Public Document Pack

Shropshire Council

Date:	Thursday, 25 September 2025
Time:	10.00 am
Venue:	Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ
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COUNCIL

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

8 A New Direction for Shropshire (Pages 1 - 12)

The report of the Leader is attached

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Committee and Date

Council
25th September 2025

Item

Public

Healthy People

Healthy Economy

Healthy Environment

Healthy Organisation

A New Direction

Responsible Officer:	Tanya Miles, Interim Chief Executive
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Heather Kidd, Leader of the Council

1. Synopsis

This report outlines the strategic direction proposed by the new administration, a precursor to the development of a new Shropshire Plan.

2. Executive Summary

The recent local elections on 1 May 2025 brought a change in the Council's administration, with the Liberal Democrat Group taking overall control of the Council. This change marked the end of the Conservative Group's leadership since 2009 and signals a new direction for the authority. Officers are now required to adapt to the new administration's priorities, which, while still operating under the Council's Constitution, reflect a departure from the previous administration's focus.

To facilitate this transition and ensure success, it is crucial for officers and Council Members to understand and engage with the new administration's priorities. An outline of these priorities is provided in the attached document ("Appendix A"), which will serve as a foundation for the new Corporate Plan. This plan will be developed in stages, starting with an Improvement Plan based on the recent Corporate Peer Challenge, followed by a comprehensive Corporate Plan, and finally, a Partnership Plan co-produced with wider partners and stakeholders to help build a prosperous future for Shropshire.

The Council needs to carefully balance the recent declaration of a financial emergency (favouring short term decision making) with the need to set a long-term vision under a new strategic and sustainable direction. The attached document, set out under the current Cabinet portfolios, includes key outcomes to emphasise accountability, suggested approaches, and short to medium-term actions, some of which help address directly the financial emergency.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Consider and endorse the strategic direction and priorities outlined in the attached document (Appendix A) with a view to agreeing an aligned way forward for the Council.

3.2. Agree that detailed delivery plans are created at a Portfolio Holder level, subject to the consideration under the Scrutiny process, with Portfolio Holders reporting back to Council on a regular basis on the progress being made.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1. The Council has an Opportunity Risk Management Strategy and ten strategic risks, reviewed regularly and due for consideration over the coming months. The development of a new Corporate Plan and, ahead of that, the delivery of the priorities set out in Appendix A of this report, will necessitate a review, and consideration of, the Council's Strategic Risks.

5. Financial Implications

5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands, and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):

- scaling down initiatives,
- changing the scope of activities,
- delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
- extending delivery timescales.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. The direction of travel is indicated in the Waste and Climate portfolio area in Appendix A.

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7. Background

7.1. On 1 May 2025 the local elections returned a new administration. The Liberal Democrat Group took overall control of the Council and a new Leader elected and Cabinet appointed at and following Council on 22 May 2025.

7.2. This change in administration, after control of the Unitary Council by the Conservative Group since its inception in 2009, marks the commencement of period for a significant change in direction for the authority. For officers this requires a change in approach given that many of the procedures in place and “business as usual” activities delivered, while provided with the overall powers set out in the Council Constitution (which has fundamentally not changed) are nevertheless reflective of the priorities of a former administration.

7.3. Given this significant change, it would be helpful for all officers across the organisation and all Council Members to understand and engage with the new Administration’s stated priorities.

7.4. Attached at Appendix A is an outline of the new direction the Administration wishes to take. This outline is not exhaustive, rather it outlines the basis for an approach that can then be considered for incorporation within a new Corporate Plan. The current Shropshire Plan covers the period to 2025 and is due to be rewritten.

7.5. The Corporate Plan will be a living document that will develop in several stages as set out below:

- Improvement Plan – this will form the first ‘chapter’ of the Corporate Plan and include actions predominantly built around the recent Corporate Peer Challenge (also on this agenda)
- Corporate Plan – this will expand the improvement plan into a full, but internally focussed, document including actions to deliver the wider priorities and outcomes of the Council over a 12-to-18-month period.
- Partnership Plan – this will be a more outward facing, place-focused plan delivered with partners. This Partnership Plan will be co-produced with our wider partners and stakeholders, setting out the long-term future of the Shropshire area and the key deliverables and commitments to enabling and sustaining a prosperous and thriving place.

