



Chief Executive's Update Full Council 24 July

I am pleased to present my first update to Council since taking up the role of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service on 26 June.

Over my first few weeks in Herefordshire, I have spent time meeting members, officers, partners and stakeholders across the county. I have been struck by the strong sense of commitment to public service that exists throughout the organisation, alongside a shared ambition to continue improving outcomes for residents and communities.

Having joined the council at the end of June, I have also had the opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made since Council last met in May. It is clear that the organisation enters its next chapter from a position of relative strength. Significant progress has been made in recent years, providing solid foundations on which we can continue to build.

One of the most important developments during this period has been the council's continued focus on organisational improvement. In May, the Local Government Association returned to Herefordshire as part of its Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review. The review recognised the significant progress that has been made since the original peer challenge in June 2025 and provided positive feedback on the council's response to the recommendations around transformation, organisational capacity, financial planning, performance and partnership working.

I am particularly encouraged that this independent review recognised not only the progress made but the council's willingness to challenge itself and maintain a culture of continuous improvement. My intention is to build further on that approach as we continue modernising the organisation and strengthening our ability to deliver for residents.

A second significant milestone has been the confirmation of the council's balanced revenue outturn position. This position has been achieved against the context of continuing pressures on local government finance and reflects disciplined financial management across the organisation. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2025/26 were published on 29 May 2026, one month ahead of the statutory deadline. External audit testing of the financial statements is now in progress with a plan to receive the audit opinion in September, well in advance of budget setting for 2027/28.

The council successfully delivered savings whilst continuing to manage increasing demand in areas such as adult social care, special educational needs and disabilities, home-to-school transport and temporary accommodation. At the same time it was able to make record levels of capital investment into local infrastructure and services.

As I settle into the role, one of my key priorities will be ensuring that financial sustainability remains at the heart of decision-making. That means continuing to align resources to the council's strategic priorities, maintaining strong financial control and ensuring that transformation activity delivers measurable benefits for residents and taxpayers.

Alongside financial resilience, service improvement remains a major focus. The recent Care Quality Commission assessment of adult social care recognised a number of important strengths, including leadership, governance, partnership working and the strength of provider relationships. Equally, the assessment identified areas where further improvement is needed. The organisation has responded positively to those findings and work is already underway to build on existing strengths while driving further improvements in service quality, responsiveness and outcomes.

Sustaining improvement in both children's and adults' services will remain one of my foremost priorities. The achievements in children's services over recent years have been remarkable and demonstrate what can be achieved through clear leadership, strong partnerships and sustained focus. My priority is to ensure these improvements continue to mature and become embedded for the long term.

The mobilisation of the new Public Realm Service on 1 June has also been one of the most significant organisational changes undertaken by the council in recent years. The new model is designed to provide greater accountability, better performance management, more responsive services and increased use of technology and data. It reflects a wider ambition to modernise how services are delivered, strengthen oversight and ensure that residents experience a more consistent and efficient service.

Transformation and modernisation will continue to be central themes over the coming years. The next phase of improvement must focus on how we operate as an organisation, ensuring that our systems, processes and technology support better decision-making, improve productivity and enable staff to spend more time focused on residents and communities.

This includes strengthening performance management and organisational assurance. Effective organisations require clear information, robust governance and the ability to identify both opportunities and risks at an early stage. Building on the work already underway, I want to see greater use of data, stronger performance insight and a consistent focus on delivery across all services.

I am also keen to ensure that we continue investing in our workforce and organisational capability. The recently announced partnership with NMITE to support skills and workforce development demonstrates the importance of building talent and creating opportunities for future generations. Internally, we must continue to invest in leadership development, learning, culture and staff wellbeing so that the council remains an employer capable of attracting, retaining and developing talented people.

Since joining the organisation, I have also been impressed by the quality of partnership working across Herefordshire. Whether through our relationships with the NHS, West Mercia Police, schools, universities, businesses, parish councils or voluntary and community organisations, there is a strong foundation for collaborative working. I am keen to deepen these partnerships further and ensure the council continues to play a leading role in bringing organisations together around shared priorities.

That place leadership role is becoming increasingly important. Delivering positive outcomes for residents depends not only on the services we provide directly, but also on our ability to influence, convene and collaborate. As Chief Executive, I am committed to strengthening the council's role as a strategic leader for the county and ensuring that we work effectively with partners to maximise opportunities and address challenges.

A good example of this broader organisational maturity has been the careful review of major programmes and capital projects during recent months. The updated approach to HMAG and Shire Hall demonstrates the council's commitment to balancing ambition with affordability, ensuring that investment decisions remain sustainable, deliverable and focused on long-term value.

During this period we have also launched the council's latest employee survey. I am a strong believer that organisational success depends upon listening to and learning from our workforce. The survey provides an important opportunity for colleagues to tell us what is working well, where

improvements are needed and how we can create an environment in which people are able to do their best work. The results will inform future priorities around leadership, culture, workforce development, wellbeing and organisational change. As we continue our transformation journey, understanding the views and experiences of staff will be critical to ensuring that change is shaped with colleagues rather than simply delivered to them.

Looking ahead, my early priorities are organisation-wide and focused on building long-term confidence. These include sustaining improvement in children's and adults' services, strengthening performance and assurance, prioritising the budget and aligning resources to what matters most, advancing digital and modernisation so people can work smarter, delivering visible progress on key regeneration and infrastructure programmes, deepening partnerships and strengthening the council's role as place leader for Herefordshire.

The council has a clear plan, strong foundations and a committed workforce. There remain significant challenges ahead, but I believe we are well placed to meet them. I look forward to working with members, staff and partners as we continue the next phase of improvement and delivery for the benefit of the people of Herefordshire.

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Herefordshire Council