Work with partners to provide high quality and affordable housing to meet all needs A commitment from the leader to provide Council with updates on the delivery of affordable housing.

This year we will: Enable the delivery of affordable properties in the county, including council owned land, through registered providers and developers

Members will recall that at full Council on 8 December 2023, we agreed that cabinet would develop a programme to deliver an ambitious number of units of social housing, market-rent lifetime tenancies, affordable home ownership and market sale properties, funded through the prudent use of borrowing, capital receipts and the management of council assets. This would be in time for this to be agreed by Council as part of next year's capital programme.

Council also requested that – as part of my Leader's report – I provide an update on housing delivery at each ordinary meeting of the Council.

On Tuesday, 24 February, we held a housing summit with registered providers where we explored how we can use of our assets to facilitate delivery by making housing sites available through sale, long term leases and Joint Ventures. We discussed pre let mandate agreements to help underwrite funding bids and revenue as we work with together with partners to support funding bids to Homes England.

We explored how the planning system and our own planning policies can be enabled to prioritise the delivery of more affordable housing in rural areas. There is a clear role to play here for S106 to assist in delivering more units and we are determined to ensure the flow of

this vital source of finance can be unlocked. We focussed on how we can help in supporting community groups, seeking to deliver rural affordable housing, to create diversity and quality in the affordable housing being provided.

We ended the meeting with agreement that we would have some working groups to try and identify additional ways to address the immediate need of households in temporary accommodation.

Herefordshire has delivered more than 1,400 affordable homes since 2020, including social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership properties. Over 120 of these homes were designed specifically for people with additional needs, such as young people at risk of homelessness, families escaping domestic abuse, refugees and residents requiring accessible accommodation.

This progress has been achieved despite significant challenges, including rising construction costs and reduced development capacity. Alongside new homes, the council has invested in better temporary accommodation and support programmes for vulnerable groups.

Looking ahead, the council plans to increase the amount of social housing, speed up development on key sites, bring empty homes back into use, and improve existing properties. A £10m capital programme for 2026/27 will help deliver more homes for large families, accessible housing, accommodation for young people, and additional temporary accommodation to meet growing demand and reduce long-term costs.

The total number of affordable homes delivered by the Council (collectively with the Registered Providers) in the County are as follows:

- Yr – 2023 to 2024 = 268 dwellings
- Yr – 2024 to 2025 = 276 dwellings
- Yr – 2025 to 2026 (to date) = 234 dwellings (an increase of 50 dwellings since my last report).

Looking ahead, the council plans to increase the amount of social housing, speed up development on key sites, bring empty homes back into use, and improve existing properties. A £10m capital programme for 2026/27 will help deliver more homes for large families, accessible housing, accommodation for young people, and additional temporary accommodation to meet growing demand and reduce long-term costs.

Theme: Place - We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place, and do everything we can to improve the health of our rivers.

6: The New Public Realm Services

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.

This year we will: Deliver the Public Realm Services and agree the Public Realm Services operating model and commence the procurement for a new Public Realm contractor

In December, Cabinet approved the award of a contract for the provision of the new Public Realm Services contact for Public Realm Services for an initial period of 6 years and 10 months (so as to align with Council financial years) and with the option for the Council to extend for a further 3-year period subject to, and in accordance with, the performance review mechanism set out in the contract.

Public Realm Services are a statutory responsibility of Herefordshire Council and are essential to the county's infrastructure and quality of life. These services include maintaining highways, green spaces and street cleanliness, managing drainage and lighting, providing bereavement services, and ensuring safe and reliable travel for residents, businesses and visitors.

The current Public Realm Services contract was awarded in 2013 and is largely outsourced, with the Council retaining a limited client and contract-management role. In April 2024, Cabinet agreed that this model no longer met the Council's requirements and approved termination of the contract with effect from 31 May 2026.

Given the scale, visibility and financial significance of Public Realm Services, Cabinet approved a new delivery approach in November 2024. This includes bringing some services back in-house and adopting a new contract model based on a schedule of rates rather than a cost-reimbursable arrangement. The new approach is designed to better support the Council's vision, ensure continuity of statutory services, and provide improved value and flexibility.