7.6. The document attached as Appendix A is set out in a way to reflect the current portfolios within Cabinet. Referencing distinct portfolio areas engenders greater accountability for the delivery of outcomes. Within each portfolio area a key outcome is described followed by the suggested approach to be taken and any short to medium term actions proposed. Each section may include specific actions that can be implemented with immediate effect, many of these tied directly, and providing a response to, the financial emergency declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. Elsewhere, the approaches described are more aligned to the setting a new strategic direction which can be incorporated within the new Corporate Plan.

7.7. The appendix outlines the administration's focus across three key priorities: (i) financial recovery and stability, (ii) contract reform and value for money, and (iii) community empowerment and partnership. Key initiatives include developing a new highways contract, launching the Shropshire Partnership, and supporting community-led initiatives. The Council will also prioritise improved customer care, inclusive planning and housing policies, expanded youth and SEND services, climate-conscious infrastructure, and transparent governance

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member:	All
Appendices	
Appendix A – A New Direction	

Appendix A: A New Direction for Shropshire

The new Liberal Democrat administration is committed to building a Council that values its residents and staff, delivers services with pride and respect, and operates with transparency and financial discipline.

Our manifesto set the direction we want to see the Council moving in, and this document outlines, in summary, how we will start to deliver on those commitments over the next four years whilst developing a new Shropshire Plan.

Alongside this, we accept that as a Council we must, and will, continue to meet our statutory duties and powers, in the most efficient way possible within the funding available. We must become a 'Can Do Council' and continue to work in partnership with other bodies including enabling our Town and Parish Councils, voluntary groups, and communities to take ownership of local priorities where Shropshire Council can no longer deliver key services alone. We want to work closely with partners at all and every level to improve services for Shropshire residents. Some service areas may need to stop, some brought in-house, some delivered in partnership and some delivered through contract - our focus will be on what works, not on a fixed idealistic approach.
This may mean shifting our role , in particular in those areas where discretionary spend is historically low. This shift should empower Town and Parish Councils, voluntary groups, and communities to take ownership of local priorities.

We are looking for positive change in all areas - we want to challenge everything we do, not for the sake of it, but to make it better. We want to work with all parties to make this a reality.

We are committed to working in partnerships, in local communities where possible, we recognise the importance of our public places in Shropshire and will continue to focus on prevention and address underlying inequalities in our diverse communities which deliver not only better outcomes but have a clear benefit to our long term financial sustainability. We recognise a digital approach can enable us to deliver more efficient local services.

This report outlines the strategic direction of the new Liberal Democrat administration, and will act as a precursor to the development of a new Shropshire Plan. It reflects on the first 100 days of the administration and sets out key objectives for the next four years.

The administration will focus on three key priorities:

i) Financial Recovery and Stability

- Will work with the LGA recommended Improvement Board to stabilise finances within two years.
- Will review capital and CIL spend and funding to support visible service improvements.
- Cabinet declared a Financial Emergency on 10 September following the LGA review.

ii) Contract Reform and Value for Money.

- Develop a new highways contract with in-house teams and modern technologies.
- Review all major contracts, including leisure and waste, for value for money and social impact.

iii) Community Empowerment and Partnership.

- Launch the Shropshire Partnership to enable local delivery.
- Formalise informal powers via Memoranda of Understanding.
- Support community-led initiatives with officer expertise and capital investment.

We will also work to ensure we deliver:

- Improved customer care across digital and phone channels.
- Inclusive planning and housing policies.
- High quality social care for our vulnerable residents.
- Climate-conscious infrastructure and economic development.
- Transparent governance and staff engagement.

