Shropshire Council

Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Guildhall,
Frankwell Quay,
Shrewsbury
SY3 8HQ

Date: Tuesday, 30 June 2026

Committee:
Cabinet

Date: Wednesday, 8 July 2026
Time: 10.30 am
Venue: Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ

You are requested to attend the above meeting. The Agenda is attached

There will be some access to the meeting room for members of the press and public, but this will be limited. If you wish to attend the meeting please email democracy@shropshire.gov.uk to check that a seat will be available for you.

Please click here to view the livestream of the meeting* on the date and time stated on the agenda

The recording of the event will also be made available shortly after the meeting on the Shropshire Council Youtube Channel Here

Richard Phillips
Service Director – Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Members of Cabinet
Heather Kidd
Alex Wagner
Roger Evans
Andy Hall
Ruth Houghton
James Owen
Rob Wilson
David Vasmer
David Walker
Sarah Marston

Your Committee Officer is:

Ashley Kendrick Democratic Services Officer
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When attending this meeting, Members are reminded of the three principles of the Jo Cox Foundation and Compassion in Politics Civility Pledge:

1. *Use a civil and constructive tone in debate*
2. *Act with integrity, honesty and compassion*
3. *Behave respectfully towards others, including those I disagree with*

*(Please note that while we strive to live stream meetings, technical issues may occasionally occur. In the event of a technical disruption, the meeting will be paused to try to resolve the issue. Should it not be possible to resume the live stream, the meeting will proceed as scheduled, and a backup recording will be made available after the meeting. Any disruption to the live stream does not affect the legality of the meeting).

AGENDA

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Disclosable Interests

Members are reminded that they must declare their disclosable pecuniary interests and other registrable or non-registrable interests in any matter being considered at the meeting as set out in Appendix B of the Members' Code of Conduct and consider if they should leave the room prior to the item being considered. Further advice can be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

3 Minutes

To confirm the minutes from the meeting held on 10 June 2026.

To Follow – due to staff illness

4 Public Question Time

To receive any questions from members of the public, notice of which has been given in accordance with Procedure Rule 14. Deadline for notification is not later than 12 noon on Thursday 2 July 2026.

5 Member Question Time

To receive any questions from Members of the Council. Deadline for notification is not later than 12 noon on Thursday 2 July 2026.

6 Scrutiny Items

a **Scrutiny Item - Verbal Update from the Station Gyratory Task and Finish Group**
Lead Member: Councillor Ed Potter, Chair of the Station Gyratory Task & Finish Group

Lead Officer: Claire Braddock, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

7 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge: Progress Review (Pages 1 - 24)

Lead Member: Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader

Lead Officer: Paul Clarke, Service Director – Strategy & Change

8 Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2027-2032

Lead Member: Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer: Duncan Whitfield, Interim Executive Director (S151)

Report to follow - Awaiting significant additional information

9 Annual Treasury Report 2025/26 (Pages 25 - 40)

Lead Member: Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer: Duncan Whitfield, Interim Executive Director (S151)

10 Shropshire UK Shared Prosperity Fund - review of progress and programme evaluation (Pages 41 - 222)

Lead Member: Councillor David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Lead Officer: Kassandra Polyzoides, Interim Service Director – Place Shaping

11 Bridgnorth Youth club – Asset Decision (Pages 223 - 232)

Lead Member: Councillor David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Lead Officer: Kassandra Polyzoides, Interim Service Director – Place Shaping

12 Shropshire's Children Achieving and Thriving (previously referred to as "Educational Excellence Strategy) (Pages 233 - 274)

Lead Member: Councillor Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder for Children & Education

Lead Officer: John Rowe, Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding (LANO)

13 Cyber Strategy Report (Pages 275 - 310)

Lead Member: Councillor Alex Wagner, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Economic Growth

Lead Officer: Sam Williams, Service Director - Enabling

14 Digital Strategy Report (Pages 311 - 350)

Lead Member: Councillor Alex Wagner, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Economic Growth

Lead Officer: Sam Williams, Service Director - Enabling

15 Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (Pages 351 - 412)

Lead Member: Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader

Lead Officer: Rachel Robinson, Executive Director of Public Health

16 Exclusion of Press and Public

To resolve that, in accordance with the provisions of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and Paragraph 10.4 [3] of the Council's Access to Information Rules, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items

17 DWP Funded Connect to Work Programme - Year 1 progress (Pages 413 - 426)

Lead Member: Councillor David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Lead Officer: Amy Farley, UKSPF Technical Officer, People & Skills

18 Date of Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 14 July 2026.

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Committee

Cabinet 8 July 20226
Council 16 July 2026

Public

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge: Progress Review

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Heather Kidd – Leader
Lead Director:	Paul Clarke – Service Director (Strategy & Change)
Service Area:	Strategy and Change
Report Author	Paul Clarke – Service Director (Strategy & Change)
Officer contact details	paul.clarke@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	All
Key Decision?	Non Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	N/A
Report considered by	N/A

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To share the findings of a recent Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review which was undertaken on 12th May 2026. The Progress Review report is included at **Appendix 1** and provides a summary the Peer Team's feedback to the Council.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet/Full Council is asked to

2.1. Note the report of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review undertaken on 12th May 2026.

2.2. Note that the CPC recommendations, along with subsequent feedback from the Progress Review, will continue to inform the Council's plans for improvement and financial sustainability

3. Background

The Progress Review – summary of approach

3.1. In July 2025 the Local Government Association (LGA) carried out a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). CPCs are part of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer to councils and involves a team of 'peers' (experienced officers and elected members from other councils) spending time onsite to review leadership, governance, performance, and capacity to improve. They provide constructive, evidence-based feedback and practical recommendations to help councils strengthen improve.

3.2 Part of the CPC approach is a requirement for the recipient council to receive a 'Progress Review' visit approximately ten months after the CPC. The 'Progress Review' is undertaken by members of the original peer team and focusses on reviewing progress against the recommendations made previously. The CPC made 10 recommendations to Shropshire Council, and these were included in the peer team report presented to Full Council on 25th September 2025. An action plan summarising the Council's response to those recommendations was agreed by Cabinet on 15th October 2025 and subsequently subsumed into the Improvement Plan agreed by Cabinet and Council in December 2025.

3.3 The report at **Appendix 1** summarises the peer team's feedback against each of the ten CPC recommendations (from July 2025). The peer team was formed of the following officers and elected members:

- Duncan Sharkey – Chief Executive, Somerset Council
- Cllr Amanda Hopgood – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Durham County Council. Liberal Democrat member peer
- Cllr Jason Cummings - Cabinet Member for Finance, Croydon Council. Conservative member peer
- Perry Holmes - Director of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer), Wiltshire Council
- Kathryn Rees - Executive Director - Corporate and Support Services, Stockport MBC
- Simon Riley – Chief Operating Officer & S151 Officer, Cheshire West & Chester Council
- Victoria Lawrence – Director of Adults and Health, North Lincolnshire Council
- James Millington – Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

3.4 To inform the Progress Review, the Council provided the peer team with:

- a RAG (Red/Amber/Green) rated version of the council's action plan setting out what progress had been made against original CPC recommendations

- a peer briefing that described key actions and activity the council had taken, beyond the response to recommendations, providing further context and examples of progress, improvement and developments
- a range of evidence and information including documents such as the Improvement Plan, People Plan, Financial Plan and Corporate Plan.

3.5 The peer-team carried out a number of pre-visit calls with officers of the council and key partners and others before the on-site visit on 12th May. The peer team met with a wide range of people to inform their work including:

- Members: Cabinet, opposition group leaders, the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and non-executive members from across all parties
- Officers: The Chief executive, members of the Council's Leadership Board, and a range of managers and staff from across all areas of the council.
- External partners and stakeholders: including the Council's external auditor and chair of the Improvement Board

4 Summary of Main Proposals

4.1 Overall, the 'Progress Review' found the Council has made significant progress since the July 2025 CPC. The report confirms there has been clear evidence of renewed energy, pace and commitment from both political and officer leadership to address the issues identified in the original CPC. The peer team found that the Council is now demonstrating a much stronger grip on its financial position, with clear progress in financial management and governance arrangements. Peers observed a council that is stabilising and building confidence, and saw encouraging signs of improvements in culture, engagement and leadership visibility, noting that the organisational 'feel' was more positive and collaborative than during their previous visit.

4.2 The report also stresses that there is significant work required to translate this early progress into sustained delivery. It acknowledged that the Council remains at a relatively early stage in its improvement journey which will be a sustained and challenging one. There is a need to ensure that transformation programmes are developed and implemented at pace, that financial sustainability is clearly mapped and achieved over time, and that organisational capacity is aligned to deliver lasting change.

5 Key risks and Opportunities

5.1 The main risks associated with the proposals are:

Risk	Mitigation
Not responding to the feedback provided by the LGA peer team	The areas for improvement cited in the report are things the council is already aware of and addressing Ongoing scrutiny by the externally chaired Improvement Board

6 Council Priorities

6.1 This report directly replates to our Corporate Plan Priority Ambition - *A Council that is financially sustainable, with clear priorities and purpose, and a workforce that is supported to excel*. This priority ambition is the aim of the Improvement Plan that was written in response to recommendations arising from the Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in July 2025

7 Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8 Legal and HR implications

8.1 No legal or HR implications are anticipated to arise from this report.

9 Electoral Division Implications

9.1 This proposals in this report do not impact on specific electoral divisions.

10 Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

10.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

11 Equality and Diversity Implications

11.1 There are no equality and diversity implications associated with this report

12 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

12.1 There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

13 Background Papers

13.1 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report – July 2025
13.2 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan – October 2025
13.3 Improvement Plan

14 Appendices

Appendix 1 - LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review Report

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Shropshire Council

12th May 2026

Feedback

Contents

1. Introduction 3
2. Summary of the approach 3
3. Progress Review - Feedback 4
4. Final thoughts and next steps 20

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1. Introduction

The council undertook a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in July 2025 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank Shropshire Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Shropshire Council took place (onsite) on 12th May. Prior to the Progress Review the team also met with colleagues virtually as part of the preparatory work.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge.

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Duncan Sharkey – Chief Executive, Somerset Council
- Cllr Amanda Hopgood – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Durham County Council. Liberal Democrat member peer
- Cllr Jason Cummings - Cabinet Member for Finance, Croydon Council. Conservative member peer

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- James Millington – Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Out of the CPC's 10 recommendations, the council's RAG rated Action plan reports that 40 per cent of actions are completed and 60 per cent have been progressed.

Overall the Progress Review found that Shropshire Council has made significant strides since the July 2025 CPC, which identified serious challenges in relation to finance, governance and organisational culture. There has been clear evidence of renewed energy, pace and commitment from both political and officer leadership to address these issues. Securing exceptional financial support (EFS) has stabilised the council's immediate financial position and provided critical short-term headroom. At the same time, the council has identified and embraced a comprehensive package of external support, reinforcing its commitment to its improvement journey and helping to establish the necessary foundations for longer-term recovery.

The peer team found that the council is now demonstrating a much stronger grip on its financial position, with clear progress in financial management and governance arrangements. The prioritisation of CPC recommendations has led to tangible improvements across a range of areas, supported by strong cross-party leadership and key senior officer appointments. There is a clear sense that the council is stabilising and building confidence, with early momentum evident. However, the focus now needs to shift towards developing greater clarity and detail within the medium-term financial plan, including specifying the pathway to financial sustainability over the coming years and reducing reliance on EFS. This journey is

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likely to take a number of years and stretch beyond the medium term of 4-5 years.

Across the council, there are encouraging signs of improvements in culture, engagement and leadership visibility. Relationships between Members, officers and staff have strengthened, and the organisational 'feel' is notably more positive and collaborative. There is a stronger sense of shared purpose, which provides a solid platform for further transformation.

The peer team concluded that the council's trajectory is positive, with good early progress and a clear commitment to improvement. This remains at an early stage in what will be a sustained and challenging journey and the next phase will be critical in moving from planning to delivery - ensuring that transformation programmes are implemented at pace, that financial sustainability is clearly mapped and achieved over time, and that organisational capacity is aligned to deliver lasting change. To date, there is not yet a single costed multi–year plan that brings all these themes together. This is expected to be further defined, developed and quantified over the summer and needs to create the roadmap that is owned and adhered to. Such a plan needs to guard against optimism bias and be based on robust insight, governance and accountability frameworks, and realistic expectations on capacity and capability to deliver. Sustained focus, clear leadership and continued strengthening of both internal and external narratives will be essential to maintaining momentum and building confidence among stakeholders and partners.

