



## **Chief Executive's Update Full Council, 9 October 2026**

I am pleased to present my latest update to Council, three months after formally taking up the role of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service. Those first three months have given me the opportunity to get out across Herefordshire. I am grateful to members who have kindly hosted me in their wards, including in Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster, Bromyard, Kington, Ross-on-Wye and the Golden Valley. I look forward to visiting other wards in the months ahead.

Visiting different parts of the county has reinforced that each has its own circumstances, strengths and challenges. At the same time, many of the issues raised with me have been consistent: the importance of strong public services, a thriving local economy, better transport and roads, and safe, healthy places in which to live and work.

Those visits have also shown me at first hand the positive and constructive role members play in their wards. Their local knowledge, engagement with communities and work in representing the interests of residents and businesses provide an important link between the council and the people it serves, and help ensure that local priorities and concerns are understood.

The commitment, professionalism and knowledge of officers across the organisation have also impressed me. Whether they are providing frontline services or enabling delivery behind the scenes, our staff care deeply about Herefordshire and the difference they make.

Another clear strength is the quality of our relationships with partners across health, policing, education, business and the voluntary sector, and I believe there is considerable potential to build on these further.

Good service delivery remains central to my priorities as Chief Executive, which is why I am pleased to have seen continued progress across a wide range of services since my last update. In children's services, the formal revocation of the DfE's statutory direction has brought government intervention to an end, while work continues on SEND and Families First reforms and on improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers. We have approved expanded overnight short breaks and outreach support for children and young people with disabilities and are recommissioning advocacy and independent visitor services so that their voices and rights remain central to decision-making.

We are developing a dedicated homelessness assessment and support hub and strengthening specialist domestic abuse services, with greater emphasis on prevention, early intervention, safe accommodation and whole-family support. In adult social care, our improvement programme is building on the Care Quality Commission's findings, supported by continued home-care arrangements for around 834 residents and a new Care Home Partnership Framework designed to improve capacity, quality, stability and hospital discharge.

The new Public Realm Service has also made a positive start, giving us clearer accountability for roads, public rights of way and open spaces. Alongside this, we have launched the Herefordshire Future Skills Grant and the Big Economic Delivery Plan, continued practical support and national advocacy for our rural economy, and enabled 677 net additional homes in 2025/26. More than £2.3 million in phosphate mitigation income has helped release planning permissions for 1,096 homes, while the adoption of Herefordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy will help ensure biodiversity, river health and landscape recovery are embedded in future growth.

We must also maintain momentum across the council's key projects and programmes, alongside the wider programme of investment to support regeneration, infrastructure and service

improvement. In his report to Council, the Leader has set out progress across a wide range of projects, many of which are now completed, nearing completion or well under way. I am grateful to officers for their hard work in delivering these often highly complex programmes.

These projects are important to Herefordshire's future, but they must also remain affordable and deliverable. My role is to support members and officers, maintain a clear focus on the long-term benefits for the county and ensure robust strategic oversight of delivery. As part of this, we have established a Major Projects Board to strengthen assurance, oversight and coordination across our most significant programmes.

Herefordshire must also have a stronger voice outside the county. I am working with the Leader and other members, and neighbouring authorities and government departments to ensure our priorities and circumstances are understood in regional and national decision-making.

We will continue to work collaboratively, for example as part of the Marches Forward Partnership, wherever that is the best way to secure results, but we will not hesitate to pursue Herefordshire's interests unilaterally where a distinct local approach is required.

Our message is clear: Herefordshire should receive fair recognition of the costs of delivering services across a large rural county, together with the investment needed to support economic growth, infrastructure, connectivity and river health. We will continue to make that case directly and consistently.

Alongside delivery and external influence, financial sustainability remains the most significant organisational challenge we face, as it does for many local authorities. At the end of the first quarter of 2026/27, the council was forecasting an £11.6 million overspend against a net revenue budget of £234.1 million. Recovery action is under way across the organisation, with directorate teams and Finance working hard to reduce the forecast overspend and mitigate savings that may not be delivered to schedule. This includes accelerating savings already in progress and identifying expenditure that can be stopped, reduced or deferred.

As you will be aware, Herefordshire has a strong record of setting and delivering balanced budgets. However, the scale of the challenge ahead means we will need to examine how services are delivered, identify further efficiencies and income opportunities, and ensure resources are directed towards the areas where they achieve the greatest benefit for residents.

Members will also have seen that the council's 2025/26 Statement of Accounts received an unqualified audit opinion from our external auditors. This provides independent assurance that the accounts present a true and fair view of the council's financial position and means members, residents, businesses and partners can have confidence in the financial information used to support decision-making. It also reflects the council's commitment to strong governance, transparency and accountability in the stewardship of public funds, particularly at a time when local authorities face significant financial pressures and increasing scrutiny. Since we last met, the latest Employee Survey was carried out to measure colleagues' experience of working for the council and their level of engagement with the organisation. More than 1,000 colleagues responded, representing the strongest level of participation since 2017.

There was much to welcome in the findings. 93% of respondents said their team was committed to quality work, 93% said they demonstrated the council's values, and 91% said they were proud of their work and had the knowledge and skills needed for their roles. Staff also identified clear opportunities for improvement. These include making processes and systems work better, workload and wellbeing, giving colleagues greater influence over change and involving them

more consistently in decisions. The findings also highlight an opportunity to strengthen colleagues' understanding of how their roles contribute to the council's wider priorities.

We must listen carefully to those messages and act on them. The Corporate Leadership Team will use the findings to develop council-wide and directorate action plans, supported by detailed discussions with services and further workforce engagement.

Transformation will be critical to addressing these challenges, and work is under way to develop a refreshed transformation plan. This will sit alongside other important improvement and transformation programmes already under way across the council.

One of those includes a significant transformation of the software and digital processes that support planning and regulatory services. This will provide more effective and reliable systems for planning officers, streamline the way applications and cases are managed, and improve the experience of residents, developers, businesses and other service users.

As Returning Officer, I have been working closely with colleagues as we prepare for the council elections in May 2027, ensuring they are once again well planned, professionally administered and command public confidence. Throughout this period, the organisation must maintain clear political impartiality and continue to serve the current administration and all members effectively.

My first three months have reinforced my confidence in Herefordshire Council and given me a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead. We have talented and committed staff, constructive relationships with members and partners, and a clear commitment to public service.

I look forward to continuing to work with members, staff and partners for the benefit of the people of Herefordshire.

I ask members to note this update.

**Paul Satoor**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Herefordshire Council**