

## 15 Ward Councillor's Report

### Penyard Ward report October 25

The starting point for this report is the 3-year financial settlement from this government to Herefordshire and hence the debate out in the Media about the shortfall in funding for next years budget and the following two years.

The shortfall next year is currently standing at £27 million as we start the long process of setting a balanced budget that is mandatory and we will try and achieve for the budget setting next February.

How we do that is what impacts us all as Council taxpayers and service users of the multitude of service provision required by the residents of Herefordshire.

We are starting from a point of delivering in 25/26 of being on target for this year's budget as agreed way back in February with an expectation of finishing this year on or very close to target as set.

It was our expectation with good fiscal management and increasing service demand that any increase in Council tax would be a lower increase than previous. The Government settlement has treated all rural authorities to a lesser share than the Urban authorities and a higher level of funding going to Mayoral authorities, which we are not one, and even if the appetite was for that to happen, won't be in the above timescale. It also comes with the statement that shortfalls are expected to be mitigated through increased Council tax levels of at least a 5% increase as starting point.

Within this scenario, we can cut services, cut investment, raise income where there are charging mechanisms, cut staff, improve efficiencies amongst a number of measures. Whatever we must look at, we will endeavour to come to the best conclusion we can. I will keep this report updated as we work our way through.

Following on from the above was the announcement last Thursday that Paul Walker, Herefordshire Council Chief Executive is to resign, effective March 26. As he said there is no good time for this, but we have time to decide how we proceed in our senior management structure.

Which leads us to today Monday, as we have been interviewing Candidates for the senior management role of Director for Environment and Place, a role vacated by Ross Cook only last week after working out a 3 month notice period. I have been on the Stakeholder panel for interviewing the candidate short list all day. Along with 3 other panels this is an arduous exercise for all concerned to find an appointable candidate.

This has led to what will our highest-level management team look like going forward.

With all the above, we will of course look at options to gain highest level management experience to ensure the Council is effectively managed, saves money and delivers quality services efficiently and effectively.

The biggest concerns over the last couple of weeks have been the road investment maintenance program where significant works have come to the South of the County and how road closures are dealt with to get these programs done.

This administration put this funding in our Capital program as a result of our pledge to invest in the road network. This £11 million investment is not government funded nor is it anything to do with MP Ellie Chowns, either now she is MP, or from when she was a local Councillor. This is your money raised through local Council tax and management of our budget to get the job done, and it is our intention to deliver another chunk of the same next year.

I am full square behind this and will continue to ensure that we continue to improve the current and future infrastructure in this area and the wider County needs. To do this road closure disruptions are a challenge and all we can do is get the job done within the advertised closure periods and move on. It just isn't possible to do this level of investment without a few issues.

Works still in the pipeline include (amongst others) the A40 through Lea due to commence in October

The route of the A40 passing through Lea Village will be closed at various times from Monday 6th to Thursday 16th of October - if you have any concerns please visit <https://one.network> or call 01432 260555

Herefordshire Council enters autumn 2025 with momentum in service transformation, capital investment, and governance improvement. External recognition from the LGA peer challenge provides confidence in the council's trajectory. However, sustaining progress in children's services, managing financial pressures, and maintaining delivery of capital projects remain the key priorities for the remainder of 2025

As ever I can be contacted on 07900 918384 and of course I should be happy to attend any Parish Council meetings should the Clerk request my participation for any reason.

Regards

Cllr Harry Bramer

Penyard Ward member

Cabinet member Community Services and Assets