The procurement process for the new contract has been specifically designed to align with these objectives and to maintain uninterrupted service delivery from 1 June 2026. The new contract also promotes greater engagement with community groups and town and parish councils, enabling additional voluntary or paid services where appropriate.

Until the new arrangements begin, the Council and the existing provider will continue to work together to ensure a smooth and well-managed transition. Details of the procurement process are set out in the report, although the identity of the successful bidder cannot be confirmed until the contract award process is completed in line with public procurement regulations.

7: Hereford Western Bypass – Phase 1: Land Acquisition Compulsory Purchase Order

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Expand and maintain the transport infrastructure network in a sustainable way and improve connectivity across the county

This year we will: Complete the necessary work to tender for the design and construction of Phase 1 of the Hereford Western Bypass

In July 2025, Cabinet approved a strategy to acquire the remaining land, confirming that a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) would be progressed in parallel with voluntary negotiations. The council's preference is to acquire land by agreement, but it must demonstrate value for money, work within a limited budget, and meet its delivery timetable. Running the CPO alongside negotiations reduces the risk of delays if agreements cannot be reached.

In December, Cabinet approved the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) and Side Roads Order (SRO) for the acquisition of land and rights required to construct, operate, facilitate and maintain the first phase of the Hereford Western Bypass.

The New Road Strategy for Hereford, approved by Cabinet in March 2024, includes the delivery of the Hereford Western Bypass, which is planned in two phases. Phase One will link the A49/B4399 junction with the A465 (formerly the Southern Link Road), with Phase Two extending the route north to rejoin the A49.

Phase One is intended to significantly improve access to the Hereford Enterprise Zone, particularly from south-west Herefordshire and South Wales. It will reduce traffic congestion at the A465/A49 junction near Greyfriars Bridge and remove traffic from unsuitable rural roads currently used as shortcuts. This phase also supports wider ambitions for housing and employment growth across the city, county and region.

Full planning permission for Phase One was granted under planning reference P151314/F and implemented in July 2019. Further construction is programmed for December 2026, but this is dependent on acquiring most of the land along the route. At present, only one parcel of the required land is in council ownership.

8: Phosphate Income: Housing delivery update

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity

As at the point of drafting, £1,436,251 (up by £137,956.48 since my last report in December) in phosphate income has been received. To date these actions have released planning permissions for 886 dwellings (an increase of 135 dwellings since December).

9: Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (H-THAWS).

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity

This year we will: Adopt the countywide Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy

In January, the Cabinet Member: Environment approved the new countywide Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (H-THAWS). This strategy will support the council's Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and the Environment Act 2021.

Tree and hedgerow management was later reviewed by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee in November 2024. The committee made several recommendations, including setting a clear percentage target for increasing tree cover and providing practical advice and guidance on tree planting and good hedgerow management. These recommendations have directly informed the development of this strategy, and funding was identified to support its production.

The resulting Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodlands Strategy encourages residents, landowners, organisations and partners to take their own actions in support of a shared vision for a more connected treescape across the county. It sets out an ambitious but realistic long-term vision for conserving, improving and expanding Herefordshire's trees, hedgerows and woodland network.

To support delivery, the strategy recommends establishing a Herefordshire Treescape Task Group. This group would help drive and promote the strategy as part of a wider review of environmental partnerships, working alongside key local stakeholders and external

organisations such as National Landscape Partnerships, Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

Theme: Transformation - *We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for money.*

10: Passenger Transport: Extension to the Dynamic Purchasing system

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Complete the review of home to school transport to mitigate increasing costs through a new delivery model

This year we will: Implement a new commissioning strategy and implement a dynamic purchasing system to achieve better value for money

In February, the Cabinet member: Transport and Infrastructure extended the current Passenger Transport Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for Home to School, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and commercial transport services.

Herefordshire Council has operated a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for passenger transport since 2018, replacing a traditional framework to provide greater flexibility and efficiency. The DPS allows transport providers to join at any time, which is particularly important in a fragile market where operators frequently enter and leave. It simplifies the process for awarding contracts and supports the delivery of home-to-school, SEND and commercial transport services.