We recognise these are our ambitions and that decisions may need to change based on the prevailing financial climate, legislative demands, changes in risk profile and local conditions. These high level objectives will need to be developed in further detail and subject to consultation and equality impact assessments as required.

New Administration

The new Liberal Democrat administration took office in May 2025 and immediately requested an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review of Council services with an additional focus on social care, key contracts and finances. The findings recommend the establishment of an Improvement Board and shortly afterwards a deterioration in the Council's financial position led to the declaration of a financial emergency.

The first 100 days of the new administration have focused on laying the groundwork for a four-year transformation, building on financial realism, community empowerment, and a firm commitment to change the culture of Shropshire Council creating a focused, energised and 'Can Do' organisation.

Changes in our first 100 days include:

- Filling 7,970 potholes across Shropshire, reducing the number of outstanding repairs by 55% compared to the same period last year.
- Deploying an additional pothole repair team focused on unclassified country lanes, repairing over 500 potholes since late June.
- Launching a major scheme to repair and future-proof the A488 Hope Valley route following five landslips.
- Rolling out Shropshire Local in-person customer service hubs to more communities, including Bishop's Castle and Whitchurch.
- Reducing average call wait times to under eight minutes over the past 12 weeks
- Engaging with our 153 Town and Parish Councils to reset relationships and explore joint service delivery.
- Signing Memoranda of Understanding with several Town and Parish Councils to strengthen new partnership working.

- Beginning work on a new Shropshire Partnership model to empower local communities, voluntary groups, and councils to co-deliver services.
- Improving accessibility and signage at council buildings, including urgent fixes to entrances and wayfinding.
- Coordinating a communications campaign to highlight visible changes and build public confidence in the new administration's approach.
- Achieving an Ofsted judgement of Outstanding for Children's Services.
- Adopting the Domestic Abuse Accommodation Strategy.
- Launching the Autumn/Winter 2025/26 Vaccination and Immunisation Improvement Programme.

Below, we set out our aims and ambitions by portfolio, clarifying our outcomes, approaches and where appropriate any short term actions we intend to take.

Finance

Outcome:
Our priority is to deliver financial recovery and stability into the long term. Our financial position must be strengthened over the short term and the Council remade on a long term sustainable footing. Following the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review in July 2025, and following a deterioration in the Council's financial position, Cabinet declared a Financial Emergency on 10 September 2025. We are now working to establish an Independently Chaired Improvement and Assurance Board to stabilise our finances and ensure long-term sustainability.

Our approach is to:
- Develop a revised and balanced Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) alongside a new Shropshire Plan.
- Target capital investment to improve income generation, reduce revenue spend, and benefit communities.
- To take the difficult decisions that have not been made previously including possible short-term reductions to services and levels of service provision, whilst meeting our statutory requirements, and increasing fees and charges

Our Short Term Actions are to:
- Work with the independently led Improvement and Assurance Board to stabilise finances within the next two years.
- Review the Capital Programme and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) spend to deliver visible service improvements.

Planning

Outcome:
Planning must become a delivery tool for economic growth, housing, and sustainability. We are committed to making the system more transparent and community-led, with more engagement in policy setting.

Our approach is to:
- Ensure the local plan is made as soon as possible.
- Set 40% affordable homes target over the next four years.
- Provide additional extra-care and supported living sites for older residents

- Improve social sustainability through policies on surface water flooding and drainage.
- Develop planning policy around quality design, alternative technologies and energy-efficient housing.
- Appropriately and more transparently involve local councillors and Parish Councils in planning decisions (minutes more detailed and ensure Local member asked)
- Strengthen enforcement and communication to increase trust in the planning enforcement process

Our Actions are to:

- Review the outdated CIL charging schedule structure to better shape new development and their infrastructure needs

Adult Social Care

Outcome:
We are committed to supporting vulnerable residents through improved care models, local provision and inclusive services enabling older and vulnerable people to live independently in their own homes and close to their informal support networks for as long as possible.

