



Report April 2026

Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst

Happy to represent Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow, Sellack, Llangarron, Welsh Newton and Llanrothal Parishes.

### **Reflections on elections**

As April starts to draw to a close I am finding myself thinking about this time next year, when, for Herefordshire, the local elections will be looming. I will be door knocking and dropping leaflets in the hope that the good people of Llangarron Ward see fit to return me once more to represent them as a councillor. It has been my great good fortune to have been elected since 2015 – more than 10 years – and I have to say that the longer I do this work, the more I enjoy it and (not to be immodest) the better I get at it.

It is one of the odd things about being elected that one gets the sack at the very moment the count is in. That's it – you are gone, made irrelevant in a second. It goes with the territory, and I fully accept it, but it is unlike any other job in that respect. It is brutal. I have seen colleagues from all parties who, having lost a re-election, are all at sea, shocked, even emotional. Ironically it was a photo of me comforting a colleague at the 2019 count that was printed in newspapers as two Tory losers having a good cry. In fact, we had both won but my colleague had done so after a year of poor health which she had coped with admirably, not a word of complaint and no meetings missed despite the treatment she was undergoing. This was the moment that all of that emotion surfaced – her moment of triumph and relief.

Who knows what will be in store in 2027 but for now I am happy to be your councillor and will continue to do my best for Llangarron Ward.

### **Herefordshire BID (Business Improvement District)**

I spent a very interesting and inspiring day at the Herefordshire BID conference. We heard about the brilliant work of the Visit Herefordshire team who are doing a great job in supporting tourism in the county. Against a backdrop of national decline we have seen our local tourism industry grow by 7% over last year – amazing! The visitor economy is now worth around £830m pa and they are aiming at £1bn. All of this has been helped by the success of Hamnet which was filmed in the county. We also heard from the Herefordshire film office who showcased the various films that have been made here, including one of my favourite TV shows. The Herefordshire BID film office is looking for more locations to add to the directory so why not join it – who knows, you might be the location for another Oscar winner! [Herefordshire Film Office - Herefordshire County BID](#)

We also heard about the new Cultural Strategy which was launched at the conference – a plan to support the creative industries in the county.

[The Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025-30 | The Shire](#)

### **The Peoples Emergency**

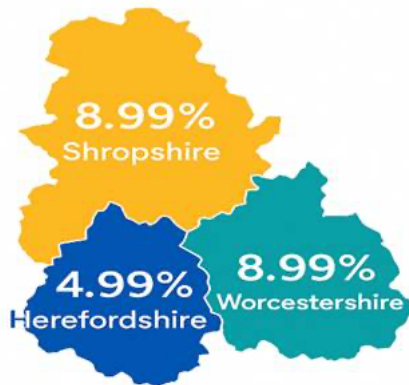
As the Cabinet Member for the Environment, I attended the national premiere of 'The Peoples Emergency' at Whitecross School. This is a short (50m) film based on the conference/seminar held in London and aimed at presenting the science of climate change to the decision makers in Westminster. I have to say that I find it somewhat depressing that the decision makers are still needing this level of engagement on what is, to my mind, an existential threat.

Herefordshire Council has just finished drafting the fourth carbon budget which tracks our progress towards the goal of net zero by 2030. We now have a pathway to follow which includes, for the first time, offsetting in order to achieve net zero. The council has reduced its carbon footprint by around 65% from the 2008 baseline but the last yards are the hardest to do. There is

also a 2030 net zero target for the county but, while good progress has been made, we are a long way off achieving that.

### A bit of context about Council Tax which I hope you will find interesting.

#### Council Tax Increases in 2026/27 Council Tax Rates for a Band D property:



Herefordshire - £2, 067  
Worcestershire - £2,400  
Shropshire - £2, 528

Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)  
Worcestershire **£60m** EFS (26/27) + **£34m** (25/26)  
Shropshire **£121m** EFS (26/27) + **£71m** EFS (25/26)

#### No EFS in Herefordshire

**"Exceptional Financial Support" (EFS)** is a UK government mechanism allowing local councils facing severe financial difficulties to avoid issuing a Section 114 notice (effective bankruptcy). It is essentially a "capitalisation direction," permitting councils to borrow money or use capital receipts (from selling assets) to fund day-to-day (revenue) operational costs.

What are the implications and consequences of EFS, the "so what?":

- **Long-Term Debt for Short-Term Relief:** EFS is not a grant; it is permission to borrow. It solves the immediate budget gap but loads councils with debt, requiring them to pay it back over time, often up to 20 years. At an interest rate of approx. 6%, thus for Worcestershire they will be paying approximately £6M of interest per year and for Shropshire it will be nearly £12M of interest just to keep the lights on.
- **Asset Depletion:** To repay this borrowing, councils often have to sell off assets, which can reduce their long-term income-generating capacity and community assets.
- **Reduced Local Autonomy:** Receiving EFS is contingent on harsh, strict conditions, which include external assurance reviews, increased financial reporting, and potentially setting up improvement boards.

EFS is therefore not an easy answer to the current Local Government funding challenge. Herefordshire has set a balanced budget for 2026/27 without reliance on EFS.

Alongside applications for EFS, councils not able to balance their budgets may request permission to increase council tax beyond the referendum limit of 5%. For 2026/27, 7 local authorities were given permission to increase council tax above this level including Worcestershire and Shropshire as shown in the diagram above.

We are required to make £20M of savings in the coming financial year which will be achieved through controlling costs of service delivery, increasing income from fees and charges, managing demand for council services in high-cost demand led budgets and delivering efficiencies through review and transformation of services. Herefordshire will be living within its means.