Appendix 2

Herefordshire Council

# Herefordshire Council Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Statement

## May 2026

# Introduction

In June 2025, Herefordshire Council hosted a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) managed by the Local Government Association (LGA). CPCs are part of a sector-led improvement initiative that enables local authorities to share expertise and support each other to improve. We welcomed a team of senior officer and member peers to review our performance, providing Herefordshire with an external perspective on our strengths, areas for development, and opportunities to drive organisational improvement.

This progress review position statement demonstrates how Herefordshire has proactively responded to the CPC over the past nine months through the delivery of our CPC Action Plan, approved by Cabinet in September 2025. It responds to the feedback received in the original peer challenge, reflecting on what has been achieved, exploring where delivery has faced challenges, and identifying what further action is needed. It forms part of our wider commitment to continuous improvement, learning, and transparency.

The Chief Executive is responsible for overall oversight, whilst relevant Directors have been assigned strategic owners of activity, to ensure ongoing accountability for progress against the plan. To track our progress in an accessible way, we have allocated a Blue, Red, Amber or Green (BRAG) rating to each of the actions:

- ✓ Action has been completed
- ✓ Action is on schedule for completion
- ✓ Action is at risk of not meeting completion date
- ✓ Action will not be delivered on schedule

Each rating is accompanied by more detailed narrative on what progress has been made.

As at May 2026, of the total 35 actions, 15 have been completed (Blue) with the remaining rated as Green. No actions are assessed as Amber or Red.

It is in this context we have produced this position statement and welcome the progress review, to continue to keep our focus on delivering the CPC recommendations and improving the organisation for partners, staff and residents.

# Herefordshire Council's Corporate Peer Challenge 2025

From 23-26 June 2025, the LGA Peer Team conducted a robust programme of activity, including over 35 interviews and focus groups involving more than 100 participants – from council staff to residents, community partners and anchor institutions. The team also reviewed a range of strategic and operational documents, such as the Herefordshire Council Plan, Medium-Team Financial Strategy, Transformation Strategy, and our Annual Governance Statement. The full report with findings can be found on the LGA website here.

The LGA final report concluded that:

> *Herefordshire Council is a good council with a strong foundation and a clear ambition to improve. It has made significant progress in key areas, particularly children's services, and is increasingly confident in its leadership and identity. The council is self-aware and understands the scale of the transformation required. With continued focus on capacity, data, and financial planning, it is well-placed to deliver on its ambitions and improve outcomes for its communities."*

The LGA's final report included five key recommendations:

> **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 MTFS 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.

The CPC action plan, approved by Cabinet in September 2025, responded to these key recommendations and also included other actions identified by the peer team in their report. These have all been included under the relevant key recommendations.

# Progress so far

Substantial progress has been made against key deliverables by the council, since our CPC in June 2025. Key highlights include:

The council's "year of delivery" began in August 2025, with work starting on a new multi-million-pound **Transport Hub** in Hereford. The hub, which is now nearly complete, will integrate key travel connections, making it easier to move around and connect by train, bus, car, bike, taxi or on foot, and forms part of a wider Local Transport Plan shaped by public input. Over the following months, other major infrastructure projects began, including active travel and safer schools routes schemes, flood alleviation, and employment land development. As of the time of writing, the council is on track to complete nine major transport projects within the next 18 months, improving connectivity, safety and accessibility for tens of thousands of residents, commuters, workers and visitors.

In September 2025, the council's **adult social care services** were assessed by the Care Quality Commission. The report will be published at the end of May 2026, with expected strengths including keeping people safe, strong quality assurance and oversight, dedicated, professional and compassionate staff, and partnership working. Improvement work will focus on reducing waiting times for assessment and specific services, and strengthening support for unpaid carers.