Overall, this represents a strong and encouraging start from a challenging baseline, with clear evidence of improved grip, governance and organisational confidence. Early progress and positive momentum are evident. However, this remains at an early stage, and significant work is still required to translate this progress into sustained delivery.

Below is the detailed feedback from the peer team for each of the recommendations:

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3.1. Urgently prepare a multi-year plan (MTFS) demonstrating and detailing the council's route to financial and operational stability. Ensure this is realistic, widely understood and shared.

The peer team could clearly see that Shropshire Council (SC) has moved at pace to respond to this recommendation, with the development of a high level medium-term financial plan (MTFP) for 2026/27 to 2030/31. The structured, transparent and inclusive approach taken - through Cabinet reporting, cross-party Budget Forums, scrutiny engagement and public consultation - demonstrates a strong and mature approach to financial planning. The MTFP appropriately reflects the context of the financial emergency declared in September 2025 and establishes a credible 'reset' position, supported by exceptional financial support (EFS) and council tax increases, which has created important financial headroom. This has provided the council with the necessary space to begin developing a clearer set of financial and transformation roadmaps towards longer-term sustainability.

However, the peer team heard consistently that while there is now a growing organisational understanding of the scale of the financial challenge, the next stage requires greater clarity and specificity. The financial sustainability strategy and transformation programme are important milestones, but these need to be underpinned by clearer articulation of the figures - setting out, even at a high level initially, the scale and phasing of savings required, and how SC will move from its current position to financial sustainability. There is a recognised need to move from broad direction to quantified plans, supported by a clear timetable. This is particularly important given the relatively short window available to the council, and the need to provide confidence to external stakeholders, including Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the council's external auditors, that there is a credible and deliverable pathway in place.

The peer team also emphasises that the delivery of transformation at the scale required may take longer than initially anticipated, and therefore early clarity on

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timelines and sequencing will be essential. SC is beginning to rebuild capacity and now has an opportunity to invest in the skills, capability and enabling functions required to deliver transformation at pace. This extends beyond a central programme management office (PMO) function and includes ensuring that services themselves are equipped to lead and implement change. This may require bringing in additional and external transformation capacity. At the same time, it will be critical that SC maintains a strong and consistent focus on the delivery of core services and continues to focus on 'getting the basics right', ensuring that performance, governance and compliance standards are sustained while transformation is progressed.

The council can also now strengthen its financial narrative - clearly setting out how financial recovery, transformation and service delivery fit together as a coherent whole. This should include articulating the risks being managed, not solely financial but also operational and reputational, particularly in relation to maintaining service quality and organisational stability. The peer team noted from leadership that the recent Fair Funding announcement does not adequately address the rurality and demographic characteristics of Shropshire. The peer team underline the importance of Shropshire Council continuing to focus on what is within its local control in moving towards financial sustainability, while also maintaining an evidence-based case with others to Government for funding arrangements that better account for local context. By doing so, SC can retain control of its narrative, avoid external expectations being imposed upon it, and provide reassurance to Government, auditors, partners and residents that it has a clear, realistic and deliverable route to financial sustainability while continuing to deliver essential services.

3.2. Immediately assess and negotiate your EFS requirements for 25/26 and for the period of the MTFS before a s114 notice becomes a necessity.

This recommendation has clearly been progressed, with a robust exceptional

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financial support (EFS) application developed for MHCLG in December 2025, covering both 2025/26 and 2026/27. The figures are of significant scale - with EFS of £71.4m (2025/26) and £121.4m (2026/27) and council tax of 8.99% agreed for this year. This was underpinned by high level financial analysis and modelling and aligned to the council's MTFP and emerging transformation activity. Confirmation of EFS in February 2026 enabled SC to set a balanced budget and provides important short-term stability, alongside the immediate implementation of spending controls following the declaration of a financial emergency.

The peer team now emphasise that the council needs to take a more strategic, multi-year approach to EFS, recognising that reliance on this support must reduce over time if financial sustainability is to be achieved. While it is understood that forecasting EFS requirements is inherently challenging, particularly in a fluid financial environment, it will be important for the council to set out a clearer trajectory across the life of the MTFP. This should include articulating how transformation activity will reduce reliance on EFS year by year, with the expectation that this requirement reduces to zero over the medium term. A five-year position which shows continued or increasing reliance on EFS is not sustainable, and the council should integrate the quantified transformation benefits into future iterations of its plans as they are developed.

The peer team consider that as plans continue to evolve, SC has an opportunity to strengthen how it manages the narrative around EFS. This includes setting out a clear and locally owned approach ensuring that its strategy balances financial sustainability with the continued delivery of core services and statutory responsibilities. This will also support ongoing engagement with MHCLG and auditors, helping to maintain their confidence in the council's direction of travel. This is important given the journey to financial sustainability is likely to stretch beyond the next MTFP period.

There is an opportunity to improve internal awareness and understanding of the EFS

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position. While recognising that the application itself is not a public document, there would be value in ensuring that key stakeholders, including opposition group leaders and officers, are appropriately briefed on its content and implications. This would support greater shared ownership of SC's financial position and strengthen collective understanding of the scale of the challenge ahead.

The council has made strong initial progress against this recommendation, and the next phase will be to embed this within a clear, multi-year strategy that demonstrates a credible path away from reliance on EFS.

3.3. Quickly implement an externally supported, independently led Improvement Board with CIPFA, a governance expert and LGA peers, preferably with support from MHCLG, to advise, assist and drive urgent changes.

Supported by the LGA the council has acted quickly to establish a voluntary, independently chaired improvement board in response to this recommendation. The board is clearly adding value, particularly in supporting the development and oversight of the improvement plan and the council's overall trajectory towards financial sustainability. The peer team also recognises the recent six-month review undertaken by the chair of the improvement board, the findings of which align with a number of the observations made during this progress review, provide a helpful basis for the next phase of its development.

Feedback from Members, officers and partners suggests that, while the board is well regarded and brings a breadth of experience, there is currently a gap in deep, technical expertise required to support the scale and pace of transformation that the council now needs to deliver. Given the complexity of the challenge, and as the board moves into a second phase after the initial 6 months, SC should consider evolving the board arrangements to include a new Leaders' Board through a

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deliberate move to drive urgency and accountability. The governance should support the council over the following period and continue to provide robust, independent challenge. This dual structure will ensure the council benefits from both political leadership and independent, expert challenge. This strengthening would enable access to specialist knowledge, provide further challenge and support to senior officers, and ensure that transformation plans are not only well designed but are deliverable at pace. This will be particularly important given the volume and complexity of change required over the coming years.

The peer team heard feedback that awareness and understanding of the improvement board across the council is variable. Some staff are unclear about its purpose, status and role, including perceptions about decision-making responsibilities and the handling of reports. While these perceptions may not reflect the formal position, they highlight the need for clearer and more consistent communication. SC may wish to consider how it strengthens its communication approach, including providing regular, proportionate updates to Members and officers to give visibility of the board's discussions and focus areas. This will help to build understanding, improve transparency and reinforce the role of the improvement board as a key component of the council's improvement arrangements.

3.4. Prepare a clear whole council transformation plan that carries the aspirations and narrative for the future council and accurately aligns the resources for delivery. Ensure this is realistic, widely understood and shared.

The council has made clear and tangible progress in developing a more structured, whole-council approach to transformation which is being driven through the improvement plan. The commitment to develop a refreshed and fully costed transformation programme, as part of a wider financial sustainability strategy, is a positive step and reflects growing organisational maturity in linking financial planning with service transformation. Early activity demonstrates a more forward-looking and coordinated approach to identifying priorities and aligning resources, supported by

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clearer governance arrangements such as the budget, transformation and change review panel.

This work remains at a relatively early stage of development and now needs to move at pace into delivery. While the framework, governance and overall direction are increasingly well established, there is a need to translate this into a more detailed and deliverable programme, supported by clear phasing, milestones and measurable outcomes. In particular, SC should ensure that transformation plans are sufficiently detailed and quantified to demonstrate how they will deliver the scale of change required, including the financial benefits and service impacts. This will be critical in strengthening confidence - both internally and externally - that the transformation programme can deliver the outcomes set out within the MTFP.

The peer team emphasises the scale and the complexity of transformation required and the importance of ensuring that the council has the capacity and capability to deliver this. While there is evidence that SC is beginning to rebuild capacity, there is now an opportunity to accelerate this by bringing in the right skills and expertise - both within central programme functions and across service areas. Transformation at this scale cannot be delivered solely through a PMO and it requires enabling functions, leadership capacity and service-level ownership to be in place. Ensuring this capacity is aligned and deployed effectively will be essential to maintaining pace and momentum. It is likely that the council will need to consider additional external capacity to support the development and delivery of its transformation at the pace and scale it requires.

Importantly, SC will need to maintain a strong focus on delivering core services and continuing to work on 'getting the basics right' alongside its transformation ambitions. The peer team heard that this balance is well understood, but it will require ongoing attention to ensure that service performance, compliance and governance are not compromised during a period of significant change. There is also an opportunity to continue strengthening the narrative around transformation - clearly articulating how

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it supports both financial sustainability and service outcomes, and ensuring that this is widely understood across the organisation and by key stakeholders.

SC has made a strong start in responding to this recommendation and has established the key building blocks of a whole-council transformation approach. The next phase will be critical with moving from design into delivery, with greater clarity, pace and capacity, to ensure that transformation is realised at the scale and impact required.

3.5. Consider how to urgently reinvigorate your cultural connections and relationships across the workforce – the organisation has become fractured, and the current context has blunted the value of initiatives such as 'Getting It Right'.

The council feels like a very different organisation to the one visited by the peer team in July 2025. There is a stronger sense of purpose and a clearer commitment to supporting and valuing staff, which is helping to rebuild organisational confidence and cohesion. The development and implementation of the people plan has been particularly well received, with staff and managers consistently reporting that it is moving the organisation in the right direction. This represents an important foundation for wider improvement and transformation.

There has also been a noticeable improvement in the visibility and accessibility of both managerial and political leadership, with stronger connections evident across the council. The range of engagement mechanisms now in place is having a positive impact, with staff reporting that they feel better informed and more connected to organisational priorities. In particular, initiatives such as budget forums and engagement sessions have helped staff to better understand the financial context and the challenges ahead. The peer team heard consistently that these changes are helping to bring people together and foster a more collective understanding of the council's direction.

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The peer team were particularly impressed with the role of the manager framework, which has the potential to drive consistent leadership behaviours and support improved performance across SC. While this is still relatively new, there is clear opportunity for it to be more widely socialised and embedded to maximise its impact. More broadly, the council appears to be doing the right things to strengthen relationships and build a more unified culture, particularly at senior and middle management levels where there is growing evidence of a 'one team' ethos emerging. This represents a marked shift from the previous feedback from the corporate peer challenge, where the council was described in more fragmented terms.

The peer team heard positive feedback about practical initiatives that are helping to bring people together, both formally and informally, including the use of physical spaces such as the council café to encourage interaction and connection. While recognising that rebuilding connections across the whole workforce, particularly to frontline staff, will take time, the peer team considers SC is on the right trajectory. Encouragingly, the language used by staff has shifted, with less reference to a 'tale of two cities' and more evidence of a shared identity beginning to emerge. There are strong indications that SC's approach to cultural renewal is gaining traction, and continued focus on embedding and sustaining this progress will be key to long-term success.

3.6. Coproduce a new council plan that recognises the financial constraints the council is under and delivers the manifesto commitments. Ensure this is realistic, widely understood, socialised and owned.

The council has made strong progress in the co-production of a new corporate plan for 2026–2030, which reflects the significant financial constraints it faces while setting out a clearer set of priorities. The plan has a robust evidence base and is aligned with the MTFP and improvement plan. The extensive engagement undertaken with Members, staff, partners and residents is a particular strength.

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The peer team encourage SC to ensure that the corporate plan is firmly future-focused and not overly anchored in the council's current or historic position. Given the scale of the financial challenge, the council will need to operate differently in the medium term, and the plan should clearly articulate what it wants to deliver in four to five years' time. This includes being explicit about priorities and where investment will be made. The peer team emphasise that investment decisions should be evidence-based, aligned to clear outcomes and demonstrable return, including identifying opportunities where targeted investment could resolve issues at source and deliver longer-term benefits.

The peer team heard a consistent message about the importance of maintaining focus on 'getting the basics right'. While these areas may not always appear transformational in themselves, they are often critical enablers of improvement and can undermine confidence if not addressed. The council is right to prioritise this and should continue to do so, ensuring that improvements to core services and infrastructure are delivered within the context of its financial constraints and alongside its wider transformation ambitions. This balance between stabilisation and transformation will be essential to maintaining organisational credibility and public confidence.

