

County Councillor, Mel Fordington, Report April 2026

Dear all and Residents of Hallow Division,

I hope this report finds you well. As your County Councillor, I continue to champion the needs of our rural communities while holding the council accountable on the issues that matter most to families across Worcestershire.

This month's update covers activity right across the division, the significant council tax rise, cost-of-living pressures, support available, my work as Worcestershire Apprenticeships Ambassador, and an exciting community event we are all invited to attend.

I will continue to support residents in Hallow Division on issues ranging from highway maintenance and flooding resilience to local bus services and community facilities. Casework this month has included helping families with school transport queries, supporting elderly residents with care packages, and liaising with parish councils on local infrastructure improvements. I remain committed to ensuring every corner of our division from the heart of Hallow to the more remote settlements receives the attention it deserves.

Council Tax Rise and Cost of Living Pressures

Worcestershire County Council has approved an 8.98% council tax increase for 2026/27. For a typical Band D household, this adds approximately £145 a year to the county precept. While the council cites financial pressures, I am acutely aware of the real impact this will have on families already struggling with the rising cost of living higher energy bills, food prices, and housing costs.

Many households in Hallow Division, particularly those on fixed incomes or with young children, will feel this squeeze directly. The additional financial pressure in some home's risks compounding stress and anxiety, leading to increased mental-health challenges for parents and children alike.

If you or your family are experiencing pressure from the rising cost of living, support is available.

I strongly encourage you to contact your local Worcestershire Advice Network (WAN) partners, which include Citizens Advice, Age UK and DIAL. They offer free, independent and confidential advice on benefits, debt, housing, energy bills and other essentials. Visit worcestershireadvicenetwork.org.uk to find your nearest contact point or drop-in session.

Additional help may also be accessed through the council's Household Support Fund for those most in need. Please get in touch with me if you need signposting to these services.

Opportunity to Develop Local Health and Community Services

Following a lengthy and productive conversation with Professor Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health at Worcestershire County Council, I am pleased to share that she has offered an opportunity for residents or community groups who wish to start a new healthcare service or any other initiative they feel will benefit their local area.

Professor McNally and her team will guide you through the pathways and support available.

If you have an idea that could improve health, well-being or community services in Hallow Division or surrounding areas, please reach out to her directly:

Email: lmcnally@worcestershires.gov.uk

She will be happy to discuss and direct you to the right support.

Overview & Scrutiny Panels. Positions Reform Must Fill

Effective scrutiny is essential for good governance. At present, there are 9 vacant seats on the council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels and related committees because insufficient Reform councillors have stepped forward to take them up. These include positions on the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board, the five Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Adult Care & Well-being, Children & Families, Corporate & Communities, Economy, and Environment), and the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

I urge the Reform administration to fill these 9 empty positions promptly. Proper scrutiny protects residents, holds the executive accountable and ensures public money is spent wisely. Without full membership, important services especially those affecting vulnerable residents cannot receive the robust, independent challenge they need.

Worcestershire Apprenticeships Ambassador Update

As Worcestershire Apprenticeships Ambassador, I am determined to seize every opportunity to grow apprenticeship and work-experience opportunities for young people in our division and across the county.

I will be working closely with schools and colleges in the Hallow area and beyond to encourage greater employer engagement. Recognising the importance of apprenticeships and quality work placements is vital for our local economy and for giving young people clear pathways into skilled careers.

The Worcestershire County Council team will guide and lead me along the established pathways to these services, and I will be reaching out directly to businesses to invite them to take part. I am particularly pleased that Severn Trent is actively participating in these pathways and opening doorways for young people in our communities. Together we can make a real difference.

Thanks to Parish Councillors and Highways Reporting.

I would like to thank all parish councillors/Chair, for their ongoing hard work and for continuing to keep pressure on reporting any highways concerns through the official Portal.

Please continue to do so and kindly forward me any reference numbers you receive so that I can follow up on your behalf and add my voice where needed.

Additionally, mobile police speed camera teams are now working more frequently across our areas. We need to ensure we keep all residents in Hallow Division informed about these safety initiatives, which help protect our communities, especially in rural lanes and village settings.

Built For Worcestershire Community Event Saturday 25 April 2026.

I am delighted to confirm that I will be attending and speaking at the Built For Worcestershire event at The Hive, Worcester City Centre, on Saturday 25 April 2026 (10

am – 3 pm). This is a Worcestershire Community Wellness & Water Event jointly hosted by Severn Trent, the University of Worcester and Worcestershire County Council. The day will feature local partners, councillors, careers advice, schools and community groups. It is a wonderful platform to give back to the city and surrounding villages while addressing the rising cost of living and showcasing the positive work happening across Worcestershire. I will be highlighting the good work our communities and partners are doing, including the apprenticeships opportunities I have outlined above. The event is open to all and includes a youth art competition, with the Mayor presenting the winner with a donation to a charity of their choice. In response to the invitation from the organisers, I would suggest inviting fellow county councillors with portfolios in education, adult care and environment, together with relevant council officers from apprenticeships and community engagement teams. If you are free on the day, please come along. It promises to be an excellent, family-friendly occasion.

Looking Ahead

April will be busy with continued casework, apprenticeship outreach, highways follow-ups and the Hive event.

I remain fully committed to listening to your concerns and fighting for the best outcomes for every family in Hallow Division.

Together we can build a stronger, more resilient Worcestershire.

Best wishes,

Mel Fordington
County Councillor for Hallow Division
Worcestershire County Council