In October, Herefordshire Council joined local parish councils to launch a new **Charter for Herefordshire's Councils**, marking a renewed commitment to collaborative working and stronger local governance. Following nearly two years of joint development, the charter establishes common service standards, promotes partnership working in key areas like planning and highways, and introduces a structured approach to resolving issues between councils.

**Broader partnerships** have also been strengthened through structures such as the Herefordshire Chief Executives' Group and the Herefordshire Partners Group, enabling coordinated action across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The council has also played a leading role in sub-regional devolution discussions, working with neighbouring authorities and partners to develop proposals for a foundational strategic authority and position the area for future opportunities.

For the second year running, the council became the first UK local authority to receive a clean bill of health from external auditors for its **annual accounts**, confirming that its 2024/25 financial reporting was accurate and error-free. This reflects strong financial governance, transparency and a clear commitment to managing public funds responsibly and to the highest standards of accountability.

In November, Herefordshire Council set out an ambitious new **Local Transport Plan** aimed at giving residents greater choice and improving journeys across the county, with proposals covering roads, public transport, walking and cycling. Shaped by public and stakeholder input, it focuses on addressing different challenges in the city, market towns and rural areas, with the overall aim of boosting connectivity, supporting economic growth and enhancing quality of life.

Between December 2025 and January 2026, the council launched its **Budget and Council Tax consultation** for 2026/27, inviting residents, businesses and groups to give views on how services should be prioritised, where savings could be made and how the budget should be balanced.

In January 2026, **Children's Services** was rated 'Good' overall by Ofsted, with each specific service area receiving a 'Good' judgement and the 'Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' judged as 'Outstanding' in a report published at the time. Ofsted found that "Children's Services are rightly considered a high priority for the Council" and said "a visible and effective leadership team, supported by corporate and political leaders, has enabled vast improvements in the services delivered to children and their families, with particular pace and vision led by the Corporate Director of Children's Services, who is aspirational for children and committed to enhancing their lives".

In February 2026, informed by the public consultation and other inputs, the council approved its **2026/27 capital and revenue budgets**, setting out major investment in the county's future while protecting public services. It set out a comprehensive plan to close a significant funding gap due to the Government's Fair Funding Review not meeting growing and more complex demands, especially in a rural setting.

Herefordshire Council and its partners launched a new "**Invest in Herefordshire**" service and website to attract business investment, support economic growth and create better-paid jobs. The initiative provides a clear gateway for companies looking to relocate, expand or invest, bringing together information on key sectors, development opportunities, available premises and local support. Backed by a promotional campaign showcasing Herefordshire's strengths, including its £3.6 billion economy, strong business base and quality of life, the service aims to position the county as a competitive destination for investors and skilled workers.

In March, Herefordshire Council, alongside partners including schools, businesses and community groups, launched **Child Friendly Herefordshire**, a long-term initiative aimed at making the county a place where every child feels included, valued, happy, healthy and safe. The programme places children and young people at the heart of decision-making, with a strong focus on listening to their views and improving opportunities, wellbeing and support.

Herefordshire's '**Back the Bypass**' campaign was officially launched in March 2026, with council leaders, business representatives and other stakeholders coming together to support the project designed to tackle long-standing congestion, improve connectivity and create the conditions for jobs and economic growth. At the same time, **Ross-on-Wye Enterprise Park** was also launched. The 17-acre strategic employment site will become one of Herefordshire's largest business hubs and has the potential to support around 600 jobs once fully developed. The development will provide high-quality employment space for a range of growing businesses and forms part of the council's wider programme to support economic growth, attract inward investment and create more better-paid jobs.

In May 2026, the council confirmed it had delivered a **balanced budget for 2025/26** despite significant funding and demand pressures. This outturn reflected strong financial management and the efforts of directorates to control spending while continuing to deliver good quality services and meet demand. This enabled the council to deliver £13.2 million in savings while managing key cost pressures in adult social care, SEND, home-to-school transport and temporary accommodation. In addition, the council delivered £86.0 million in capital investment during the year, including fully utilising highways and local transport grants.