The peer team discussed the council's approach to assets and recognise that asset rationalisation and disposal will form an important part of the financial strategy. This work is ongoing, but there is a need to further develop the pace and scale of this approach, including being realistic about the level of receipts that can be generated, recognising its historical buildings, and ensuring that the cost of delivering is proportionate to the likely financial return.

The council should continue to strengthen its capacity in key enabling functions such as commissioning and procurement. While recruitment challenges have been identified in these areas, these roles will be critical not only for maintaining service delivery but also for enabling SC to successfully deliver its transformation programme

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and achieve long-term financial sustainability.

3.7. Improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders to help colleagues make the organisation legible for colleagues at a time of great change.

The peer team recognises that the council has made clear and sustained progress in improving the visibility and accessibility of both managerial and political leadership, which is now having a positive impact across the organisation. Feedback from staff, Members and partners consistently highlighted that people feel much more connected to the organisation than at the time of the original CPC. This reflects a more open and engaged leadership culture, with communications described as honest, transparent and increasingly trusted. These are important enablers in supporting the organisation through a period of significant change.

The introduction of more structured engagement mechanisms has been particularly effective in strengthening relationships and improving organisational coherence. The fortnightly senior leadership forum was frequently referenced as a positive and valued space for listening, engagement and shared understanding, helping to cascade key messages and foster a more collective leadership culture. The peer team heard that relationships across the council have improved significantly, with growing evidence of stronger collaboration between services and a clearer sense of organisational direction.

The peer team also heard very positive feedback regarding the visibility and approachability of political leadership. Initiatives such as ward walks and ‘coffee and chat’ sessions were highlighted as being especially well received, providing meaningful opportunities for direct engagement with staff and communities. These approaches are helping to build trust and create a stronger connection between decision-makers and the wider council.

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These developments represent a marked shift from the position observed previously, with a more open, visible and connected leadership approach now evident. While it will be important to sustain and continue building on this progress, the peer team is encouraged by the consistency of feedback and the tangible improvements in how leadership is experienced across SC.

3.8. Improve the status of and make efforts to drive good governance; consider implementing a 'statutory officers' board' or similar mechanism to include the head of paid service, monitoring officer and s151 officer which would consider pressing issues, co-ordinate responses and drive implementation of, for example, internal audit recommendations.

The council has made strong and tangible progress in strengthening its corporate governance arrangements, with the establishment of the statutory officers' board representing a particularly positive development. This group appears to be operating effectively and is adding real value, providing a clear mechanism for collective oversight of governance issues and driving improved coordination across the council.

The peer team noted that clearer expectations from the senior leadership cohort about how the organisation should operate are beginning to have a measurable impact, with a stronger emphasis on compliance, accountability and consistent ways of working. There is clear evidence that this increased focus is translating into improved organisational performance in key areas. For example, the peer team heard that compliance with freedom of information requirements and financial returns has improved significantly, with more timely submissions and greater consistency across services. This reflects a cultural shift where leadership focus, clear expectations and active monitoring are reinforcing behaviours and driving improvement. The peer team considers this to be a strong example of how visible leadership attention and prioritisation of 'the basics' can deliver tangible results and build organisational discipline.

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The council can build on these strong foundations by extending this disciplined approach beyond financial management into wider performance and project management. While progress has been made, the peer team heard about some examples where project management arrangements were not sufficiently robust to deliver the outcomes required. The council will want to consider the level of project management capability across the organisation and assess whether there is sufficient capacity and skill to consistently deliver, and also provide the appropriate level of oversight and monitoring to provide assurance.

The peer team also heard positive feedback regarding the cohesion and effectiveness of the cabinet, with Members working increasingly as a collective team. The recent rebalancing of cabinet portfolios appears to have been well received and is supporting clearer accountability and leadership.

These developments point to a strengthening governance environment, with improved leadership clarity, stronger organisational grip and better alignment between political and officer leadership. SC has clearly put the key building blocks in place, and the next phase will be to sustain and deepen this progress, ensuring that governance, performance and delivery arrangements continue to mature in line with the scale of the challenges ahead.

3.9. Budget monitoring needs to be focussed on actual spend and projections with clear understanding of one off and recurring expenditure with appropriate intervention and action.

The council has made strong progress in strengthening its budget monitoring arrangements, with a clear shift towards greater focus on actual spend, forecasting accuracy and timely intervention. The enhanced monthly monitoring processes, increased transparency through reporting to cabinet and scrutiny, and improved timeliness of returns demonstrate a more disciplined approach to financial management. The significant increase in compliance rates for budget monitoring

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returns is particularly positive and reflects a strengthened organisational focus on accountability and financial grip.

However, the peer team heard that while these improvements are evident, there remains some inconsistency in how effectively these processes are embedded across the council. Good practice is emerging and delivering results, but this is not yet uniform in all service areas. The council should therefore continue to focus on ensuring that established processes, standards and expectations are consistently applied across all directorates, so that the benefits of improved budget monitoring are realised council-wide. Embedding this consistency will be critical to strengthening overall financial control and ensuring a reliable and accurate picture of the council's financial position.

The peer team heard that financial capability, particularly in relation to forecasting and understanding longer-term demand and cost drivers, is not yet consistently strong across the organisation. While SC has the foundations in place, there is a need to further develop the depth of expertise within the finance team to support more robust and confident financial planning. The intended benefits of the finance business partnering model do not yet appear to be fully realised in all areas, with some stakeholders reporting limited evidence of strategic financial support and challenge.

The peer team emphasises the importance of continuing to embed long-term financial discipline as there is a risk that without consistent behaviours and controls, financial gains could be eroded over time. SC should continue to reinforce expectations around financial management and ensure that spending decisions align with agreed plans and priorities.

Overall, SC has made a strong start and has put in place many of the key building blocks required for effective budget monitoring and financial control. The next phase

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will be to embed these consistently across the organisation, strengthen capability, and ensure that improved financial discipline is sustained and supports the delivery of longer-term financial sustainability.

3.10. Change your narrative, tell your story and clearly celebrate your success as one council.

SC has made positive and visible progress in reshaping its narrative and how it communicates its story, particularly given the scale of the challenges it is facing. There is now a clearer approach to communications, with a stronger emphasis on transparency and consistency. The development of an overarching narrative, linking the improvement plan, corporate plan and financial sustainability strategy, has helped reinforce a sense of 'one council' responding collectively to the challenges ahead. The peer team heard that this narrative is increasingly understood across the organisation and is helping to provide clarity of purpose during a period of significant change.

However, the peer team also emphasises the importance of maintaining confidence and belief in the council's ability to deliver its ambitions. While the scale of the financial challenge is well understood, there were instances where uncertainty about deliverability was expressed. It will be critical for senior leaders to continue to provide clear, consistent and confident messaging about the council's ability to meet this challenge. This does not require unrealistic optimism, but rather a clear articulation of how and when financial sustainability can be achieved. Establishing and communicating this confidence is important for maintaining organisational momentum.

The council has made progress in building a stronger sense of organisational identity and pride, with evidence that staff are increasingly positive about working for SC. In the latest pulse survey nearly three quarters (71%) of staff say they understand the council's priorities and are happy to work for Shropshire. While this represents a

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clear improvement on the position observed previously, there remains an opportunity to continue strengthening this sense of pride so that staff feel confident acting as ambassadors for the organisation both internally and externally. SC has already taken steps to celebrate success and recognise staff contributions, and these efforts should continue to be expanded - particularly through initiatives that bring colleagues together, including frontline staff, and reinforce a shared sense of achievement and purpose.

The peer team encourages the council to maintain a strong forward-looking narrative, focusing on where it is going rather than where it has come from. While it is important to learn from past challenges, SC should continue to emphasise its future direction and the progress being made. Continue to celebrate success and recognise achievements, ensuring that positive progress is visible and understood across the council.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Shropshire Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Helen Murray (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and their e-mail address is helen.murray@local.gov.uk.

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Cabinet
8th July 2026

Audit & Governance Committee 15th July 2026

Council 16th July 2026

Public

Annual Treasury Report 2025/26

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Roger Evans, Finance
Lead Director:	Duncan Whitfield, Section 151 Officer
Service Area:	Corporate Finance
Report Author	Cheryl Sedgley, Strategic Finance Manager
Officer contact details	cheryl.sedgley@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	All
Key Decision?	Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	Yes – 25th March 2026
Report considered by	

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. This report provides details of the outturn position for treasury activities and highlights compliance with the Council's policies previously approved by members.

1.2. During 2025/26 the Council achieved all required targets for managing its financing arrangements, including day to day cashflow, short term investments and longer-term borrowings. Investment income of £2.409m was secured.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to: -

2.1. Approve the actual 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators in this report.

2.1. Note the annual treasury management report for 2025/26.

2.2. Note the inclusion of EFS borrowing in the 2025/26 position

3. Background

3.1. The Council is required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2025/26. This report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, (the Code), and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code).

3.2. During 2025/26 the minimum reporting requirements were that the full Council should receive the following reports:

- an annual treasury strategy in advance of the year
- a mid-year treasury update report
- an annual review following the end of the year describing the activity compared to the strategy, (this report)

In addition, Cabinet has received quarterly treasury management update reports during the year.

3.3 The Council's treasury management debt and investment position is organised by the finance team to ensure adequate liquidity for revenue and capital activities, security for investments and to manage risks within all treasury management activities. Procedures and controls to achieve these objectives are well established both through member reporting detailed in the summary, and through officer activity detailed in the Council's Treasury Management Practices. Assurance on liquidity is taken from detailed cashflow planning which is amended day by day and reviewed to identify issues and address them. Cash flow plans extend out 24 months. Day to day cash flow plans inform short term investment and borrowing planning, as well as supporting the planning for longer term investments and borrowings.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

4.1. During 2025/26, the Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements. The key actual prudential and treasury indicators detailing the impact of capital expenditure activities during the year, with comparison to the target set in the Treasury Strategy, are detailed in Appendix C.

4.2. The returns on investment were marginally short of the benchmark (-0.14%), achieving a return of 4.19%. As cash balances held are low due to a reduced level of balances held, the Council needs to ensure cash balances are highly liquid, resulting in lower interest rates on short term deals. Whilst returns on investment are important, as we strive to achieve the best investment we can, the Council's priority is always to ensure security of funds and ensure we hold sufficient liquid balances. This will often mean that we cannot secure the higher rate investments as these are offered to longer term deals.

4.3. The Council does receive benchmarking analysis of its investments in relation to its comparative group and throughout 2025/26, its performance on investment were considered in line with the other organisations.

4.4. Treasury activities during the year have been within approved prudential and treasury indicators set and have complied with the Treasury Strategy.

4.5. The Council's Borrowing Strategy and Outturn position for 2025/26 can be found in Appendix A.

4.6. The Council's Investment Strategy and Outturn position for 2025/26 can be found in Appendix B.

5. Alternative Options

5.1. Not applicable

6. Key risks and Opportunities

6.1. Compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the Council's Treasury Policy Statement and Treasury Management Practices and the Prudential Code for Capital Finance together with the rigorous internal controls will enable the Council to manage the risk associated with Treasury Management activities and the potential for financial loss.

7. Council Priorities

7.1. The requirement to manage the Council's cashflow position, treasury investments and borrowing efficiently and effectively is a key requirement in helping to deliver a financially sustainable council. By ensuring that any surplus monies are invested, this will generate essential additional income for the Council. Also by carefully managing the timescale and need to borrow funds, this can keep associated borrowing costs to a minimum for the Council.

8. Financial Implications

8.1. The Council makes assumptions about the levels of borrowing and investment income over the financial year. Reduced borrowing because of capital receipt generation or delays in delivery of the capital programme will both have a positive impact of the council's cash position. Similarly, higher than benchmarked returns on available cash will also help the Council's financial position. For monitoring purposes, assumptions are made early in year about borrowing and returns based on the strategies agreed by Council in the preceding February. Performance outside of these assumptions results in increased or reduced income for the Council.

8.2. The 2025/26 performance is marginally below the benchmark for the reasons outlined in paragraph 2.2 of this report and has delivered income of £2.409 million which has been reflected in the Financial Outturn report for 2025/26.

9. Legal and HR implications

9.1. The Council is required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for the year. This report provides this detail to fully meet this requirement.

