

## February 2026 – Ward Report – Sutton Walls



It's official! Herefordshire is the new Shakespeare County.

The film Hamnet, which was filmed on location at Weobley, the Cwmmau Farmhouse in Brilley, and the river wye at Clifford is being used by Visit Herefordshire to promote local tourism in our county. Visit Herefordshire is a standalone organisation financed by larger local tourism business to advertise our county and support the visitor economy. Herefordshire Council worked closely with the film company before and during the

making of the film and gets a mention in the closing titles.

The film has already won international awards and are nominated for Oscars and BAFTAs. The picture shows the old red Lion pub in Weobley, now a curry house, being transformed for the film. Hopefully our local villages and tourism business will benefit from extra visitors this year.

I am pleased to confirm that Herefordshire Council's Children's Services have now been 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'. This is a significant achievement for the Council, reflecting the hard work and dedication of practitioners, managers, elected members and partners who committed to deliver the improvements.

These very sensitive services which look after the care of some of the most vulnerable children in our county were placed in special measures in 2022 with a commissioner appointed by Government to oversee its running. While not as visible as some council services like potholes, the proper care and protection of these local children must always be a priority; the achievement of this turnaround in the timescale and without further huge financial investment is a testament to excellent working practice by employees and partners. The very nature and complexities of children's care mean you can never be overconfident in this area, but the service and political leaders deserve all credit for what has been achieved.

The full inspection can be read at <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50293401>

### Diagnosis Centre opened in Hereford



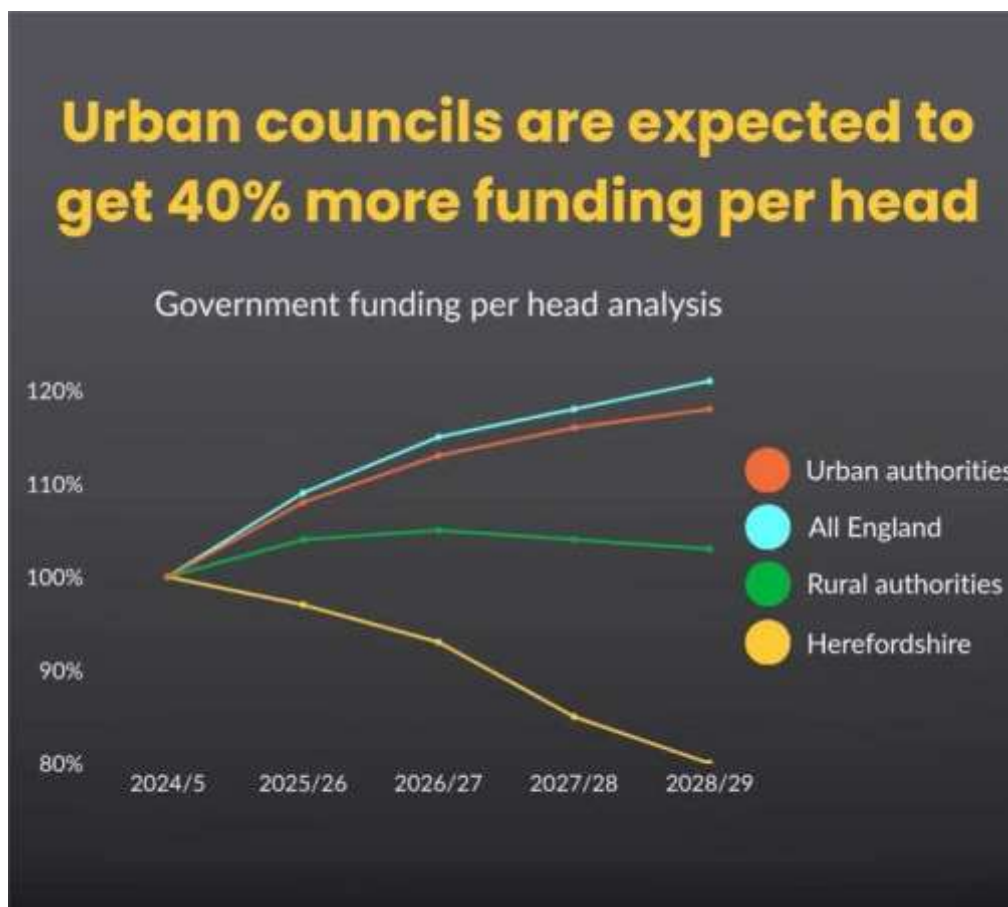
Government health Minister Stephen Kinnock MP officially opened the new NHS facility in Hereford last month. The 18-million-pound Wye Valley Community Diagnostic and Treatment centre provides residents in Herefordshire and part of Powys with access to the latest cutting-edge imaging services – X-ray, CT, MRI and Ultrasound. The centre will help take off pressure from the main Hospital, speed up waiting times and is open from 8am to 8 pm.

The centre has been open since September and is located just off Holmer road behind B&Q. It is oddly located between Painter Bros and B & Q via an Industrial access road.

The Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council Paul Walker had indicated he would retire on 31<sup>st</sup> March, and the council has been looking for his successor. Sadly, initial applications received were considered by a cross-party group of lead councillors as not being of the competency expected, so a further process is being undertaken with the current CEO extending his term.

The significant business for the Council now is to confirm the budget for 2026/27 and set the Council Tax rate. In this update I go into detail of the very poor settlement Herefordshire has received for the next three years from the Government.

I also report on a recent visit by The Prince of Wales, the appointment of the new highways contractor to succeed Balfour Beatty, plus the usual updates on Highways.



### **HEREFORDSHIRE FUNDING HIT HARD BY THE GOVERNMENT**

The Government announced a 'fair funding review' of English local authorities just before Christmas. The formula used for working out the funding was changed moving funding from rural councils to urban councils. As the graph shows urban councils will get nearly 40% more funding per head than Herefordshire by 2028/29.

It is deeply disappointing that the government is failing to sufficiently fund the additional costs of delivering services to residents across a rural county. The government's Review, which covers the next three financial years, will cut £17.3 million (-23%) from Herefordshire's central funding by 2028/29, adding to previous losses such as the £7.1 million Rural Services Delivery Grant leaving changeling savings to be found to meet inflation and service pressures. Our neighbouring English councils are similarly under pressure.

The government's new funding model assumes local authorities will raise council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum - 4.99% per year for the next three years - placing further strain on rural households who already pay 20% more council tax than urban areas.

That increase means a band D equivalent charge to £2,067.63, representing an increase of £8.19 per month for 2026/27. The new formula fails to properly account for remoteness, increased and more complex needs for rural young people and the impact of an ageing population. In short, demand and costs for essential services are rising faster than funding increases. Herefordshire council`s draft revenue budget, which will be debated at the Council meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February, aims to overcome the £30.0 million gap identified, including redundancies, and measures to manage Directorate inflationary pressures via a centrally held Contract Inflation Fund. Details of the 2026/7 budget are in Cabinet papers on the council`s website.

Other rural councils are facing tough decisions including Shropshire who are heading for a technical bankruptcy caused by not making savings in the past and freezing council tax for three years which resulted in a huge hole in their finances. Working with the Rural Services Network and our MPs we are trying to get a re-visit to the calculations but despite the Labour Government having 100 rural seats I fear it will be a tough challenge.

Roger Phillips, the Chairman of Herefordshire Council, met with the local Government Minister Alison Mc Govern MP and requested her to revisit their “remoteness element of their criteria” and apply it to all rural services not just social care which could improve our settlement by 10 million pounds. The Finance team are briefing all the political groups on the council on measures to close the funding gap. I believe despite the above inflation figures we must increase council tax by what the government expects otherwise the cuts will become even more severe to our services.

## **HIGHWAYS**

Following the procurement process **M Group Highways** has been selected as the preferred provider to deliver the county`s new Public Realm Services contract starting in June this year succeeding Balfour Beatty – who did not tender.

The contract covers essential services that residents rely on, including the maintenance of roads and green spaces, highway drainage, street lighting, street cleansing, bereavement services, maintenance of 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. This approach will give the Council greater flexibility and ensure services are high-quality, efficient, and provide better value for money.

The winter season is having its impact on our highways, and I do urge you to report concerns



## PLEASE report potholes and concerns

Report problems on the road –  
[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/report-problems-road](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/report-problems-road)

Check on progress of a defect  
[herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/pothole-road-defect-progress-map](http://herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/pothole-road-defect-progress-map)

Report a serious pothole, flooded road or highway obstruction- Balfour Beatty  
Living Places: 01432 261800

Footpaths issues –

- PROW - [PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk)
- PROW No – [01432 383 550](tel:01432383550)

Report fly tipping it will be dealt with in a much quicker time frame. by either calling the Contact Centre on 01432 261800 or by logging the fly tipping via the council website on the links below as your [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/fly\\_tipping](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/fly_tipping)

### Prince of Wales in Herefordshire discussing mental health in Farming



Prince William made a recent visit to Much Cowarne in Herefordshire as Patron of the 'Wearefarmingminds' charity.

The Charity raises mental health awareness in rural communities of Herefordshire offering 24-hour support, professional counselling and befriending services, combats isolation, provides resources and advice.

While speaking with farmers John and Laura Bowler he joined in with tree pruning and feeding the sheep. They discussed the financial, business and weather pressures that farmers face living in the countryside but so often challenged by isolation.

The Duchy of Cornwall is the largest landowner in Herefordshire, primarily the original Guys Hospital estate of over 10,000 acres based mainly in the south of the county and the Cradley estate in the east. Comprising of farms, woodlands, residential, and business tenancies, focusing on sustainable land management, environmental conservation, and community support, managed for the income of the Prince of Wales.

He is very tall and at 6ft 3 inches he will be the tallest monarch for over 500 years - since Edward the fourth 1442-1483.

**Pictures include the Lord Lieutenant Edward Harley (still taller!), The Prince, John and Laura Bowley, Sam and Emily Stables (founders of the Charity) and our Chairman Roger Phillips.**