Over the last six months, the council has been preparing to transition its largest single contract. M Group Highways will deliver the new **Public Realm Services contract** starting on 1 June 2026. The multi-million-pound contract covers maintenance of roads and green spaces, highway drainage, street lighting, street cleansing, bereavement services, bus shelters, rights of way and winter gritting. Under the new contract, the council will take back day-to-day control of public realm services, with the provider delivering work at pre-agreed rates, giving greater flexibility and ensuring high-quality, efficient services that deliver excellent value for money.

Internally, key highlights include a stronger and more coordinated approach to **transformation** now being in place, led by a Corporate Transformation Board established in summer 2025. A structured programme has been developed around core themes, supported by updated digital and transformation strategies and strengthened governance arrangements. The Corporate Intelligence and Performance function has been strengthened to improve insight and support service improvement, particularly in social care. Data quality has improved alongside investment in systems and infrastructure, including a new performance management platform.

The council has continued to deliver on its **workforce priorities**, including the launch of a new corporate recruitment video: Delivering the best for Herefordshire , the introduction of THRIVE values-based recruitment to help embed our values, and appointments have been made to the key roles of Chief Executive and Corporate Director for Economy and Environment. Workforce planning and development activity has continued to strengthen, with effective use of the apprenticeship levy resulting in 62 apprentices by December 2025, the piloting of a new workforce planning model, delivery of our leadership development programme called Lead@HC and the launch of a digital skills development offer for all employees in April. Work to support equality, diversity and inclusion has included active engagement with staff networks, delivery of a staff networks day and refreshed EDI resources and intranet content.

Overall, the council has made **strong and sustained progress** in response to the CPC, with all actions either completed or on track. Clearer governance, stronger financial management, improved use of data, increased organisational capacity and deeper partnership working are driving delivery. This is reflected not only in strengthened internal performance but also in visible outcomes for residents, including infrastructure investment, improved services, economic growth activity and positive external assurance. However, while we are pleased with the progress achieved, we are not complacent. We welcome further challenge and scrutiny so we can build on this momentum through the 2026/27 Delivery Plan and continue improving outcomes for Herefordshire's communities.