10. Electoral Division Implications

10.1. Not applicable

11. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

11.1. Not applicable

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1. Not applicable

13. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1. Not applicable

14. Background Papers

1. Treasury Strategy 2025/26 – Council, 27 February 2025
2. Treasury Management Update Quarter 1 2025/26 – Cabinet, 10 September 2025
3. Treasury Management Update Quarter 2 2025/26 – Cabinet, 3 December 2025
4. Treasury Strategy 2025/26 Mid-Year Review – Cabinet, 3 December 2025
5. Treasury Management Update Quarter 3 2025/26 – Cabinet, 11 February 2026
6. Treasury Management Update Quarter 4 2025/26 – Cabinet, 10 June 2026

15. Appendices

Appendix A – Borrowing Strategy and Outturn 2025/26

Appendix B – Investment Strategy and Outturn 2025/26

Appendix C – Prudential Indicators 2025/26

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APPENDIX A - BORROWING STRATEGY AND OUTTURN 2025/26

Borrowing Strategy for 2025/26

During 2025/26, the Council maintained an under-borrowed position. This meant that the capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement), was not fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow was used as an interim measure. This strategy was prudent as near-term investment rates have generally been lower than medium to long-term borrowing costs. The latter are expected to fall a little through 2026 and 2027 in the light of economic growth concerns and the eventual dampening of inflation. The Authority has sought to minimise the taking on of long-term borrowing at elevated levels (>5%) and has focused on a policy of internal and temporary borrowing, supplemented by short-dated borrowing (<5 years on a maturity loan structure/ <10 years on an EIP loan structure) as appropriate.

The Council's borrowing requirement identified within the capital programme 2025/26 to 2027/28 was self-financing prudential borrowing of £55.1m and the need to borrow externally was considered against the Council's current under borrowed position and the level of cash balances held within the authority.

By maintaining an under-borrowed position, the Council has been utilising cash balances to internally "borrow" for prudential borrowing schemes. This has enabled the Council to benefit from saving on interest costs compared to the returns that could be generated on the cash balances. This approach has been effective during a period where the Council previously held significant cash balances.

Cash balances have reduced over the last two years as a result of reduced levels of reserves being held and loans continuing to reach their maturity dates. Therefore new borrowing has been undertaken to maintain an appropriate cash flow position, thereby reducing the under-borrowed position.

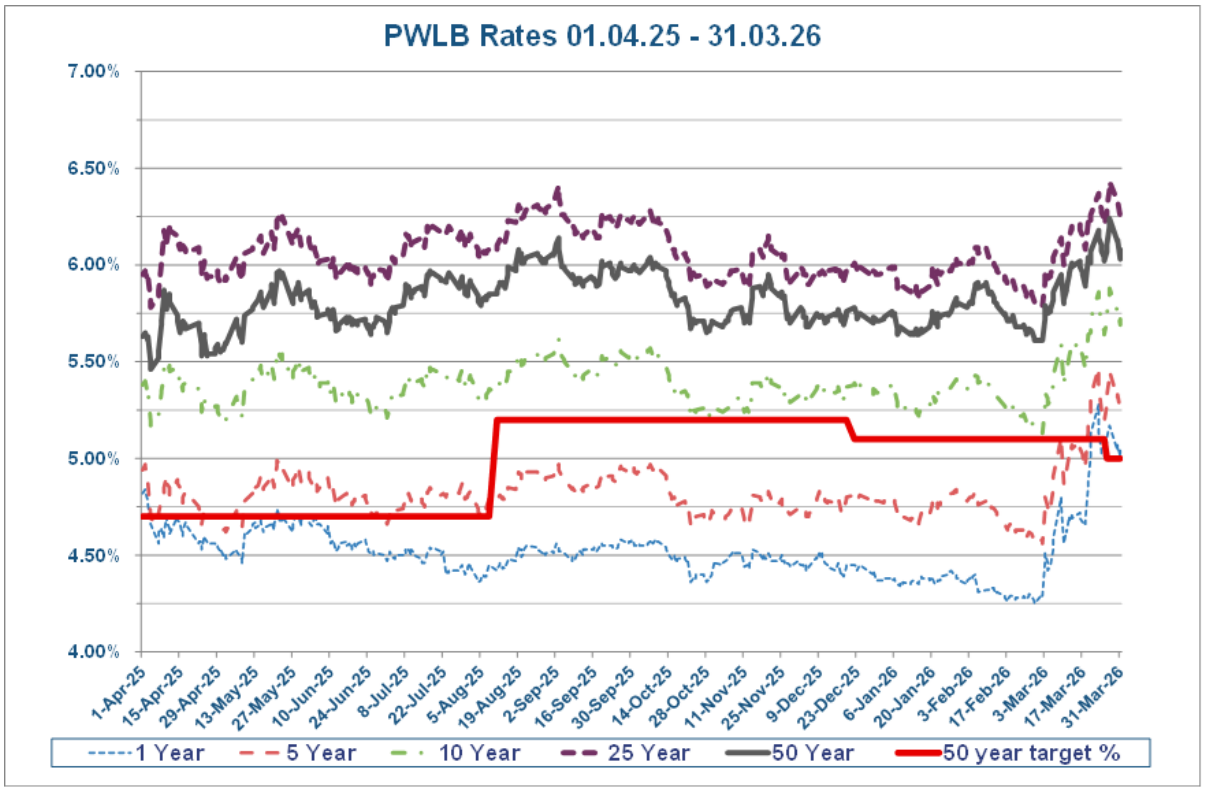
It should be noted that the Council is also managing a deficit position for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which stood at £45.6m. This is in effect being funded from Shropshire Council cash balances, and so in terms of managing cash flow, borrowing may be undertaken that may not have been necessary if the DSG had been funded fully. The Government has committed to providing a 90% High Needs Stability Grant during 2026/27 to offset the deficits held by local authorities in DSG, and so this will relieve the pressure on cash balances once this is received.

Interest rate forecasts initially suggested gradual reductions in short, medium and longer-term fixed borrowing rates during 2025/26. Bank Rate did reduce to 3.75% as anticipated, but the initial expectation of significant rate reductions across the whole curve did not transpire, primarily because inflation concerns were very elevated in March 2026.

At the start of April 2026, the market expected Bank Rate to increase over the coming months to 4% or 4.25%, from 3.75%, whilst all parts of the curve have also risen substantially through March. A significant fall in inflation will be required to underpin any material movement lower in the longer part of the curve.

Borrowing Outturn for 2025/26

The Finance Team take advice from its external treasury advisor, MUFG Corporate Markets, on the most opportune time to borrow. Movements in rates during 2025/26 are shown in the graph below.



The table below shows PWLB borrowing rates for a selection of maturity periods. The table also shows the high and low points in rates during the year, average rates during the year and individual rates at the start and the end of the financial year.

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
Low	4.25%	4.56%	5.13%	5.78%	5.46%
Date	27/02/2026	27/02/2026	02/03/2026	04/04/2025	04/04/2025
High	5.28%	5.47%	5.88%	6.43%	6.24%
Date	23/03/2026	23/03/2026	27/03/2026	27/03/2026	27/03/2026
Average	4.52%	4.82%	5.38%	6.06%	5.81%
Spread	1.03%	0.91%	0.75%	0.65%	0.78%

PWLB rates are based on gilt (UK Government bonds) yields through HM Treasury determining a specified margin to add to gilt yields. The main influences on gilt yields are Bank Rate, inflation expectations and movements in US treasury yields. Inflation targeting by the major central banks has been successful over the last 30 years in lowering inflation and the real equilibrium rate for central rates has fallen considerably due to the high level of borrowing by consumers: this means that central banks do not need to raise rates as much now to have a major impact on

consumer spending, inflation, etc. This has pulled down the overall level of interest rates and bond yields in financial markets over the last 30 years.

However, since early 2022, yields have risen dramatically in all the major developed economies, first as economies opened post-Covid; then because of the inflationary impact of the war in Ukraine in respect of the supply side of many goods. In particular, rising cost pressures emanating from shortages of energy and some food categories have been central to inflation rising rapidly. More recently, the Middle East conflict is likely to see inflation spike higher from late spring 2026 through to early 2027.

Gilt yields have been volatile through 2025/26. The low point for long-term rates of 25 and 50 years' duration was reached early in April 2025 whilst the low points for short and medium dated rates were reached in early 2026, prior to the outbreak of the Middle East conflict.

At the close of 31 March 2026, the 1-year PWLB Certainty rate was 5.04% whilst the 5, 10, 25 and 50 year rates were 5.28%, 5.72%, 6.29% and 6.08% respectively.

The Council had borrowing of £420.205m as at the 1st April 2025, and loans that have been drawn during 2025/26 are set out in the table below. The closing balance of loans as at 31 March 2026 is £459.705m which includes £61.8m of borrowing for Exceptional Financial Support during 2025/26.

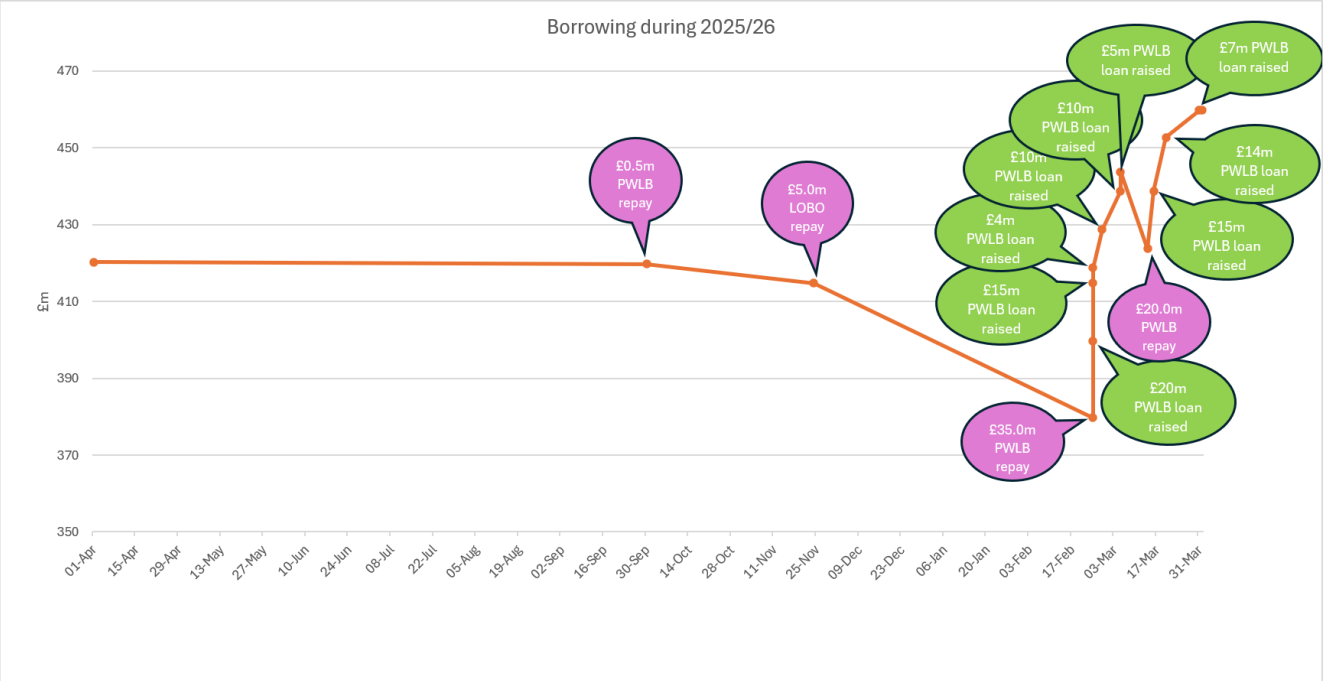
The revenue costs of borrowing for Exceptional Financial Support are £4.964m per annum.