Our approach is to:

- Work with Cornovii, STaR Housing, and other providers to expand supported living accommodation.
- Use existing community facilities through the Shropshire Partnership to support vulnerable people.
- Review and reduce out-of-county care placements where appropriate.
- Improve access to support via Let's Talk Local, aligning with our neighbourhood hubs programme providing direct contact with council staff.
- Promote inclusive employment, transport, and public spaces for disabled and older people.
- Develop services to help people remain safely in their own homes.
- A focus on prevention, early intervention and reducing demand

Children's Services

Outcome:
We are focused on improving outcomes for children and young people through better access, support, early interventions, preventative services and collaboration.

We Note there are several bills going through Parliament currently which will inform or have the ability to change key areas or priorities in this area.

Our policy is to:

- Improve communication with parents and carers through the Education Access Service to continue to improve school attendance.
- Promote uptake of free school meals with support from Shropshire Local
- Lead a national pilot to rebuild inclusive, youth-led services (funded until March 2026) in the form of the Youth Transformation Strategy.
- Expand out-of-hours use of school facilities and promote joint-use schemes where appropriate.
- Use CIL and other funding streams to continue with support for nursery and classroom expansion to meet demand
- Encourage Academy Trusts to collaborate with the Local Authority.

- Accelerate the work to improve timeliness of EHC Needs Assessment and Annual Reviews through permanent sufficient EHCP and Educational Psychology teams.
- Explore new SEND hubs to meet growing demand.
- Embed our placement stability strategy to enable children to remain living within their families, or if this isn't possible, as close to home as possible or within our in house residential care provision.
- Implement the national Children's Social Care reforms through all aspects of the Families First Partnership programme

Highways and Flooding

Outcome:
We are reforming our highways and flood response services to be more responsive, locally engaged, and focussed on preventative actions.

Our approach is to:
- Develop a new highways service focused on the most efficient and effective delivery model contract focused on in-house delivery and cost control.
- Partner with Town and Parish Councils to maintain highways and Street Scene.
- Improve major engineering schemes and maintenance of A, B, and C roads
- Ensure all road defects are repaired in one visit.
- Enhance drainage infrastructure to reduce flooding and road damage.
- Expand the in-house Flood Risk Management department for design and live response.
- Establish community flood response groups with local contacts and safe gathering points.
- Support the River Severn Valley Water Management Scheme as a national case study.
- Advance an up-river preventative strategy with farmers, landowners, and flood groups.
- Collaborate with the Environment Agency on urban flood resilience projects.
- Deploy sensors on at-risk gullies and support volunteer flood response teams
  Set up emergency hubs and improve land drainage team capacity.

Our Short Term Actions are to:
- Improve communications with residents about closures and issues.
- Invest in streetlight repairs and complete the LED conversion as soon as possible.

Waste and Climate

Outcome:
We are committed to improving waste services and addressing climate change through practical, community-focused measures.

Our approach is to:
- Introduce food waste collection, pending government funding.
- Improve recycling rates.
- Support retrofitting of existing homes.
- Promote energy-efficient housing through planning and housing policy.

Our Short Term Actions are to:

- Improve compliance with building regulations, exceed where possible, building regulations and housing quality to support climate resilience.
- Introduce curb side tetra pack recycling from April 2026.

Housing

Outcome:
We are working to ensure housing provision meets the needs of all residents, with a focus on affordability, warmth, sustainability and security.

Our approach is to:

- Deliver more social rented and affordable homes to high energy efficiency standards.
- Plan for extra care, supported housing, temporary accommodation, and key worker housing.
- Reduce sales of social housing (not impacting on Right to Buy) and upgrade existing stock to EPC rating C where possible
- Review the approach to temporary homes and increase in-house emergency housing.
- Review failed tenancies and what support required to make people tenancy ready / increase tenancy sustainability across all tenures
- Looking at a housing first model to ensure support remains in place for those who most need
- Review adaptations and supporting people to remain longer at home.
- Establish a housing delivery officer

Our Short Term Actions are to:

- Review and reform the housing allocation policy
- Improve partnership working with Registered Social Landlords, STaR Housing and Cornovii.
- Ensure housing need is fed into the local plan

Leisure and Libraries

Outcome:
We are protecting and enhancing leisure and cultural services to support wellbeing, community life, and local identity.