# Progress update

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KR1 | Now need to focus on corporate transformation and provide the resources needed to deliver. | • Establish Corporate Transformation Board to drive direction for transformation and ensure delivery. | A corporate transformation board has been established and in place since August 2025. The board is chaired by the CEX and meets monthly to set the direction and ambitions for transformation, drive delivery and manage strategic risk and resources. | ✓ | Director of HR and OD |
| | | • Commission review of the council's transformation resources to ensure the right skills and resources to deliver our transformation ambitions. | In August 2025, council commissioned SOCITM to undertake a review of the council's transformation capacity from a digital perspective. One of the key findings of that work was a lack of internal digital transformation expertise. The council is implementing the SOCITM recommendations including the appointment of an interim Chief Digital and Information Officer who is leading the council's transformation activity. | ✓ | |
| | | • Develop a clearly articulated transformation delivery plan which sets out the investment required and the profile of savings to be delivered. | A corporate transformation programme of work is being developed around the three key themes of 'Fix the basics', 'The way we work' and 'Customer'. The council's digital and transformation strategies are being updated to reflect the new approach and to ensure the council has the right conditions for success. | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | • Ensure the timeliness of feedback to scrutiny on decisions. | Scrutiny recommendations are reported on at each scrutiny meeting – escalation routes (managed by the statutory scrutiny officer) have been established to notify the Corporate Leadership Team about any scrutiny recommendations at risk of not being responded to within the constitutionally required two-month completion period.<br><br>A new recommendation action tracker is being developed alongside the current arrangements.<br><br>The dedicated scrutiny web pages are being updated to include information on task and finish group reports and recommendations made by the committees. This will provide greater public visibility. Strengthened communications activity to highlight the work of scrutiny is actively being considered. | ✓ | Director of Governance and Legal Services |
| | | • Review training for councillors. | A review of the mandatory training was undertaken by the Member Development Working group in July/August 2025 and the second round of mandatory training was undertaken during September to November 2025. All training was recorded and placed on the Councillors Intranet site as a resource for members to utilise on an ongoing basis (for the remainder of this administrative term). | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | A member survey was circulated following the mandatory training requesting feedback on the quality of the training modules provided. A good to very good satisfaction rate was returned. Feedback from the survey will be used by the member development working group to inform continuing improvements to the two-yearly mandated training programme. | | |
| | | • Strengthen the council's brand and review both its internal and external communications to achieve this end. | New multi-year communications strategy has been developed and approved, aligned with Council Plan pillars and timeline. It includes capability plan to bolster nine key areas, including channels, content, commissioning and coordination. The most recent performance data underlines improvements in reach, followers, engagements and video views.<br>From February to April 2026, social media performance showed strong overall growth compared to the same period in 2025, with gains across most key metrics and channels.<br>Audience growth was positive across Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, with LinkedIn seeing the highest percentage increase (+18%), followed by Facebook (+14%) and Instagram (+11%) - overall net increase of nearly 4,000 followers.<br>Organic reach improved significantly, driven particularly by LinkedIn and Instagram, both | ✓ | Director of Communications |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | more than doubling year-on-year (+223% and +221% respectively). Facebook also delivered solid reach growth (+13%), contributing to an overall increase of 257,000 impressions.<br><br>The most notable gains were in video performance. Overall video-related reach increased by more than 600,000, underlining the effectiveness of video content as a key driver of visibility and engagement.<br><br>Key stakeholders, including local newspaper editor, have noted our responsiveness to media enquiries has “significant improved”. Cabinet members have also expressed “big improvements” in communications and are seeing more higher quality content being published helping to tell the story of the council.<br><br>There is growing evidence of increased impact of communications, for example the current campaign to secure subscriptions for the new garden waste service has seen higher rates of sign-ups than expected and targets ahead of schedule. Recruitment marketing has also contributed to increased interest and applications of key roles, particularly in children’s services.<br><br>We are now engaging audiences more directly through local online community groups, and a number of campaigns have | | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | supported core organisational priorities, including children's services recruitment.<br><br>New channels have been developed, including Viva Engage, which now reaches 91% of staff, enabling them to communicate to and with each other more easily, while providing a more engaging platform for leadership to share key messages and resources.<br><br>The comms operating model is currently being reviewed, with options for the new model being considered for implementation from Q2 2026/27. | | |