General Fund

Lender	Principal	Date	Type	Interest Rate	Maturity
PWLB	£20m	24/02/26	Fixed interest rate	4.41%	36 months
PWLB	£15m	24/02/26	Fixed interest rate	4.36%	30 months
PWLB	**£4m***	24/02/26	Fixed interest rate	4.51%	48 months
PWLB	**£10m***	27/02/26	Fixed interest rate	4.32%	24 months
PWLB	**£10m***	05/03/26	Fixed interest rate	4.67%	64 months
PWLB	**£5m***	05/03/26	Fixed interest rate	4.67%	66 months
PWLB	**£15m***	16/03/26	Fixed interest rate	4.83%	18 months
PWLB	**£14m***	20/03/26	Fixed interest rate	4.76%	18 months

PWLB	**£7m***	31/03/26	Fixed interest rate	5.09%	24 months

* Highlighted cells represent loans raised for Exceptional Financial Support purposes

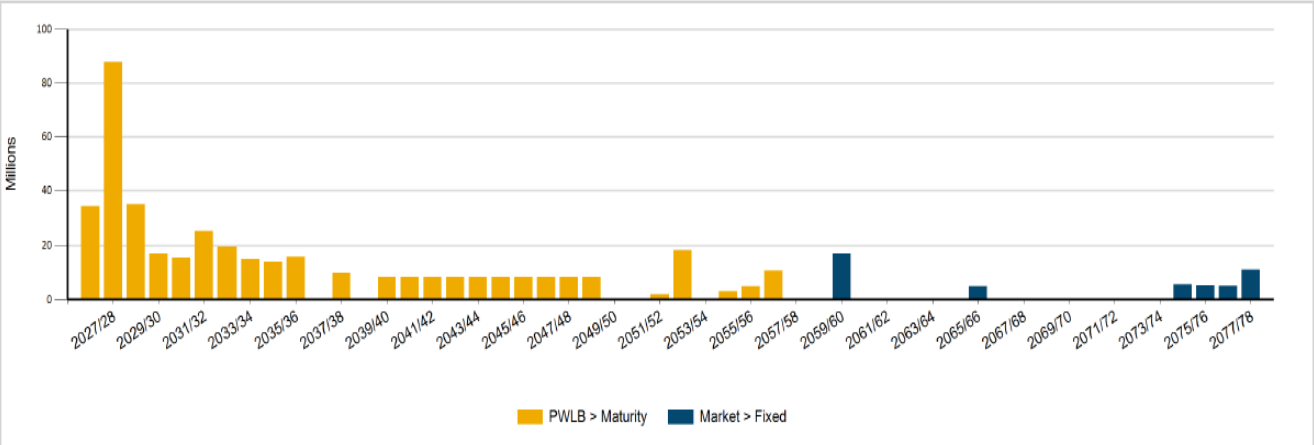


The Authority has not borrowed more than, or in advance of its needs, purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed.

The maturity profile of the debt is evenly spread to avoid large repayments in any one financial year. As highlighted above, there has been a tendency over the last 12 months to secure short term borrowing as interest rates are relatively high, so that the Council can take advantage of reductions in interest rates in the next 2-5 years. The total debt portfolio has a maturity range from 1 year to 52 years.

The Treasury Strategy allows up to 25% of the total outstanding debt to mature in any one year. It is prudent to have the Council's debt maturing over many years so as to minimise the risk of having to refinance when interest rates may be high. The actual debt maturity profile is within these limits

Debt Summary for Shropshire Council



Debt Rescheduling

No rescheduling was done during the year as the approximate 1% differential between PWLB new borrowing rates and premature repayment rates made rescheduling unviable.

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APPENDIX B - INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND OUTTURN 2025/26

Investment Strategy 2025/26

When the Treasury Strategy was approved in March 2025, our treasury advisor had predicted that the Bank rate would decrease during 2025/26 as the inflation rate reduced in the economy. The below forecast table was included in the Treasury Strategy report 2025/26.

UK Interest Rate Forecast

Link Group Interest Rate View	11.11.24												
	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27
BANK RATE	4.75	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
3 month ave earnings	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
6 month ave earnings	4.70	4.40	4.20	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
12 month ave earnings	4.70	4.40	4.20	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.50	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.00	4.00	3.90
10 yr PWLB	5.30	5.10	5.00	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.50	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.10
25 yr PWLB	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.30	5.20	5.10	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.60	4.50	4.50
50 yr PWLB	5.40	5.30	5.20	5.10	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.60	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.30

In 2025/26 investment of surplus cash continued to be managed by the finance team. The investment priorities are the security of capital and the liquidity of its investments. The Council also aims to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity. Investments are made in line with the Council's policy on creditworthiness which was approved in the Annual Investment Strategy.

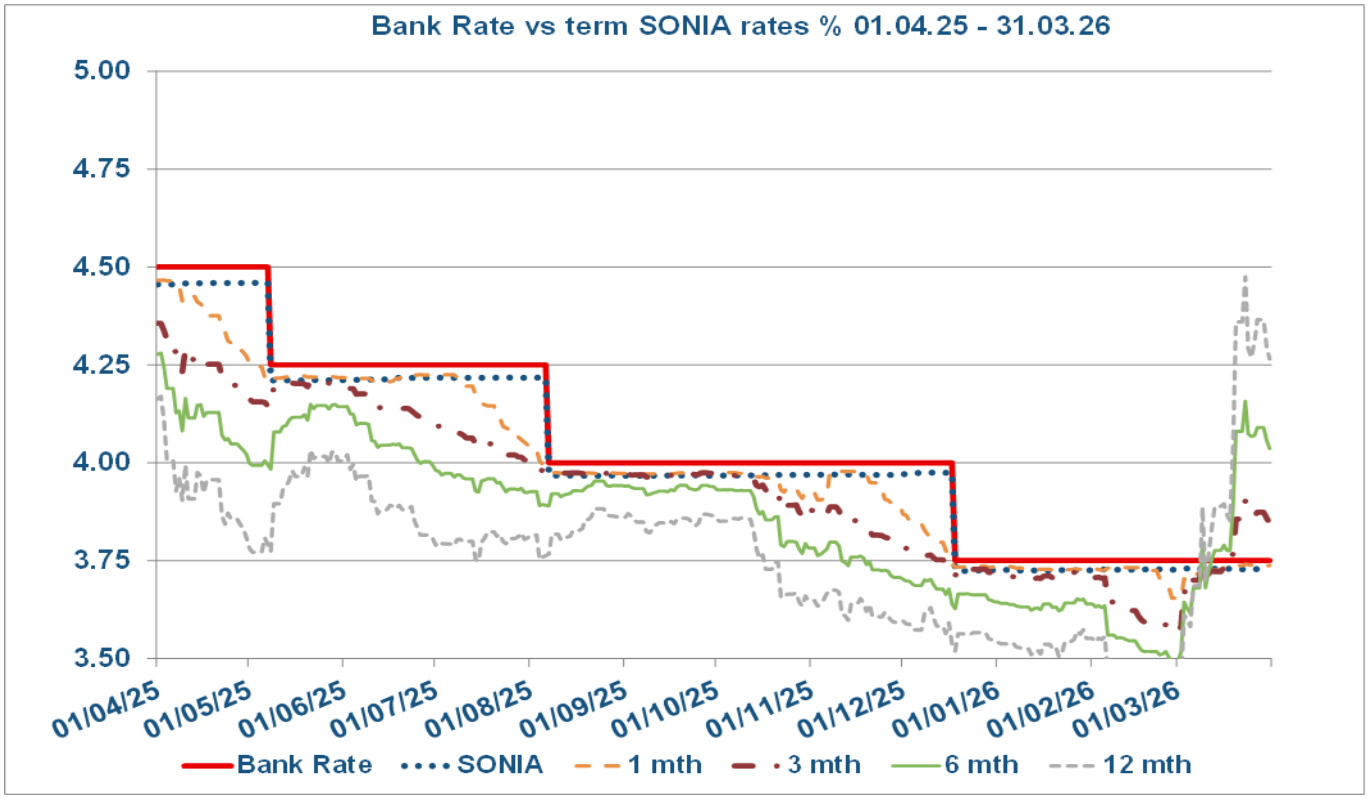
Investment Outturn 2025/26

Investment returns remained robust throughout 2025/26 despite Bank Rate reducing steadily through the course of the financial year (three 0.25% rate cuts in total), and at the end of March the yield curve had turned positive, reflecting inflation concerns emanating from the on-going conflict in the Middle East.

Bank Rate reductions of 0.25% occurred in May, August and December, bringing the headline rate down from 4.50% to 3.75%. Two of the Bank Rate cuts occurred in the same month as the Bank of England publishes its Quarterly Monetary Policy Report, therein providing a clarity over the timing of potential future rate cuts.

As of early April 2026, market sentiment has been heavily influenced by the Middle East conflict. Commentators anticipate a growing risk of inflation, meaning interest rates will not be cut for some time, and may increase to counteract inflationary pressures arising from steepening energy costs. Growth will also be impacted in many regions of the world. UK GDP is projected by the Office for Budget Responsibility (3 March 2026) to be 1.1% in 2026 before picking up to 1.6% in 2027 and 2028. But the likelihood is that there is downside risk to this forecast given events in the Middle East through March and still on-going.

Movements in short term rates through the year are shown in the graph below.



At 31 March 2026 the allocation of the cash portfolio was as follows:

Maturity Date	£m
Under 1 month	54.5
1-3 months	0
3-6 months	0
6-9 months	0
9-12 months	0
TOTAL	**54.2**

The average return on cash investments for the internal treasury team during the year was a return of 4.05%. Recognising the need to manage short term cash flow requirements, the target for the internal team is the Overnight SONIA rate (4.19%). Therefore, the internal finance team are marginally short of the benchmark by 0.14%, which reflects the fact that during the year, the team were holding extremely short-term cash balances.

APPENDIX C – PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2025/26

The Prudential Code requires the Council to set Prudential Indicators in the Treasury Strategy and report performance against those indicators in the Annual Treasury Report.

As can be seen from the table below, all of the actual indicators are below the targeted level that was set out in the Treasury Strategy for 2025/26. Some variations may appear in subcategories such as in Prudential Indicator 1. This refers to the capital expenditure anticipated during the year, and as can be seen from the indicator, HRA capital expenditure has exceeded the original target which is due to additional funding becoming available during the year. Non-HRA expenditure is lower than the revised indicator and so total capital expenditure still lies within the targeted level. The increase in the movement in the CFR relates to the inclusion of Exceptional Financial Support within the CFR for 2025/26.

Prudential Indicators	**2025/26 Revised Indicator**	**2025/26 Actual**
1. Capital Expenditure		
Non-HRA	£120.5m	£47.2m
HRA (applies only to housing authorities)	£18.2m	£21.5m
TOTAL	**£138.8m**	**£68.7m**
Financing of capital expenditure		
Capital receipts	(£12.7m)	(£6.7m)
Capital grants	(£84.1m)	(£38.5m)
Other contributions	(£9.2m)	(£1.2m)
Major Repairs Allowance	(£5.6m)	(£6.7m)
Revenue	(£0.9m)	(£0.9m)
Net financing need for the year	**£26.3m**	**£14.7m**
2. Net Borrowing & Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)		
Non – HRA	£462m	£411m
HRA	£123m	£106m
TOTAL CFR	**£585m**	**£517m**
Movement in CFR	**£19m**	**£70m**
Gross Borrowing (including HRA)	£527m	£460m
Investments	£75m	£54m
Net Borrowing	**£452m**	**£406m**
3. Authorised Limit for External Debt		
Borrowing	£657m	£460m
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	£91m	£111m
TOTAL	**£748m**	**£531m**
4. External Debt – Operational Boundary		
Borrowing	£569m	£460m
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	£91m	£111m
TOTAL	**£660m**	**£531m**

5. Borrowing Limits	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	
Fixed Interest Rate Exposure	£374m	£748m	£460m
Variable Interest Rate Exposure	£0m	£374m	£0m
6. Investment Limits	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	
Fixed Interest Rate Exposure	£0m	£250m	£54m
Variable Interest Exposure	£0m	£250m	0
7. Maturity Structure of Fixed/Variable Rate Borrowing During 2023/24	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	
Under 12 mths	0%	25%	13%
12 mths & within 24 mths	0%	25%	17%
24 mths & within 5 years	0%	50%	15%
5 years & within 10 years	0%	75%	20%
10 years & within 20 years	0%	100%	13%
20 years & within 30 years	0%	100%	16%
30 years & within 40 years	0%	100%	3%
40 years & within 50 years	0%	100%	1%
50 years and above	0%	100%	2%
8. Investment Limits			
Upper Limits for Total Principal Sums Invested for over 365 days:			
Externally managed	£50m		£0m
Internally Managed	£70m		£0m

Committee	Cabinet
Date and Time	8th July 2026, 10.30 am
	Public

Shropshire UK Shared Prosperity Fund – review of progress and programme evaluation

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Wagner – Portfolio Holder for Transformation & Economic Growth
Lead Director:	Kassandra Polyzoides, Service Director, Place Shaping
Service Area:	Economy, Funding and Skills
Report Author	Gary Spence, Strategic External Funding Lead
Officer contact details	01743 252976 gary.spence@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	All
Key Decision?	Non Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	Not applicable
Report considered by	Not applicable

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide Cabinet with a performance review of Shropshire's UKSPF Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the outcome of its independent evaluation, and the current state of Growth Funding in Shropshire.