Our approach is to:

- Review leisure facility management ahead of the new countywide leisure contract (August 2027).
- Work with voluntary groups, trusts, and Town and Parish Councils to support leisure centres
- Use the capital strategy to support leisure infrastructure and reduce revenue burden.
- Explore how libraries can deliver more services and host community initiatives linked to neighbourhood hubs.
- Enhance Shropshire's cultural offering through partnerships with museums and theatres.
- Maintain and improve the Rights of Way network.
- Protect and enhance Shropshire's natural landscapes for residents and tourism.

Our Short Term Actions are to:

- Invest, where possible, capital funds in local services

Transport and Economic Growth

Outcome:
We are investing in transport and economic development to support connectivity, growth, and opportunity across Shropshire.

Our approach is to:

- Work with communities to introduce safer speed limits.
- Improve Park and Ride services and explore Sunday operations

- Increase capital investment in walking and cycling infrastructure.
- Use limited available funding to protect bus services.

- Advance the Shrewsbury Movement & Public Space Strategy as a cornerstone of the Big Town Plan.
- Develop Movement Plans where there is local support

- Explore increased car parking capacity at Frankwell and Abbey Foregate.
- Lobby for improvements to rail connectivity such as reopening Baschurch Station, a new direct link to London and a Parkway Station to the east of Shrewsbury

- Work with partners to improve rural mobile ‘not spots’.

- Support the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan and Future Oswestry Group.
- Develop a new Economic Growth Strategy and Get Shropshire Working Plan.
- From our market towns to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, and everywhere in between, make better use of the “In Shropshire” brand to promote Shropshire as a place to visit as well as live, work and invest.
- Increase bed capacity to improve the ratio of day to staying visitors from 86:14 to 80:20 by 2029.

- Engage with the Shropshire business community to provide the best possible • environment for success.
- Support local farmers and businesses with a policy of buy & spend local, where possible.
- Follow guidelines of Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE).

Our Short Term Actions are to:

- Restart work on the stalled Local Transport Plan.
- Scrap the proposed Multi-Agency Hub at Smithfield Riverside.
- Publish a mobile connectivity map under the River Severn Partnership.

Health and Public Protection

Outcome:
We are committed to improving health and wellbeing outcomes through targeted programmes to reduce inequalities, shift to prevention, neighbourhood-based service delivery, and stronger multi-agency collaboration while ensuring we meet our statutory duties.

Our approach is to:

- Champion a systemwide programme to increase update Vaccinations & Immunisations Improvements Programme (V&IP) with an initial focus on Autumn/Winter 2025/26
- Commit Health in All Policies (HiAP) collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into all Council decision-making
- Establish Neighbourhood Hubs and mini-hubs working with partners and communities to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes, services and support, including co-location with partners and with GP practices where feasible. This includes building on outreach provision into rural areas including sustainable use of mobile buses within the resources available
- Continue to Target improvements where resources allow to areas of highest deprivation including areas experiencing rural deprivation.
- Develop metrics to identify and monitor rural deprivation.
- Work with partners to seek assurance and prioritise the following activity;
    - To ensure the response to NHS reforms doesn't impact negatively on our residents including that adequate local patient safety systems are in place and communicate with local provider plus regional and national patient safety systems.
    - Expand access to community-based and specialist mental health services.
    - Establish a Healthcare Dashboard to monitor urgent and emergency care KPIs.
    - Implement medium-priority improvements in 2026/27, including commissioning reform, ICB funding transfer, increased community bed capacity, expanded therapy provision, and improved dental, mental health, women's health, and sexual health services.
    - Integrate statutory Medical Examiner Reports into the Healthcare Dashboard.
- Ensure private water supply regulation is funded through appropriate charges.
- Ensure delivery of food standards and hygiene inspections are prioritised in accordance with the regulations