| KR2 | 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. | • Review the council's Corporate Intelligence & Performance function to strengthen its role in supporting strategic planning, service improvement and transformation | The Corporate Intelligence & Performance (CP&I) function has undergone a restructure to enhance the data provisions for adult and children social care. CP&I is currently refreshing the service planning process and will be revising the Performance Management Framework during 2026/27. | ✓ | Director of Finance |
| | | • Deliver planned improvements to data quality at source. | There have been significant improvements to data quality over the past 18 months on Mosaic with further enhancements due to take place during 2026/27. A new project has been set up to rebuild the data warehouse for Children Social Care as part of the Families First Programme. | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | • Improve self-service, empowering staff to access insight directly through dashboard and drill-down tools. | Significant improvements have been made in Adult and Children Social Care self-service options, including dashboards and drill-down tools. To record and monitor performance against corporate KPIs and delivery plan milestones, a new system (InPhase) has been procured and training has been rolled out within CP&I to administer the system. This will support the self-serve options by creating bespoke reporting on corporate KPIs and delivery plan milestones for officers at all tiers and councillors alike. | ✓ | |
| | | • Upskill staff in data literacy and visual analytics. | InPhase (performance management system) training has been delivered. A new post dedicated to improving technical skillset in SQL and data warehousing has been filled to support Children Social Care. | ✓ | |
| | | • Proactively use equalities data to inform decision-making and ensure that inclusive practice is consistently applied in both internal culture and external service delivery | Training to strengthen the consideration of equality impact assessments was delivered to service areas as part of the development of the 2026/27 budget. This training included information on sources of diversity data to support EIAs (Herefordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, population and census data) and guidance in respect of the consultation process.<br><br>Assessments completed as part of the budget setting process considered the equality impact of saving proposals and | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | changes in service delivery and these were actively considered and reviewed by Cabinet and subject to appropriate challenge through the scrutiny and consultation process.<br><br>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training was one of the five modules of mandatory training in the council's Programme for 2025.<br><br>The EIA guidance document has been revised to incorporate details of how cost increases impact on certain protected characteristics and a new template form has been developed to ensure compliance on completion of EIAs and/or Equality Impact Screening Checklists. | | |
| KR3 | Bring forward refresh of MTFS and provide some scenario planning for future years. | • Report to Cabinet in September 2025 on the impact of local authority funding reform on the council's future financial position. | An update on the key headlines from the June 2025 Spending Review and potential impact of local authority funding reform on the council's future financial position was presented to Cabinet in September 2025.<br><br>The report highlighted the redistribution of funding through the Fair Funding Review 2.0 and the estimated impact for Herefordshire.  An updated funding gap estimate was identified and reported to Cabinet and a clear approach and budget setting timetable outlined to balance the budget for 2026/27 and close the future funding gap. | ✓ | Director of Finance |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | • Continue to review the financial position through the 2026-2027 budget setting cycle. | Performance against the 2025/26 approved revenue budget and capital programme was reported to Cabinet throughout the year via quarterly updates. Monthly Directorate Budget Boards and Directorate expenditure control panels continued in 2025/26 with oversight of monthly financial position and performance by Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet.<br><br>Additional information to highlight and advise of financial plans for 2026/27 and the medium term period was provided throughout the period from September to February budget setting through dedicated briefings to Portfolio holders, Cabinet, Leadership Group, Group Leaders, individual political groups, Members of Scrutiny Management Board and key messages were shared with all staff via All Staff Briefings.<br><br>An Annual Review of Earmarked Reserves was presented to Cabinet in February 2026 as part of the budget setting process. The Earmarked Reserves and General Policy Statement sets out the council's approach to maintaining appropriate levels of reserves and general balances to meet known future commitments and to mitigate against unforeseen future events. The review identifies forecast reserve balances | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | to 31 March 2027 and a risk assessed minimum level of general fund balances.<br><br>The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position and impact of SEND Reform and the High Needs Stability Grant on the council's overall financial position has been reported through Schools Forum, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. | | |
| | | • Continue to tightly manage the delivery of the 2025-2026 savings. | The delivery of savings has been monitored robustly throughout 2025/26 through monthly Directorate Budget Boards and dedicated Directorate Saving Boards. The outturn position for 2025/26 confirmed delivery of 2025/26 approved savings in full (£3.9m approved savings in Children & Young People) and delivery of £9.3m of the £11.9m savings brought forward from previous years, Savings not delivered in year have been mitigated within the balanced outturn position and will be carried forward for delivery alongside approved savings in 2026/27. | ✓ | |
| | | • Embed the risk management strategy across the council and its activities. | The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Cabinet have undertaken quarterly reviews of the Corporate Risk Register to update risk scores, consider the adequacy of control measures and mitigating actions and identify new threats and opportunities to the delivery of the objectives and priorities of the Council Plan 2024-28. | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | The council's 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan has been reviewed to ensure it is aligned to the refreshed Risk Strategy and risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register.<br><br>A consistent Risk Register template to record and monitor individual Directorate, Service and Project risks has been developed with automated links and escalation flags; this template aligns risks to the council's approved Risk Strategy and Risk Appetite Statement.<br><br>A SharePoint site and Teams channel has been established to share guidance, training and enable interaction between risk owners Training was delivered to the council's Leadership Group in September 2025. | | |
| | | • Ensure that the audit committee is delivering robust challenge and appropriate assurance. | The Annual Report of the Audit and Governance Committee was presented to the Committee in June 2025. The report highlights the activity and impact of the work of the Committee throughout 2024/25. The 2025/26 Report will be presented in June 2026.<br><br>The Committee has exercised healthy challenge of the statutory accounts process and external audit assurance framework, Code of Conduct and complaints, whistleblowing arrangements, fraud, risk and information governance issues. | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | In 2025/26, alongside the activity identified above, the Committee supported changes to the Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules to ensure compliance with relevant legislation, minimise risk of fraud and ensure the council can demonstrate effective, efficient and economical use of public resources. | | |
| KR4 | Strengthen and stabilise the internal capacity to overcome challenges in the thin-client model of delivery. | • Strengthen internal capacity in relation to the public realm contract<br>• Strengthen contract management across the council | The new public realm contract goes live on 1 June 2026. 53 staff are being transferred back into the council in order to strengthen internal capacity and contract management. | ✓ | Corporate Director Economy and Environment |
| KR5 | 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. | • Develop a co-produced commissioning framework with the voluntary and community sector. | This work is underway being led by the Director of Commissioning. A new low entry commissioning framework will be in place from July 2026 that can be used by the whole council but will initially support the wider engagement of the VCSE within Community Wellbeing Directorate. | ✓ | Corporate Director Community Wellbeing |
| | | • Co-produce a robust social value approach as part of the council's wider commissioning and procurement, initially with the public realm contract. | The social value approach is being developed initially with ACEOM who are engaged with the work on the Southern Link Road. Learning from this work will inform the development of a consistent offer across all contracts. | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | • Lead the growth agenda, ensuring alignment across strategies and partnerships. | We have proactively led sub-regional engagement in identifying a future basis for devolution through establishing a proposed Foundational Local Authority and Spatial Development Strategy area – the Three Counties (Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire).<br><br>Government wrote to the council on 12 February 2026 seeking expressions of interests on the creation of new Foundational Authorities in the areas outside of existing Mayoral Authorities. Herefordshire's Leader and CEO led engagement with all neighbouring counterparts to explore options. We held extensive local engagement with all key stakeholder groups, considering an in-depth evidence base we had established to guide the best possible future for the county. This included the Herefordshire Business Growth Board, the Skills Board, Public Sector CEOs, the Herefordshire Public Sector Leaders Group, all elected members, and local MPs overseen by our political Group Leaders. The unanimous outcome was support for a Three Counties Foundational Strategic Authority, which builds on our long-term collective strengths in defence and security, inter-dependent supply chains and workforce, shared economic aspirations, and integrated infrastructure. | ✓ | Corporate Director Economy and Environment |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | We have also continued to play a leading role in the Marches Forward Partnership with Powys, Monmouthshire, and Shropshire through initiatives such as the Green Growth Environmental Investment Platform. | | |