1.2 To underline that the delivery of UKSPF in Shropshire has shown the benefits of a locally managed and delivered Growth Funding programme, with a wide range of sectors and organisations benefiting from investment of the last 4+ years.

1.3 To promote that the programme evaluation found that UKSPF was managed effectively by Shropshire Council and it praised the transparent approach to allocating and awarding funds that reflected local needs.

1.4 To highlight that the Government's current policy towards Growth Funding puts Shropshire and other areas that are still in the process of planning or implementing their devolution plans at an obvious disadvantage to areas with mayoral authorities or the devolved nations.

1.5 To note that officers are actively pursuing internal funding solutions and other external funding sources, to maintain a level of support to our community and business sectors whilst the Council is developing its future devolution plans.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to

2.1 Note the high-performance of the delivery of Shropshire's UKSPF programme, including the achievement against spend, outcomes and outputs targets.

2.2 Note the findings and recommendations from the independent Shropshire UKSPF programme evaluation.

2.3 Recognise the decline of external funding in Shropshire post UKSPF and the implications leading from this,

2.4 Agree to formally write to Government and its departments noting concerns around the loss of funding to rural and non-Combined Authority Regions and the implications that this will have for Shropshire.

2.5 Support the effort to promote UKSPF and its legacy as a good news story, whilst also communicating effectively to its residents and businesses that the Council is continuing to lobby Government for fair access to future growth funds.

3. Background

3.1 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was introduced by the UK Government as a domestic replacement for the European Structural and Investment Funds following the UK's exit from the European Union.

3.2 Its aims were to reduce regional disparities and support local economic growth by investing in communities, businesses, and skills.

3.3 Funding was allocated to Shropshire Council, to deliver programmes aligned with local priorities and national objectives.

3.4 A total of £13.4m UKSPF Funds were allocated to the 2022-2025 programme, which closed in March 2025 with no underspend allowed to be carried forward.

3.5 A total of £4.3m was allocated to the 2025-2026 programme, which is still in delivery and due to close September 2026.

3.6 Across the 2022-25 programme £2.6m of the £13.4m was received from DEFRA to specifically support activities within rural areas. For the 2025-26 programme we received £777k of the £4.3m from DEFRA for rural activities.

3.7 The rural programme allocation was not confirmed by Government for the 2022-25 programme until May 2023, with all funds being delivered across capital programmes (see appendix C for full details).

3.8 The first call for expressions of interest was not able to go out until March 2024 with approvals being issued in June of that year. Due to the truncated timeline, there was an underspend of approx. 39% that could not be rolled into the 2025-26 programme, meaning that there was an underspend of £495k for that period, which was returned to Government.

3.9 The following tables set out the expenditure achieved by the programme. Please note that local delivery of UKSPF did not commence until December 2022 (Table A – April – March 2025) and the final 6 months of delivery (Table B April 26 – September 26) are projected figures with programmes still working towards completion.

Table A – April 2022 to March 2025 (13.4m inclusive of M&A)

Community & Place				
	Total Allocation	Total Spend	Variation	Spend %
Capital	£1,749,292.00	£1,560,268.37	£189,023.63	89%
Revenue	£1,721,406.00	£1,547,558.75	£173,847.25	90%
Total	£3,470,698.00	£3,107,827.12	£362,870.88	90%
Business Support				
	Total Allocation	Total Spend	Variation	Spend %
Capital	£450,708.00	£430,628.02	£20,079.98	96%
Revenue	£5,305,964.75	£4,487,420.97	£818,543.78	85%
Total	£5,756,672.75	£4,918,048.99	£838,623.76	85%
People and Skills				
	Total Allocation	Total Spend	Variation	Spend %
Revenue	£1,617,846.25	£1,586,364.16	£31,482.09	98%
Total	£1,617,846.25	£1,586,364.16	£31,482.09	98%
Rural Business				

	Total Allocation	Total Spend	Variation	Spend %
Capital	£856,826.00	£519,066.64	£337,759.36	61%
Total	£856,826.00	£519,066.64	£337,759.36	61%
Rural C&P				
	Total Allocation	Total Spend	Variation	Spend %
Capital	£1,732,677.00	£1,576,607.69	£156,069.31	91%
Total	£1,732,677.00	£1,576,607.69	£156,069.31	91%

Table B Expected spend from April 2025 to September 2026 (£4.3m Inclusive of M&A)

Total Programme March 25-Sept 26	Total allocation	Total Spend	Total underspend	Forecast to September	%
Main					
Cap	£655,067.00	£331,148.09	£323,918.91	£323,918.00	100.00%
Rev	£2,729,647.41	£2,533,507.39	£196,140.02	£84,443.17	95.91%
Total	£3,384,714.41	£2,864,655.48	£520,058.93	£408,361.17	96.70%
Rural					
Cap	£776,707.00	£356,919.59	£419,787.41	£419,673.00	99.99%
Total	£776,707.00	£356,919.59	£419,787.41	£419,673.00	99.99%
Total					
Cap	£1,431,774.00	£688,067.68	£743,706.32	£743,591.00	99.99%
Rev	£2,729,647.41	£2,533,507.39	£196,140.02	£84,443.17	95.91%
Total	£4,161,421.41	£3,221,575.07	£939,846.34	£828,034.17	97.31%
M&A	163,527.00	147,395.49	16,131.51	94,784.66	148%

Due to the programme being extended for 6 months with no additional funding provided, revenue underspend has been used towards M&A for this period.

3.10 Over the course of delivery, circa seventy individual contracts, large and small, were supported through UKSPF funds covering a range of activities across the different investment priorities and delivered by a diverse array of organisations, large and small, from the public and voluntary sectors. It also supported grant schemes for business, so that this sector could also benefit directly from UKSPF too.

3.11 The Communities and Place Investment Priority has delivered a wide-ranging and impactful programme across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund. The Main UKSPF Programme was particularly effective in driving community engagement, cultural participation, and organisational capacity, with many outputs and engagement-related outcomes exceeding original expectations despite a compressed delivery period. The Rural Fund complemented this activity by supporting capital projects that created lasting community and environmental assets, notably through green space enhancements and active travel infrastructure.

3.12 The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has delivered extensive business engagement, advisory support, and early economic impacts across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund. The Main UKSPF Programme performed particularly well in enterprise reach, innovation support and employment growth, with several interventions exceeding targets for business participation, technology adoption and job creation. The Rural Fund complemented this by providing capital investment to rural businesses, supporting productivity improvements and early employment outcomes. The level of engagement and early productivity gains suggest that further economic impacts are likely to accrue after March 2025.

3.13 The People and Skills Investment Priority has achieved high levels of engagement across Shropshire, with several interventions exceeding participation and qualification targets. Delivery has been particularly effective in digital inclusion, workforce upskilling and progression into employment pathways. While sustained employment and some skills outcomes remain below target, this reflects the time required for individuals to convert support into long-term labour market outcomes.

3.14 A breakdown of the outputs and outcomes achieved by UKSPF in Shropshire is included as Appendix A.

3.15 An independent programme evaluation for the first three years of delivery was undertaken in 25/26. Subject to the availability of funding, an addendum for the final year (+6 months) of delivery will be added.

3.16 The key findings of the evaluation were as follows:

3.16.1 Relevance and Strategic Fit

- The Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with both national UKSPF priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded appropriately to Shropshire's distinctive challenges, including an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, which were particularly acute across market towns and rural communities and exacerbated by environmental risk and economic uncertainty.

- Overall, the Programme demonstrated a high degree of strategic coherence. By combining Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and Rural Fund interventions within a place-based framework, it effectively balanced short-term delivery priorities with longer-term ambitions to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies. Without UKSPF investment, Shropshire Council would not have been able to support a number of important activities that addressed identified gaps in provision and responded to emerging local needs. The use of robust local data and intelligence ensured that interventions were grounded in evidence and responsive to local context.

- While the Programme was well designed and strategically coherent, compressed delivery timescales limited the ability to plan and launch funding calls concurrently. This reduced opportunities for integration, cross-project collaboration and shared learning across Investment Priorities and placed additional pressure on delivery teams and partners.

3.16.1 Performance and Delivery Effectiveness

- Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery window, the Programme achieved a high level of financial and operational performance. Overall expenditure of over 90% across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund represents a significant achievement given the scale, complexity and late mobilisation of activity.

- Output delivery was generally positive across all three Investment Priorities, with many interventions exceeding participation and engagement targets. While some outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the nature of capital investment and economic and labour market change, where impacts materialise over longer timescales. The evaluation highlights the importance of recognising intermediate outcomes achieved during delivery, particularly where final outcomes will not be fully realised until, or after, projects have concluded. Importantly, the Programme established a solid platform for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

3.16.2 Impact and Added Value

- The Programme delivered clear added value through locally managed, partnership-led delivery. Shropshire Council's open call approach supported transparency, fairness and geographic balance, while local oversight enabled funding to be aligned with emerging needs and mobilised at pace.

- Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations with established networks and where interventions were well targeted and flexible. Across all Investment Priorities, the Programme generated meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes, including improved community capacity and pride in place, strengthened business resilience and innovation and improved employability, skills and confidence among participants. The evaluation also demonstrates that small-scale projects can make a significant difference and generate disproportionate impact when well targeted. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond the Programme's end.

3.16.3 Management, Delivery and Value for Money

- The Programme benefited from an experienced Programme Team, established partnership working and robust programme management systems. These factors enabled rapid mobilisation once funding was confirmed and supported effective governance, compliance and delivery under challenging conditions. Clear roles and responsibilities within the Programme Team were essential to managing delivery and should be established prior to programme launch in future initiatives.

- Programme scale and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness. While the use of boards and sub-groups supported accountability and assurance, their size and structure at times limited meaningful engagement and agile decision-making. Evidence suggests that smaller, more focused governance groups would have enabled clearer strategic direction, more effective challenge and more active participation, while still maintaining appropriate oversight.

- The design of the Programme, including separate reporting requirements for the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, multiple interventions across Investment Priorities and the distinction between capital and revenue funding, increased the complexity of delivery management, financial monitoring and the evidencing of outputs and outcomes. While delivery was effective, these structural constraints limited the Programme's ability to fully embed activity and maximise longer-term impact.

- Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money. The use of established delivery partners, intermediary-led models and alignment with existing assets reduced mobilisation costs, maximised reach and generated additional social, economic and environmental benefits, reinforced by significant match funding and leverage. Greater flexibility in match funding requirements would have further supported delivery, particularly for smaller organisations and community-led projects.

3.17 This evaluation is included as Appendix 2 to this report for information.

3.18 Following the 2025 Spending Review, it became clear that Government policy was to include Growth Funding as part of the settlement to devolved authorities. Despite lobbying from Shropshire and other areas, Government has offered no alternative route to Growth Funding for areas that are still in planning and implementation stages of devolution.

3.19 Shropshire also was not an area targeted by Government for their Pride of Place programme.

3.20 The lack of Growth Funding for Shropshire post UKSPF has an immediate impact of the ability of the organisations and council services that benefited from UKSPF funding.

3.21 This affects Shropshire Council's engagement with local businesses and means that our businesses are now at a big disadvantage in terms of what can be offered to them when compared to their competitors in Wales and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

3.22 The absence of funding for business support / skills and community activity will significantly constrain delivery of the Corporate Plan by weakening the foundations required for a thriving economy, resilient communities and sustainable public services.

3.23 Reduced support to SMEs will limit growth, job creation and town centre vitality, directly impacting the ambition of a fair and thriving economy, while loss of community-led provision would decrease preventative capacity, increase demand on statutory services, and undermine health, wellbeing and inclusion outcomes.

3.24 This is likely to widen inequalities, stall progress on regeneration and environmental outcomes, and increase demand for higher-cost services, ultimately undermining the Council's financial sustainability and its ability to deliver the Corporate Plan

3.25 Officers are currently looking at internal funding solutions and other external funding sources, such as lottery funding, to maintain a level of support to our community and business sectors whilst the Council is developing its future devolution plans.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

4.1 The main purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the delivery of UKSPF in Shropshire and the position post UKSPF. The key points to recognise are summarised below.

4.2 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) launched in April 2022 under the Levelling Up agenda.

4.3 Provided £2.6bn for local investment across the UK by March 2025.

4.4 Programme extended by the current government (additional 18 months), with financial completion now set for 30 September 2026.

4.5 Shropshire received £17.16m (excluding management & admin) / £17.76m (including M&A).

4.6 Shropshire Council is the accountable body, and delivery was managed by a dedicated UKSPF/external funding team within the Economy, Funding and Skills Service, with oversight provided by the Shropshire Economic Partnership Board.

4.7 The Shropshire programme is on course to spend over 95% of its total award through UKSPF.

4.8 The programme delivered against a range of outputs and outcomes, including the creation of new jobs, carbon reduction, environmental improvements, supported employment, digital training, upskilling opportunities and business support.

4.9 An independent evaluation for the programme was undertaken which found that it was highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with both national UKSPF priorities and local strategic objectives.

4.10 The positive impact of UKSPF in Shropshire has been wide and varied and Appendix D collates the PR undertaken during its delivery, highlighting individual examples of how the funding has made a positive difference to Shropshire's communities and businesses.

4.11 With the changes to Government Growth Funding post UKSPF, which is now part of Combined Authority Area settlements, Shropshire is left in a very difficult position. Officers are currently looking at internal funding solutions and other external funding sources, such as lottery funding, to maintain a level of support to our community and business sectors whilst the Council is developing its future devolution plans.

4.12 The council will continue to lobby strongly for fair access to government growth funding and consider ways to continue economic growth activity post-UKSPF, and this will include the following immediate actions:

4.12.1 To engage with local MPs, including to request that they communicate with DEFRA regarding the loss or rural development funding and what that means for the rural economy and rural services.

4.12.2 To input into the shaping of the Local Government Association position on growth funding and to actively participate in LGA working groups on the matter.

4.12.3 To continue the work already undertaken either with our Portfolio Holder or with partners such as Shropshire Chamber, BIDs, Visit Shropshire, the CCN, town and parish networks and through press and PR to lobby for growth funding for Shropshire.

4.12.4 To communicate the funding situation to residents and businesses through strong and consistent PR, explaining the steps the council is taking to secure funds for Shropshire.

4.12.5 To work with other local authorities that find themselves in a similar position to Shropshire such as Worcestershire, Cornwall and Telford.

4.12.6 To work cross-directorate to find interim funding and resources, potentially through the Transformation Fund, to continue some of the successful activity supported through UKSPF, including Shropshire Crowdfunding (opportunities are being explored to use this for dispensing NCIL - the portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy collected from local developments), Shropshire Growth Hub Business Booster and the Small Equipment Grant.

4.13 A prolonged absence of Growth Funding for business support / skills and community activity is likely to have a negative impact on the delivery of priorities of the recently adopted Corporate Plan.

4.14 It should be noted that it is important to ensure that capacity is retained within the Economy, Funding and Skills Service to implement the above and to take advantage of future funding opportunities as they emerge.

5. Alternative Options

5.1 Not applicable within the limits of this report.

6. Key risks and Opportunities

6.1 **Performance risk**
Five capital-funded projects are continuing to deliver into 25/26 and therefore risks to the delivery of activity, expenditure and outputs remain. However, risk will be mitigated by the ongoing close monitoring of the projects, to ensure that delivery remains on track. All projects are required to report on progress as part of the terms and conditions of the grant funding agreement.

6.2 **Financial and compliance risk**
As a MHCLG funded programme, there is a risk of funding clawback should grant conditions be unmet. This is mitigated by Shropshire Council's role as an experienced Accountable Body, with robust financial management, assurance processes, clear audit trails and regular reporting to MHCLG.

6.3 **Delivery capacity risk**
There is a risk that delivery capacity could be reduced given that the two dedicated UKSPF officers have their contracts ending on September 30 2026, and may seek alternative employment in advance of their contract end date. The risk will be mitigated through the wider support of the Economic Growth Team and the reprioritisation of work tasks as required.

6.4 **Impact on future economic growth within Shropshire**
The loss of UKSPF in Shropshire and the government policy to channel growth funding into mayoral authority areas creates an immediate risk to the economic growth and prosperity of the area. Officers are working to mitigate the effects of this through the following:

6.4.1 Maximising what can be achieved through the core funding provided to the Shropshire Growth Hub through government, however this funding remains very limited.

6.4.2 Examining ways that the remaining Marches LEP legacy funding can be used for economic growth, but noting as in 6.4.1, funding within this route is limited compared to the funding received through UKSPF.

6.4.3 Engaging with other national funders, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

6.4.4 Maximising opportunities that are emerging through DWP's targeting of worklessness.

6.4.5 Developing a robust evidence base to continue lobbying efforts.

6.4.6 Exploring options to support activity through the Council's Transformation Fund and to ensure that the risk presented is owned corporately, cross-directorate.

6.5 Risk table

Risk	*Mitigation*	*Link to Strategic Risk*
Under-performance against remaining UKSPF spend and output targets	Ongoing project monitoring and programme management.	Economic growth and employment
Loss of UKSPF funding due to non-compliance or poor assurance	Strong financial controls, clear audit trail, MHCLG compliant reporting, and experienced Accountable Body arrangements	Financial resilience / Corporate governance
Loss of programme management staff	Reprioritise the workload of other officers within the Economic Growth Service area.	Workforce capacity and skills
Impact of loss of UKSPF	Explore alternative funding options and continue lobbying efforts	Economic growth and employment

7. Council Priorities

7.1 UKSPF supported activity across three Investment Priorities that were set by Government; Supporting Local Businesses, Community and Place, and Supporting People. Projects delivered through UKSPF funding in Shropshire supported the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and thrive at every stage of life
- An environment that harnesses our natural assets and supports wellbeing
- A thriving economy that benefits everyone

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The UKSPF programme is fully funded by the Ministry for Homes, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG), with all delivery, staffing, commissioning, management and governance costs met through external grant funding. There is no financial burden on Shropshire Council's core budgets.

8.2 Shropshire Council acts as the Accountable Body for UKSPF in Shropshire and financial oversight, grant claims and assurance are undertaken by the Council, with no ongoing financial liability beyond the grant period, other than in relation to clawback.

8.3 Risks of clawback are mitigated through strong governance, financial controls and compliance with MCHLG requirements.

9. Legal and HR implications

9.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

10. Electoral Division Implications

10.1 Not applicable

11. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

11.1 The Shropshire UKSPF programme considered potential impacts on health and wellbeing, and the economy as part of the appraisal process for supporting projects. This applied sustainable development principles to activity delivered through the programme.

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 The Shropshire UKSPF programme considered equality and diversity impacts as part of the appraisal process for supporting projects. All organisations that were supported by UKSPF had to demonstrate that they had an equality and diversity policy and were aware of relevant legislation.

12.2 The programme directly supported organisations that championed equality and diversity, including The Hive (formerly Belmont Arts), Hands Together Ludlow and Arts Alive.

12.3 It also funded The Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP), which is a partnership of voluntary and community sector infrastructure, aiming to facilitate effective joint working amongst voluntary and community infrastructure organisations in Shropshire.

13. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1 The programme is a wide-ranging investment programme, covering capital and revenue projects across the investment priorities of Supporting Local Business, People and Skills, and Communities and Place. The potential impact on climate change is difficult to quantify.

13.2 UKSPF supported specific projects that sought to have a positive impact on climate change, which included:

- Shropshire Energy Grants (provided grants to businesses for renewable energy generation and energy efficiency measures)
- Shropshire Net Zero Leaders (helped businesses to measure and manage their carbon impacts, particularly focusing on cutting emissions along the supply chain.

13.3 Capital investment across a range of environmental and built environment projects that had various positive impacts on carbon mitigation.

13.4 Digital training reduces travel needs, cutting carbon emissions by enabling remote learning instead of in-person sessions.

14. Background Papers

14.1 Shropshire UKSPF Investment Plan

15. Appendices

Appendix A – SHROPSHIRE UKSPF OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES
Appendix B – SHROPSHIRE UKSPF EVALUATION
Appendix C – PROJECTS LIST AND FUNDING ALLOCATION
Appendix D – COLLATED PR ON UKSPF

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Investment Plan Drafting Template

Version 2
May 2022

Your location

To be eligible for funding, you will need to be applying on behalf of a lead authority in one of the delivery geographies.

Select the lead authority

For Scotland and Wales only: Who else is this investment plan being submitted on behalf of? Select all that apply

Your details

Name: Gary Spence

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Local challenges and opportunities

In this section, we will ask you:

- If you've identified any challenges or opportunities, you intend to support
- Which of the UKSPF investment priorities these fall under

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?
(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible
Shropshire has a growing, but ageing population The demographics of Shropshire are not reflective of the national average, with 25% of the population currently aged 65 or older compared to the England average of 18.5%, and a prediction of 12.8% growth by 2025 – with those aged 80+ rising even further at 20.3%. In comparison, the number of young people in the area is relatively low, and cultural diversity is limited - consequently many young people migrate out of the area seeking employment opportunities or lifestyles that they do not perceive as being available in Shropshire. There are therefore progressively higher numbers of people requiring care and support – either in their own home, or a care home – and rising numbers of people living with dementia, alongside a backdrop of a declining skilled working age population. The Shropshire Plan 2022-25 demonstrates the impact of this, stating that 78% of net budget was spent on social care for adults and children in the 2021/22 financial year. In order to improve healthy life expectancy and levels of wellbeing, careful consideration of place in relation to physical, environmental and social elements will be required both to encourage retention of younger people and a thriving working age population, whilst also ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to effectively meet the needs of older people without overburdening already stretched resources. **Market Town Resilience** With 13 market towns, and numerous villages between them, the population of Shropshire is disparate, with 57.2% of residents living in rural areas and 42.8% living in urban areas. Overall population is set to increase significantly by 2043, by up to 28% from the current 323,600 - with a 6.4% increase predicted by 2025. This is faster than the 3.8% growth predicted for the West Midlands and 3.5% for England overall. Whilst some market towns may be considered relatively

affluent and offer access to a range of facilities and services, others are experiencing the challenges caused by historic infrastructure, vacant or derelict buildings and spaces and a lack of flexibility in the way retail, services and facilities are provided.

Shropshire's market towns play a number of important and distinctive roles and possess a range of quality assets that combine to offer significant growth potential to boost the economy. They are key service centres that support local people and businesses within the towns and in the surrounding hinterlands. They also present as visually attractive, authentic, traditional market towns, with features and assets that appeal to many people, making the towns a desirable choice for living in or visiting.

However, there is the need for market towns to adapt and harness the positive aspects of culture, addressing the challenge faced by many residents in more rural areas who are effectively cut off from opportunity, experiencing growing food poverty and rural isolation. Altered working patterns due to the pandemic have also had an impact, with people living in or moving to Shropshire due to being able to work remotely looking for cultural activities closer to home, including a focus on activities outside of Shrewsbury.

An increase in footfall for market towns has a potential multiplier effect in terms of more local spend higher business sales, and in the long term, more positive economic growth in the high street. This in turn increases desirability of the area, both in terms of encouraging new commercial opportunity, and also socially, encouraging people to make better use of their local area. The challenge for Shropshire market towns is realising this potential – with a combination of physical improvements (which can be relatively small scale, such as greening with hanging baskets, flower boxes or food growing initiatives, to larger scale urban regeneration schemes which make public realm more appealing and encourage pride in place. Markets themselves play a key role in attracting pedestrians, passing traffic and visitors to increase their dwell time in the area. Development of new initiatives and partnerships, particularly those supporting cultural and community activities, community arts projects and small independent retailers offer a way to improve both the physical and social appearance of market towns, whilst also enhancing the general ambience – connecting people, place and community and making the most of the aspirations of local people to be able to use their market towns to access services, work, or socialise.

Changes to the way that local spaces are used and operated, in addition to improvements to digital and physical connectivity and improved facilitation of engagement with young people, will be required to lessen the inequality gap and ensure all residents are able to access and enjoy social and cultural events and activities in flexible, adaptable spaces – building capacity, cohesion and resilience for the future.

Environmental and community resilience

In February 2020, Shropshire was hit by the worst flooding in 20 years, with residents and businesses evacuated from Shrewsbury and Ironbridge following two severe danger-to-life flood warnings. This was followed by the first Covid-19 lockdown. With the UK also leaving the EU, recession, and a national cost of living crisis, this has created a challenging time for Shropshire – many rural businesses have been forced to close, urban businesses have lost access to appropriate spaces to operate, and others are still experiencing the detrimental impacts of changes in climate in an area with rich heritage, but the associated problems that often sit alongside dated infrastructure and a lack of flood amelioration measures.

