



Title of report: CQC Assessment report and Improvement plan

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 30 July 2026

Report by: Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing;

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present Cabinet with the outcome of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assessment and to approve Herefordshire's CQC Assurance improvement plan 2026-2027.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet notes the outcome of the Herefordshire CQC Assessment;**
- b) Cabinet approves Herefordshire's CQC Assurance improvement plan 2026-2027;**

- c) Cabinet authorises the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing to lead this improvement plan on behalf of the Council and to take all operational decisions, as set out within this report and appendices.**

Alternative options

1. To not approve the CQC Assurance improvement plan. This is not an option as the council would not have a structured way to deliver the necessary improvements following the publication of the CQC Assurance report.

Key considerations

2. The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessments of how local authorities meet their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. These duties focus on promoting individual wellbeing, prevention, early intervention and person-centred care. The Care Act also establishes a national approach to assessing needs, determining eligibility and arranging personalised care and support. It gives carers equal rights to assessment and support, and requires councils to provide information, integrate services and safeguard adults at risk.
3. The CQC assesses local authority adult social care through a framework built around four themes: working with people, providing support, ensuring safety, and leadership. Each theme is underpinned by a set of quality statements that describe what good practice looks like. The CQC gathers evidence from people's experiences, feedback from staff and partners, and performance data, and uses this to score each quality statement. These scores are combined, supported by professional judgement and defined rating characteristics, to produce a single overall rating of Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, or Inadequate.
4. Herefordshire Council's CQC assurance process began with formal notification on 7 April 2025, followed by submission of the Information Return on 2 May 2025. During July and August 2025, the CQC undertook provider and partner interviews, alongside case tracking activity in August 2025, where 50 cases were submitted and 10 selected for detailed review. A leadership presentation took place on 18 August 2025, ahead of the on-site inspection conducted between 9 and 11 September 2025. This was followed by the factual accuracy process from late December 2025 to mid-January 2026, before the final report was published on 29 May 2026.
5. Herefordshire Council received an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' following the CQC assessment, achieving a score of 56%, which is seven percentage points below the threshold for a 'Good' rating. Across the nine quality statements, two areas were rated as 'Good' — Partnerships and communities, and Safeguarding — highlighting strong partnership working and effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
6. Herefordshire Council welcomes the findings of the CQC assessment. The process has been a positive, learning experience for the authority, providing a focus in which to celebrate and promote strengths as well as to crystallise areas for improvement. Through the process, CQC has endorsed the strengths with Good ratings and has affirmed the areas for improvement. This baseline assessment gives the council a solid foundation on which to move forward to maximise strengths and expedite progress on areas for improvement. CQC did not identify any adults at risk and/or in need of safeguarding during the process.
7. There were no surprises resulting from the CQC assessment. No new issues were identified — either as a strength or an area for improvement — and no known issues were identified as being of higher risk than expected.

8. The CQC findings in relation to our strengths mirrored the council's own self-assessment. The whole council commitment to excellence in adult social care and emphasis on collaboration with partners, providers and communities to meet our Care Act requirements is clear from the strengths identified, namely:
 - I. **Strong prevention model** supported by Talk Community and a new Prevention in Adult Social Care Strategy.
 - II. **Developing coproduction**, with lived experience boards influencing strategies, commissioning, and continuous service improvement.
 - III. **High-performing care market**, with the majority of home care and care homes rated good or outstanding and strong provider relationships.
 - IV. **Effective hospital discharge arrangements**, driven by whole system multi-disciplinary team working and positive feedback from health partners.
 - V. **Strong safeguarding outcomes**, with high proportion of enquiries meeting desired outcomes and robust multiagency governance.
 - VI. **Inclusive, engaged workforce**, supported by the THRIVE values, leadership development, and strong staff engagement.
 - VII. **Commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion**, backed by the ADASS Equality Diversity and Inclusion tool and targeted cultural competency training.
 - VIII. **Innovation through technology**, including TEC pilots, predictive technologies and digital tools that support independence and prevention.
 - IX. **Robust governance and leadership**, aligned with good governance principles and active system partnership working.
 - X. **Significant transformation achievements**, including new commissioning frameworks, high direct payments uptake, and strong community-based support.
9. The self-assessment equally identified key areas for improvement, which the CQC assessment has affirmed. They recognised that improvement plans were in place but they were not fully implemented and improvements embedded at the time of the site visit. However, progress has been made in the intervening six months with full implementation due by 31 March 2027.
10. Herefordshire's CQC Assurance improvement plan, at Appendix A, sets out the delivery of key actions across seven improvement areas. These areas and their supporting plans are:
 - I. Strengthening the **front door**, specifically embedding Community Connectors, TEC and therapy in the front door offer through our Managing Demand project.
 - II. Improving the **reablement** offer, through streamlining the reablement pathways from hospital discharge and the community set out in our Reablement Project Plan.
 - III. Improving the offer for **unpaid carers** in the county, through implementation of the co-produced All Ages Carers Strategy and led by the Carers Partnership Board.
 - IV. Strengthening the **Occupational Therapy service** within the local authority, through implementation of the OT Practice review and service improvement plan.
 - V. Improving our capacity to manage **demand and waiting lists**, through implementation of a new structure for adult social care from July 2026.
 - VI. Driving **innovation in market development** for working age adults, through the Learning Disabilities transformation programme.
 - VII. Strengthening the use of **data and associated analysis** to support practice improvement and future service modelling, through our Data Development Plan.
11. Governance of the improvement plan will be achieved through bimonthly updates to the Corporate Improvement Board and monthly updates to the Cabinet Member and full Directorate Team. Regular progress reports will be submitted to the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. Issues requiring executive oversight will be escalated to Cabinet, via the Cabinet Member, where required.