| | | • Strengthen the role of the Business Board. | The recent and future devolution discussions have given the Business Growth Board a clear focus and added impetus.<br><br>A joint meeting of the Herefordshire Business Growth Board and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership was held in early March 2026. The private sector representatives identified significant economic opportunities and shared goals, supported a future devolution relationship along with Gloucestershire (writing to government in support of this future direction). They have committed to carrying on these discussions in seeking to develop a devolution 'ask' and are seeking to engage the Gloucestershire Business Board too.<br><br>The Herefordshire Business Growth Board has also led a review of the Herefordshire Economic Plan and established a delivery plan. This will provide further focus of activity for the Board to drive forward. | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | • Articulate the council's role in delivering the Herefordshire Big Economic Plan. | The Herefordshire Business Growth Board, Skills Board and Economy and Place Board have all played a key role in reviewing the Economic Plan and led the development of a new delivery plan.<br><br>The Plan identifies a wide range of actions to be delivered over the next three years. A significant number of the actions are identified for the council to lead (infrastructure, employment land, housing, and business support). | ✓ | |
| | | • Lead, shape and seize opportunities on devolution in the sub-region. | Herefordshire Council has played a key sub-regional leadership role in identifying a future direction for devolution. The council formed a Leader and CEO working group with counterparts across Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, as well engaging with Shropshire and Telford.<br><br>We established an evidence-based approach to reviewing all localised opportunities for forming a Foundational Strategic Authority. We formed a Steering Group of the political Group Leaders, and fully engaged public sector, community, private sector leaders as well as all locally elected members and MPs.<br><br>This comprehensive approach led to unanimous local support for a Three Counties (Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire) Foundational | ✓ | Chief Executive |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | Strategic Authority, which we submitted to government on 20 March 2026.<br><br>While government considers this response, we are now developing a devolution 'ask' as a basis of firming a future devolution deal with our Three Counties partner authorities. | | |
| | | • Continue to lobby government for a more flexible and sympathetic approach to supporting the opportunities associated with closer cross-border relationships. | We continue to play a leading role in the Marches Forward Partnership. At the request of the four local authorities, MHCLG has established a national cross department working group to continue to lobby to support local opportunities.<br><br>The Partnership also continues to seek government support wherever possible, including support from Defra for the proposed Green Growth Environmental Investment Platform. We also submitted a joint bid to the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) fund.<br><br>We are also working with MFP partners on a ministerial engagement plan (with UK and Welsh Governments) to lobby for the region and promote its opportunities, with Parliamentary and Senedd receptions being arranged for later this year.<br><br>A new MFP LinkedIn group has also been developed to allow members of each council (and respective partners) to share | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | announcements, content and contacts on this professional platform. | | |
| | | • Use the Herefordshire Chief Executives' Group (HCEG) to improve services through a focus on delivery and public service reform. | The HCEG continues to develop, with strong collaboration cited by all members, and is now equipped with a unifying narrative. Highlights have included deep-dives into neighbourhood health, market town development plans and the recent adoption of Child Friendly Herefordshire policy – all to improve broader understanding and buy-in. More recently, the group have explored the topic of devolution and this is now discussed as a standing item to ensure ongoing shared understanding of current policy changes, foundational strategic authorities proposals and alignment with other public sector reform and boundary changes, including in policing, health (new ICB clusters) and Fire and Rescue services.<br><br>A new Herefordshire Directors Group (HCEG sub-group) has also been established and has set out a work programme and set of priorities, including neighbourhood health, housing, employment and skills. These form the basis of two upcoming summits this year to improve multi-agency collaboration on two key determinants of health and wellbeing: housing and employment. The group has sponsored the development of a LinkedIn Group giving public sector leaders in | ✓ | |

