

February Report.

As February 2026 gets under way, here is a short update on Worcestershire County Council matters that are particularly relevant to our Malvern Hills parishes and neighbouring areas. This covers the current budget process, the ongoing need for local SEND provision, and the continued success of the on-demand bus service.
Worcestershire County Council Budget 2026/27.

The council is working through the final stages of setting the budget for the coming financial year. Like many local authorities nationwide, we face significant pressures from rising demand in children's and adult social care, inflation, and other essential service costs. The draft proposals include difficult but necessary savings measures aimed at protecting frontline services as far as possible. Full Council will debate and approve the final budget later this month. I remain focused on ensuring decisions continue to support the most important community priorities, especially education and care for our most vulnerable residents.

SEND Provision – Malvern Hills Priority

There is still no dedicated SEND school provision in the Malvern Hills district. This means many children with special educational needs and disabilities continue to be transported long distances by bus to specialist places in other parts of the county. Long journeys can be exhausting and disruptive for the children and their families.

For reference, current specialist provisions are located as follows:

2 in Redditch

2 in Kidderminster

3 in Worcester

At the January meeting of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Panel, we strongly urged Cabinet Member for Education, Cllr Stephen Foster, to keep the proposed new SEND school in Malvern as a top priority. Education leaders have confirmed their commitment by choosing to pursue the dedicated new facility rather than accepting an alternative offer from the Department for Education that would have funded places in existing or mainstream settings instead. While the original target opening date of September 2027 may now move to 2028 or 2029 due to various factors, the project remains on course for construction.

I will continue to monitor progress closely and advocate for the school to open as soon as possible, so that local SEND children can access suitable education much closer to home.

Worcestershire On-Demand Bus Service.

The on-demand bus service is going from strength to strength. The new North West zone, which includes Tenbury Wells, Stourport, Bewdley and surrounding villages, launched at the end of January 2026. This flexible, app-booked service is designed for

shorter local journeys in areas with fewer traditional bus routes and is proving very useful for many residents. To mark the expansion, free travel has been available in the North West, North Central, and North Malvern zones through the end of February. The service builds on excellent groundwork from the previous administration and is making a real difference to local connectivity and independence.

If there is anything else I can help with or raise at county level, please do get in touch. I am always pleased to hear from you and represent our local communities.

All the best,

Mel Fordington