More than 400 contracts are currently delivered through the DPS on a daily basis. This approach enables the Council to respond quickly to statutory transport needs and to achieve best value, as running separate tenders for each contract would be impractical given the volume and complexity involved.

The introduction of the Procurement Act 2023 requires existing DPS arrangements established under previous regulations to be extended by February 2026 and to end by February 2029. Due to the scale and complexity of the transport arrangements, and the lack of established precedents under the new legislation, procuring a replacement system is expected to be resource-intensive.

We took the decision to extend the current DPS to maintain continuity of service, allow sufficient time to procure a new agreement, assess the implications of the new legislation, clarify future procurement requirements, and ensure that any new processes are supported by clear communication and training for officers and suppliers.

Other Decisions Taken By Cabinet and Cabinet Members

11: Adoption of the Dormington & Mordiford Neighbourhood Plan

In February, the Cabinet Member: Environment approved revisions to the Dormington & Mordiford Group neighbourhood development plan (NDP) as part of the statutory development plan for Herefordshire. The Dormington & Mordiford Group Neighbourhood Development Plan was prepared by the parish council and local community under powers introduced by the Localism Act 2011. Neighbourhood plans must meet legal “basic conditions” and align with national policy and the Herefordshire Local Plan.

The plan was submitted to Herefordshire Council in February 2025 and consulted on later that month. An independent examiner concluded that, with minor modifications, the plan met all legal requirements and could proceed to referendum.

A local referendum was held on 13 November 2025, with 78.8% of voters supporting the plan. As a result, Herefordshire Council is legally required to adopt it. Adoption will also require an update to the countywide policies map to reflect the new neighbourhood planning policies.

12: Herefordshire's co-ordinated school admissions arrangements 2027/2028

In January, the Cabinet Member: Children and young people, approved Herefordshire Council's proposed admissions arrangements for the academic year 2027/2028. For community and voluntary controlled schools, where the Council is the admissions authority, the arrangements must set out oversubscription criteria and the coordinated processes for admitting children to reception classes and for secondary school transfers.

The Council is legally responsible for ensuring that these arrangements comply with the School Admissions Code. The proposed arrangements largely reflect those already in place and take account of responses received during the most recent consultation, which took place in 2020–21. For schools where the Council is not the admissions authority—such as voluntary aided, foundation, trust, free schools and academies—each school is responsible for setting its own admissions arrangements every year by 28 February. In Herefordshire, this applies to 48 primary schools, 11 secondary schools and one through school.

Once admissions arrangements have been formally determined, information for schools where the Council is the admissions authority is published on both the Council's website and individual school websites. Regardless of who the admissions authority is, the Council retains responsibility for coordinating the reception and secondary transfer admissions process across the county. This includes ranking preferences for Council-controlled schools, while other admission authorities rank their own preferences and submit them to the Council as part of the coordinated process.

Finally, the document notes that admissions arrangements must be consulted on at least once every seven years. In Herefordshire, the last consultation took place between December 2020 and January 2021, meaning the next consultation is due by January 2028.

13: Extension of the council's Care Homes (Unified) Contract

In February, the Cabinet Member: adults, health and wellbeing took the decision to extend Council's care Home Contract. The Council has a statutory duty under the Care Act 2014 to ensure there is sufficient, suitable care provision for residents. To support this, a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for adult care home provision (with or without nursing) was established in 2016. The DPS was originally set up for five years and has since been extended several times.

The DPS is currently due to expire on 5 September 2026. The Council proposes to extend it until 23 February 2029, which is the maximum extension permitted under the regulations, representing a final extension of 2 years and 5.5 months. There is no financial limit associated with extending the DPS, as it does not have a fixed contract value.

The DPS provides access to pre-qualified suppliers through a competitive, fair and transparent process. New providers can join at any time during its lifetime. Extending the DPS will:

- Ensure continuity of care arrangements for individuals and providers
- Enable commissioning resources to focus on wider transformation and savings work
- Allow flexibility while future service requirements are shaped
- Provide time to fully consider procurement options under the Procurement Act 2023, introduced in February 2025

Care placements will continue to be made on an "as-and-when" call-off basis until the service is re-procured.