| Ref. | Recommendations from the corporate peer team | Actions | Progress update – January 2026 | RAG Rating | Lead officer |
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| | | | Herefordshire a professional platform to share content, announcements and contacts. The HCEG has also nurtured the wider Herefordshire Partners Group (HPG), which now brings together – at a strategic level – statutory as well as voluntary sector leaders, and businesses representative organisations and civil society organisations. The HPG has become a unique public, private and third-sector forum to share information, insights and progress on key issues affecting Herefordshire (devolution, ICB strategic commissioning and neighbourhood health, fair funding review) and also the opportunities for closer working on key themes to have a greater impact (investment in digital and data capacity, infrastructure and growth). | | |

# Next steps

Herefordshire Council will continue to transform in line with its vision of "Delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do". Key developments in 2026 will shape the future direction of the council – the appointment of the new Chief Executive in June 2026, the development and implementation of the Future Financial Strategy in the light of the outcome of the Fair Funding Review and the implementation of the 2026-2027 Delivery Plan.

The 2026-2027 Delivery Plan reflects the breadth of services and programmes for the year ahead. In children's services, the council will continue to strengthen early help support, develop new alternative provision and advance further investment in schools. The plan also reaffirms the council's ambition to deliver Child Friendly Herefordshire, ensuring children and young people are at the heart of local decision making and that services, spaces and opportunities across the county are designed to help every child feel included, valued, happy, healthy and safe in their homes and communities.

The council will continue to drive major upgrades across the transport network – progressing the Hereford Transport Hub, Holme Lacy Road corridor and Aylestone Hill improvements, while also expanding and enhancing local bus services. The plan confirms the council's intention to begin construction of phase one of the Hereford Bypass, marking a significant step toward delivering long term congestion relief and improved strategic connectivity for the county.

The council will continue delivering one of its most significant highways investment programmes to date, reflecting residents' priorities around potholes, safer travel and better maintained roads. More than £37 million is being invested across 2025/26 and into 2026/27 in resurfacing, surface dressing, drainage and road safety improvements, with over 140 schemes planned across the network, from key A and B roads to neighbourhood streets. This includes £12 million for resurfacing and preventative treatments to reduce pothole formation, building on recent programmes that have delivered around 100 miles of improvements, repaired 25,000 potholes, upgraded crossings and signage, and strengthened routes that support daily life, commuting and business across Herefordshire.

Housing and community resilience form a core part of the plan, with commitments to expand emergency accommodation through refurbishment of council owned properties, accelerate housing delivery on council sites, develop transitional accommodation, and progress the flood alleviation works at Merton Meadow and Essex Arms. The council will also continue work with registered providers and Homes England to bring more affordable homes forward, while addressing homelessness through strengthened prevention and winter provision.

The environment and climate portfolio will deliver the new Carbon Management Plan, expand home energy efficiency schemes, progress the next phase of integrated wetlands, contribute to the Catchment Management Plan for the River Wye, publish the Nutrient Management Plan and advance the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The council will continue to help strengthen the local economy by supporting business growth across the county. This includes progressing key employment sites such as the Ross Enterprise Park and expanding the network of business hubs in market towns, giving local enterprises the space, infrastructure and advice they need to thrive.

A renewed focus on attracting inward investment will see the council champion Herefordshire's high value sectors and raise the county's profile as a dynamic place to do business. Close collaboration with the defence, cyber and security cluster, alongside promotion of innovation led industries, will help draw new investors, employers and skilled professionals into the county.

To support long term growth, the council will work with partners, including NMiTE and the Skills Board to strengthen pathways into education, training and higher skilled employment. These programmes will equip residents with the skills needed by local employers, broaden career opportunities and help ensure businesses can access a strong and future ready workforce.

The council will continue to modernise operations, including a new delivery model for SEND home to school transport, an updated commissioning strategy, improvements to procurement, and further digital transformation – building on successful pilots of artificial intelligence to improve efficiency and free-up time for frontline staff.

Financially, the plan is supported by a stable and well managed position, with the council taking effective action throughout the year and delivering strong performance. The Delivery Plan will operate within the balanced 2026/27 budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, with risks closely monitored through established governance and performance frameworks.

The council will build on its workforce insights with the launch of the 2026 Employee Survey from June, alongside a comprehensive review of competencies and qualifications to reinforce the corporate learning framework. Key developments for the next year will include the introduction of a new Learning Management System and expanded self-help learning offer, delivery of a senior leadership programme, and continued investment in EDI through mentoring, buddying and improved data quality. Support for managers and employees will be enhanced through refreshed 1:1 resources and change toolkits, while digital capability will be developed through our digital skills offer.

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We look forward to welcoming members of the Corporate Peer Challenge Team back to Herefordshire to talk through the progress we have made in the last year and to receive their thoughts on our future direction of travel.

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