Community impact

12. Herefordshire's CQC Assurance improvement plan identifies seven priority improvement areas, each intended to strengthen services for residents. Taken together, these actions are expected to have a positive impact on people living in Herefordshire.
13. In line with the overarching vision, 'Delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do', the CQC improvement plan directly supports the Council Plan 'People' priority by driving improvements in how we work with people, provide support, ensure safety and lead the system – ensuring residents can live well, independently and safely.

Environmental impact

14. Herefordshire's CQC Improvement Plan is focused on strengthening adult social care services and improving outcomes for residents. The plan is not expected to have any significant direct environmental impacts. Where actions within the plan influence service delivery or operational practices, these will be implemented in line with the Council's wider environmental and sustainability commitments, ensuring that any indirect environmental considerations are appropriately managed.
15. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
16. Whilst activity because of the implementation of this improvement plan will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's environmental policy.

Equality duty

17. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
18. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this improvement plan and it has been found to have low impact for equality. Individual projects and delivery workstreams within the improvement plan will complete an equality impact assessment, where required, as a fundamental element to planning, decision making and implementation.

Resource implications

19. There are no direct financial implications arising from approval of the improvement plan. Delivery of the planned improvements will be managed within the current and agreed Community Wellbeing budget for 2026-27. If any additional resource requirements are identified as the improvement plan is developed, these will be supported by appropriate business cases for approval and funding identified.

Legal implications

20. There are no direct or specific legal implications in this report other than those mentioned in earlier parts of the report.

21. The relevant legal provisions for this decision can be found in the council's constitution, www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution.

Risk management

22. Risks associated with delivery of the CQC improvement plan will be entered onto the relevant project, service or directorate risk register and escalated as appropriate. The corporate risk register is a living document and reviewed regularly by Corporate Leadership Team, Cabinet and Audit and Governance Committee.
23. The table below summarises the main risks to delivering this improvement plan, together with their potential impact and mitigation.

Risk	Mitigation
Lack of workforce stability – Reduced delivery pace, reduced capacity to deliver and less consistent implementation.	Workforce planning, recruitment, retention and leadership oversight.
Lack of delivery capacity - Improvement activity may be delayed by operational demand.	Phased delivery, protected capacity and regular performance oversight.
Inconsistent prioritisation of work - Effort may be spread too thinly across competing priorities.	Clear prioritisation, sequencing and routine review of progress.
Lack of partner engagement - Progress may be affected where delivery relies on partners.	Strong partnership governance, shared planning and escalation of issues.
Unrealistic timescales - Delivery milestones may slip.	Regular review of milestones, dependencies and delivery risks.

Consultees

24. The Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing has provided active oversight throughout the development of the Herefordshire CQC Improvement Plan, including regular briefings, review of key documents such as the self-assessment and supporting evidence, and the provision of challenge and feedback to inform its development.
25. A political group consultation has been held where the improvement plan was presented followed by specific discussion around working age adults, reablement and unpaid carers.
26. Following publication of the CQC Assessment Report, stakeholder briefings were delivered through webinars and supporting communications, engaging statutory partners, commissioned providers, and wider stakeholders including Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, community groups and lived experience boards. This engagement supported transparency, feedback and ongoing dialogue, forming part of the wider consultation approach underpinning the development of the CQC Improvement Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A: Herefordshire CQC Improvement Plan

Background papers

Herefordshire's CQC published report - [Herefordshire Council: local authority assessment - Care Quality Commission](#)

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

ADASS – the Association of Directors of Adult Social Care

ASC – Adult Social Care

CQC – Care Quality Commissioning

TEC – Technology Enabled Care

VCSE - Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise