

August 2026 – Ward Report – Sutton Walls

I am pleased to report that the Department for Education has made the decision to end government intervention in Herefordshire children's services and has revoked the statutory direction issued to the council in September 2022 under the previous administration.

This decision follows significant improvements across children's services over the last three years and represents a major milestone in the council's work to deliver better outcomes for children and young people across Herefordshire. The latest decision builds on the progress recognised by Ofsted, which announced Herefordshire's children's services to be "Good" with "Outstanding" leadership in January this year. This is a significant achievement and tribute to the work of staff, partners and the council's political leadership.



The exceptional dry weather is bringing several problems of wild and outdoor fires as we are witnessing in Europe and at home. Just over the Welsh border saw a large fire on Hanter Hill which lasted several days. Several of the Herefordshire fire crews supported the Mid Wales fire authority and played an important role in protecting a house on the edge of the hill. Our local Fire service has been involved daily with many fires in the open, farm and crop fires thought-out our County.

The picture is taken from the Hergest Hill racetrack walk which some of you may be familiar with.

Please be careful when walking or traveling in our countryside the vegetation is so dry and highly at risk of fire. The dry summer has also seen an early harvest for farmers and with moisture levels so low that the oilseed rape had to be combined from 4am till the heat of the sun forced the moisture too low.

Last month the government made announcements on abolishing District and County councils and creating Unitary Councils in England (like Herefordshire) which had implications for Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Gloucestershire will become one unitary authority with Worcestershire being split into two. The significance of this is that the government will then be establishing regional Mayors, which our new Prime Minister is a strong believer in. Having our backs to Wales, our options are limited and the current consensus view is Worcestershire plus is the better option.



Leominster's sole GP practice, Ryeland Surgery, has relocated to the new £7 million Marsh Court Health Centre (HR6 8FU). The purpose-built facility—located off Porters Mill Close, opposite the cricket ground and B&Q—features expanded clinical space, over 70 parking spaces, and an on-site medical research hub.

The new facility has been named Marsh Court Health Centre. While Ryeland

Surgery will be the main occupant, the development also includes space for a new pharmacy to operate alongside the practice.

The health centre has also been designed with future expansion in mind. With the Government promoting the development of neighbourhood health centres across the country, discussions are already underway with Herefordshire's mental health trust, Wye Valley Trust and other healthcare partners to explore the possibility of bringing additional services to the site.

Targeting all farmers and rural communities!

West Mercia Police want to hear the views of our rural communities around how you would like West Mercia Police to communicate with you. This includes farmers and anyone living in a more remote or rural location. If that's you, please take a few minutes to complete this short survey which will close on Monday 31st August. Copy and paste - <https://survey.neighbourhoodmatters.co.uk/Survey/HASH/FE2A0BCBFEBD9ADB D9930CF973D894AF>

Dealing with Homelessness, and vulnerable families in Herefordshire



The Council has a statutory duty to address homelessness, supply suitable accommodation for vulnerable residents across Herefordshire. Demand for temporary accommodation has increased steadily, with the number of households accommodated rising from 93 in January 2023 to 184 in January 2026. The costs of providing emergency accommodation continue to rise, with a single room in a local hotel costing the council around £85 per night, equivalent to more than £31,000 per year, while housing benefit payments do not fully cover these costs.

Recently the Council approved a 4.1 million capital funding programme to improve experience and save money. A key element of the new programme is the introduction of an Empty Properties Grant Scheme to bring long-term vacant homes back into use. Herefordshire currently has more than 1,800 empty properties, including over 600 homes that have been vacant for more than a year. Grants of up to £50,000 per property will be available to support refurbishment, with funding tied to agreements that make homes available at below-market rents. This will enable the council to move families out of temporary accommodation and into more stable housing. The funding will also support the development of accommodation for groups whose housing needs are particularly difficult to meet, including large families, disabled residents and households requiring accessible homes.

Picture above: John Venn building purchased by the council to place homeless people rather than expensive local hotels.

The programme also provides transitional accommodation for homeless young people and care leavers, helping them move towards independent living. The council intends to purchase at least four properties for this purpose, creating a stepping stone between supported accommodation and permanent housing. Supported housing placements for looked-after children cost the council on average £61,000 per year. Investment in transitional accommodation has the potential to improve independence while delivering significant long-term savings.