



Title of report: Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 30 July 2026
Cabinet member:	Councillor Stoddaart, finance and corporate services
Report by:	Corporate Director, Community Wellbeing
Report author:	Corporate Director, Community Wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To receive the report on the outcome of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review, held on 28 May 2026, and to endorse the continued delivery of the council's action plan in response to the original recommendations.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Cabinet receives and notes the report arising from the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review held on 28 May 2026; and**
- b) **Cabinet endorses the continued delivery of the council's action plan in response to the original recommendations.**

Alternative options

1. The council could choose not to accept the feedback from the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review. This option has been rejected on the basis that the feedback was shared informally at the end of visit and accepted.
2. The council could choose not to continue with the delivery of the original action plan in response to the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge. However, whilst not mandatory, the council is committed to building on the progress made to date and to deliver against the recommendations in full.

Key considerations

3. Corporate peer challenge forms part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government and is delivered by the sector for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officers undertaking a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information. The team spent four days at Herefordshire Council in June 2025, gathering information and views from more than 40 meetings, in addition to reviewing a range of information. In total, the team spoke to around 120 people, including a range of council employees, elected members and external stakeholders.
4. All corporate peer challenges consider five core components:
 - a. Local authorities and outcomes
 - b. Organisational and place leadership
 - c. Governance and culture
 - d. Financial planning and management
 - e. Capacity for improvement

In addition, the peer team considered the council's approach to risk, use of data and insight and transformation.

5. The LGA report issued following the peer team's visit in June 2025 recognised Herefordshire Council as: *"a good council that is striving hard to improve further"*, highlighting a strong sense of place, maturing political culture and growing confidence in leadership. The team acknowledged the council's commitment to transformation, improvements in children's services and an increasingly strategic role in regional partnerships.
6. The report identified five key recommendations and a plan identifying 24 actions to respond to the recommendations was approved by Cabinet in September 2025.

Recommendation 1- Transformation: Now need to focus on corporate transformation and provide the resources needed to deliver.

Recommendation 2 - Data and Insights: Use of data must be improved so that insights can flow to support service improvement and framing the scope of the transformation programme. There are lots of examples where this is taking place elsewhere and the council should draw on the experience of others to support this development.

Recommendation 3 - Medium Term Financial Planning: Carry out planned refresh of Medium-Term Financial Strategy and provide some scenario planning for future years.

Recommendation 4 - Internal Capacity: Strengthen and stabilise the internal capacity to overcome challenges in the thin-client model of delivery.

Recommendation 5 - Working with partners to deliver: Partners are very supportive, and the council can build on this to develop strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and others to help deliver services.

7. The council has continued to monitor delivery of planned actions to respond to these recommendations and an assessment of progress is included at Appendix 2.
8. The Progress Review is an integral part of the corporate peer challenge process. Taking place around 10-12 months against the original peer challenge, it is designed to enable the council to reflect on progress made against the recommendation and to consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges.
9. Herefordshire's Progress Review focussed on the key recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge and took place on Thursday 28 May 2026, involving the following members from the original peer team: Richard Flinton (Chief Executive, North Yorkshire Council), Cllr David Fothergill (Conservative Member, Somerset Council) replaced Philip Broadhead who stood down as a councillor in 2025 and Eamon Lally (Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association).
10. The Progress Review report is included at Appendix 1. This report acknowledges the further progress made by the council, with 100% of planned actions completed or on schedule for completion, and notes that the original observations of the peer team that "*Herefordshire is a good council that is striving hard to improve further*" were reinforced in the progress review.
11. The report recognises the key strategic achievements of the council since June 2025; in particular, the "enormous amount of work by the council over a number of years" to improve children's services resulting in an Ofsted rating of overall 'good' in January 2026, progress in delivery of major capital projects, continued robust financial stewardship, strong delivery of Delivery Plan milestones and effective partnership and cross-sector working.
12. In relation to the five specific recommendations from the original report, the peer team noted:
 - I. The **transformation** programme is gaining momentum and the council has delivered a number of projects which support its transformation aims. They noted that the governance around transformation had strengthened and there was greater clarity on the themes of the transformation: the customer; the way the organisation works; and transforming the basics. In working through the detail and bringing the projects under the three themes, the council will need deft management of its resources to deliver them, but they heard strong testimony on how the council will do that.
 - II. In June 2025, the peer team recommended that the council should improve the use of **data** so that insights can flow to support improvement and transformation. In May 2026, the team noted that the performance function has been restructured and there have been improvements in some performance management systems, including the procurement of a new performance management system to consolidate strategic, operational and service level performance in one place and support more regular and timely analysis. The team concluded that the council has the right ambition in this area but there is still more work to be done.
 - III. In terms of **financial management**, the team stated that "*the council's finances continue to be well managed....The council continues to deliver balanced outturn positions.*" The team recognised the significant impact of the fair funding review on the council and the ongoing financial challenges that created. The team acknowledged an understanding of the strategic financial position across the council, as a result of regular briefings and increased engagement between staff and the finance team;

demonstrating a collective commitment and responsibility for the council's financial position.

- IV. In the June 2025 peer challenge, the peer team noted that the council would need to raise its **internal capacity** to manage contracts and recognised that in redesigning the model for delivery of public realm services, the council had taken the opportunity to increase control and ensure improved outcomes for residents. The team noted that, given the council's ambition, it should continue to keep under review its capacity and capability to manage emerging issues.
 - V. Working with **partners** was recognised in the original corporate peer challenge as a real strength of the council and the team noted that this had continued to develop and embed over the last 12 months. The Chief Executives' Group was being replicated at director and head of service level providing the structure for, and deepening, cross organisational working, in line with the original peer team recommendation. In particular, the team noted that *"Herefordshire council is playing a leading role in the devolution discussions."*
13. During the Progress Review, the outcome of the Care Quality Commission's assessment of the council's adult social care services was received. Whilst the overall rating was 'Requires Improvement' the team noted good messages and strengths throughout the report and in relation to the corporate health of the council: *"There were clear governance, management and accountability arrangements at all levels within the local authority."* The team recognised that responding to the assessment will be a significant priority for the council, requiring much member and managerial time, but the team was encouraged by the response to the assessment being ready for the challenge.

Community impact

14. There is no direct community impact as a result of the corporate peer challenge progress review report. However, the ongoing action to embed more strategic engagement with the voluntary and community sector will have a positive long-term impact in terms of genuine co-production and involvement in strategic commissioning.

Environmental Impact

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. The decision to receive the corporate peer challenge progress review report will have no environmental impacts.

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 decision, and it has been found to have no impact for equality.

Resource implications

19. There are no resource implications arising from the decision to receive the corporate peer challenge progress review report. Any resource implications associated with individual activities within the ongoing action plan will be subject to the normal governance processes.

Legal implications

20. There are no direct legal implications arising from this recommendation.

Risk management

21. The risk of not continuing the progress the original recommendations made by the peer challenge team is that opportunities for improvement are not taken which may have an adverse effect on the council's longer term strategic plans.

Consultees

22. Consultation has been undertaken with, Political Group Leaders, the Corporate Leadership Team and the wider Leadership Group.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review: Herefordshire Council, 28 May 2026
Appendix 2 – Herefordshire Council Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Statement May 2026

Background papers

None identified.