



Department for Education

Josh MacAlister OBE MP
Minister for Children and Families

Councillor Jonathan Lester
Herefordshire Council,
Plough Lane,
Hereford HR4 0LE

By email: jonathan.lester@herefordshire.gov.uk

17 July 2026

Dear Councillor Lester,

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL: ENDING INTERVENTION AND REVOKING STATUTORY DIRECTION

I am writing further to my letter of 13 February 2026.

I have received Deborah McMillan's final report as children's services commissioner to Herefordshire. It comprehensively addresses the points I raised regarding Herefordshire's continued commitment to service improvement, engagement with the national reforms to children's social care, and to ensuring a stable transition of senior executive leadership in the council.

I was delighted to read of the progress made since inspection, to continue to improve services, and of your progress in implementing the wider children's social care reforms as part of your ambitions for Herefordshire's children.

In particular I am grateful, Councillor, for your personal commitment to continue to closely monitor performance in children's services. Continuing to prioritise children's services and providing key direction to that effect will bring clarity as Paul Satoor begins his new role as your chief executive.

On the basis of both these assurances and the progress demonstrated through inspection and since, I am satisfied that it is appropriate to end the DfE's statutory intervention. I have asked my officials to publish the Commissioner's report and revoke the Statutory Direction to the council. Once this is complete, the intervention will formally conclude, and officials will confirm the necessary updates to the relevant GOV.UK pages.

I would like to thank you, your team, and your partners for all your work on behalf of the young people you serve. I would also like to thank Deborah for her support as well as Eleanor Brazil and Gladys Rhodes White for the direction and help they provided previously.

You will be well aware of the effort behind this progress. You should be proud of what has been achieved, while remaining focused on sustaining and building on this improvement – in particular I am sure you will share my desire to ensure that more children are supported to remain safely within their family networks, and recognise the importance of bringing service budgets more closely in line with comparable services elsewhere.

Please continue to engage with your CSC Area Lead, John Bostock. I look forward to hearing more about your progress as you implement the Families First reforms in the run up to March 2027.

I am copying this letter to Councillor Ivan Powell (Cabinet Member for Children and Families), Paul Satoor and Paul Walker (respectively incoming and outgoing Chief Executive, Herefordshire Council), Tina Russell (Director of Children's Services), Deborah McMillan (Commissioner), and Eleanor Brazil and Gladys Rhodes White (respectively former commissioner and former improvement adviser).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Josh MacAlister', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Josh MacAlister MP
Minister for Children and Families