Climate change and other environmental factors are also having an impact, with higher temperatures, droughts, storms, and increasingly poor air quality all being issues which have affected Shropshire residents. Improving the urban realm is one way that these challenges can be addressed, with more trees and greening initiatives offering shading and air quality improvement, root networks to combat the effects of drought, and rain gardens or schemes designed with sustainable urban drainage in mind providing flooding and drought countermeasures which mitigate the impact of extreme weather events. Pleasant urban realm can also encourage people to alter the way they travel, promoting walking or cycling rather than driving, which in turn reduces air pollution and improves health and wellbeing outcomes.

Community connection to place is at the very heart of resilience – on its own, resilience has very limited value if local people do not feel invested in, or attached to, the place that they live or work in. Building and nurturing a relationship between people and their environment is a key priority for Shropshire, creating shared values, community capacity, and cross-sector collaboration through allowing opportunity for people to actively participate in creation of meaning and use – investing in smarter infrastructure, civic technology investments, greening (providing improved air quality and shading to mitigate the impacts of increased temperature), carbon reduction and climate change initiatives which together will deliver 'place capital' - the shared built and natural wealth of the public realm. In order to mitigate the impacts of flooding in the future and encourage pride of place in the local area, sympathetic restoration and management of both historic and more modern localities will be required, with feasibility for repurposing of vacant and derelict properties and spaces considered in the context of adaptable, fit-for-purpose, multi-faceted community and cultural opportunity and careful investment of funds to ensure sustainable operation in line with the priorities and needs of local people.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT?

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

Sustainability and innovation

With a rich blend of natural, industrial and social heritage, Shropshire is a unique and diverse county – 23% of the county is designated as areas of natural beauty, with three national natural reserves, internationally important wetland sites, a variety of geological features unequalled in any area of comparable size in Britain, and the third longest rights of way network in the country. Blended with fascinating historical features such as the Ironbridge Gorge and Flaxmill Maltings, numerous museums and opportunities for self-led learning, the area offers untapped potential for a strengthened cultural and community offer which will benefit residents and increase levels of wellbeing and pride in place. These features have also supported Shropshire in achieving a reputation for sustainability, coupled with investment in renewable energy and a commitment to tackling climate change and improving biodiversity, in part driven by the flooding in 2020, pilot projects offered support through covid recovery funding, and the demonstrable positive impact on air quality seen during the first COVID-19 lockdown with high levels of air pollution dramatically improving due to significantly reduced levels of congestion and private vehicle use.

Improve functionality, dwell time and experience in Shropshire market towns

Shropshire already has 21 libraries forming important hubs within the heart of disparate communities, and the opportunity exists to build upon this successful concept, harnessing the momentum of change which has taken place over the last two years in the wake of the pandemic, flooding issues and Brexit. Improvements to infrastructure which encourage modal shift towards sustainable travel, encouraging walking and cycling connections between cultural destinations and promoting interesting, locally led cultural activities will not only support an improvement in health outcomes, but also enhance levels of social cohesion, boosting capacity and resilience in the future. A place-based approach for transformation of market towns which encourages maximisation of natural assets and resources, increases accessibility and boosts awareness of environment and low carbon initiatives will support wellbeing, at the same time increasing desirability of currently under-utilised spaces, vacant buildings and heritage feature – championing sustainable development and provision of flexible, adaptable locations which can be used by a variety of community and cultural groups for a wide range of different purposes.

Activities and services to address isolation and exclusion

One of the advantages of the significantly higher proportion of older people in Shropshire is the existence of a strong and highly skilled volunteer base with aspirations to facilitate and improve affordable community and cultural initiatives. Investing in support for groups to succeed and thrive (in conjunction with investment in infrastructure as detailed above) will assist with tackling issues of deprivation and isolation, allowing families, vulnerable adults and those experiencing poverty to access early support and interventions and promoting inter-generational activities which enhance

community understanding, inspire younger people, support lifelong learning, and improve inequality of access.

Merging volunteer-led services with support for cultural and creative social enterprise, particularly operating in flexible shared spaces which can also be used for affordable co-working (something which has seen rising demand following a move towards increased remote working in the area) will allow for development of a thriving community and cultural sector and a network of support which becomes self-sustaining, reducing demand on overburdened council services and promoting independence, resilience and community wellbeing.

This results in the following high-level opportunities under the Communities and Place Investment Priority that Shropshire intends to support:

1. Build upon existing assets, resources and infrastructure, harnessing the potential of market towns to offer a wide range of activities, services and facilities that bring communities together and encourage both physical and digital connection between different individuals, groups and localities.

2. Offer support to boost cultural capacity and social cohesion, leading to an increasingly diversified cultural offer which will benefit younger people, older people, existing residents and those moving to the area in the wake of the pandemic and changing lifestyle priorities – offering all sectors of the community the chance to recognise and explore their aspirations and achieve their potential.

3. Promote understanding of climate change issues, environment and air quality, opportunities for carbon reduction and the benefits of active lifestyles, including working with the community through creation of new or updating existing defences for natural hazards – increasing healthy life expectancy, improving physical and mental wellbeing, and enhancing pride in place.

4. And, linking with the other two investment priorities, building social and physical infrastructure which supports development of improved employment and educational opportunities and a better understanding of the role of volunteering in supporting socio-economic outcomes, delivered through a combination of skills sharing activities, connections and signposting, and provision of high-quality, desirable community and cultural spaces.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

Shropshire businesses are currently operating within the context of massive social, economic, political and environmental change – recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, dealing with a recession, the impacts of Brexit, achieving net zero and climate change, and localised flooding events which particularly impacted businesses in Shrewsbury. Shropshire currently has a lower than national average GVA per head, at 20.5% less than the West Midlands average and 30.1% less than the UK average.

Working patterns, recruitment, retention and connectivity

The changing work patterns which have emerged as a result of the pandemic has led to a change in local demographics, with young people increasingly migrating out of the area, and difficulty in encouraging young professionals/graduates to relocate into the area. A gap exists in the provision of a skilled labour force at entry level, hampering progression of a diversification of industry which would raise productivity, retention of young people, and encourage recruitment. Transport, accessibility and availability of affordable housing also link to this challenge – whilst not directly related to business investment, the fact that it is currently difficult for those without access to a car to travel around the county from more rural areas causes the issue that even for those businesses

wishing to engage a skilled labour force it is often not possible to recruit the employees they are looking for. Whilst digital connectivity has been improving since 2014, with a rise from 24% with access to superfast broadband up to 94% in 2020, the local infrastructure and provision of affordable workspaces in local towns has yet to catch up with the change from office-based to home-based working which has resulted in a desire for more localised hubs and community facilities – according to the Shropshire Business Impact Tracker (December 2020), 39% of businesses intend to continue to work remotely.

A need for specifically tailored, accessible business support

People in Shropshire are also more likely to enter self-employment and start-up a business than other areas of the country, with 14.2% of those aged 16-64 self-employed compared to 9.4% nationally. This results in a need for high quality business support, and space for businesses to grow rather than relocating out of the county. Additionally, there is a perception that Shropshire's current business support is complex, with a low level of awareness of Shropshire's strengths and what it can offer.

Lack of affordable, flexible, fit-for-purpose infrastructure

There is also a lack of suitable commercial property available – although the Estates Gazette demonstrated that during the first quarter of the pandemic, Shropshire was the most sought after location for business, demand exceeds supply of appropriate space. In many cases, this is due to constraints caused by the history and heritage of the area (which is also an opportunity, viewed in the right context) and the brownfield nature of 'traditional' working sites, many of which have issues including the risk of flooding as mentioned above which mean they are unviable for private investment without initial public funding for remediation. The planning process can also be difficult to navigate, and previously has taken considerably longer than it could.

Requirement for diversification of traditional Shropshire industries

Finally, although prior to COVID-19, there were over 13m visitors to Shropshire each year, the county ranked only 40th out of the 50 most visited in the UK, with spend per trip only around £10 per head – lower than the national average. The tourism, hospitality and food and drink industries are typically lower paid (alongside two of the three other areas which have created the most additional employment since 2020: health and business administration and support services), and all of these have also suffered due to the pandemic, with many smaller rural businesses closing down. Average earnings in Shropshire are £29.20 below the regional average per week, and £57 per week below the national average. Tourism offers a significant contribution to the local economy, but this has the potential for exponential growth given the right investment. Additionally, impact of leaving the European Union on tourism and other cultural sectors has yet to be realised, due to the COVID-19 lockdown - impacts will emerge over the next few years and will require a flexible and adaptable implementation plan.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT?

(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

The Shropshire Plan 2022-25 reports that 34,607 business grants to the value of nearly £170m have been delivered by October 2021, plus numerous other projects, by both the council and partners, to support market towns, communities and individuals. This has included a £2.76m Economic Recovery Fund alongside the High Streets/Welcome Back Fund and Town Centre Recovery Programmes. Potential exists to build upon this positive work to boost business support, resilience and productivity.

Strength sectors in Shropshire

With 22% of the county designated as areas of natural beauty, two World Heritage Sites within the Council area, 7000 listed buildings Grade 1,2 or 2* and more than 13m visitors a year, the opportunity exists to diversify and grow the visitor economy, linking with opportunities identified as

part of the Communities and Place investment priorities. The visitor economy sector is forecast to grow by 73% between 2012 and 2036, taking GVA to £367m. The creative industries sector forecast to grow by 174% over same period, generating £331m by 2036 and employment opportunities in higher value, professional jobs. Taken together, the value of the natural and historic heritage offer is significant, with economic return of visits to the environment estimated to be up to £100m per year. As important sectors of the local economy, support going forward has the potential to grow the market, even without increasing the number of visitors.

Shropshire also has a reputation for sustainability – it is the second biggest producer of renewable energy in the UK - and the low carbon and renewable energy sector is predicted to be an area of significant growth in the West Midlands. The opportunity exists to build upon demand for low energy vehicles, infrastructure, energy efficiency and low-carbon heat, and encourage industries working in this sector to locate themselves in Shropshire.

Grow high value sectors and boost some existing sectors to create better quality jobs:

The aim to develop Shropshire as a safe, strong and vibrant destination to attract people to live in, work in, learn in and visit the County links intrinsically with business support - providing and promoting high quality cultural activities, building Shropshire's reputation as a cultural destination, increasing visitors, which in turn will attract people and businesses to relocate to the area, providing a skilled workforce and new options for employment. Delivering support for businesses, including creative industries, food and drink, agri-tech, leisure, outdoor activities, the visitor economy, renewable energy and green industry and working with businesses in a fair and proportionate way (balancing regulatory requirements with business support) will allow those considering investing in Shropshire to grow and thrive, benefitting both local people and the local economy. Shropshire has an enterprising and independent spirit that manifests in higher-than-average numbers of small businesses and self-employed people, and strong arts, music and creative industries, heritage, leisure and visitor economies - many with potential for growth.

This results in the following high-level opportunities under the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority that Shropshire intends to support:

1. Provide the right tools and support to facilitate businesses to invest in research and development, relocate to Shropshire or expand and grow in their physical locations and workforce, particularly in relation to sustainability and green industry and the creative and cultural sectors.

2. Champion investment in wider infrastructure that underpins business investment, focused on town centres and high streets, business parks and growth corridors - recognising the potential to establish hubs providing support to supply chains and individuals moving into the county to access and develop its strengths and opportunities, and exploring affordable, flexible co-working space in key locations.

3. Collaborative working with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and business improvement districts, assisting businesses to gain support through recovery funds, UKSPF and other relevant funding.

4. And, linking with the other two investment priorities: Provide appropriate housing, connectivity, networks and workplace progression through training and upskilling, so the county has the right workforce to enable economic growth and prosperity and can grow the working age population.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? (In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland this should also include challenges relating to Multiply)

(If yes) Describe these challenges, give evidence where possible

Shropshire has a tight labour market with low unemployment, poor retention of skilled young people and an ageing population above the national average. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues with more people leaving the labour market and becoming economically inactive, particularly in the older age cohorts within the labour market.

Strategically **we need to ensure that: local employers have a supply of labour market entrants.**

1. better entry-level skills
2. support local people develop the skills they need to live healthy and prosperous lives
3. retain young people and a younger skilled demographic to live and work in Shropshire

Shropshire Council's Shropshire Plan 2022-25 'Healthy Economy' priority prioritises the need to ensure Shropshire can retain and develop a skilled workforce for the future and for communities to have the skills they need to function and prosper in society.

"We will provide access to lifelong learning, supporting people and our communities to prosper, and through providing the right skills developing greater productivity and improved wages."

The Shropshire Plan 2022-25

Shropshire therefore has clear Challenges we need to target:

1. Upskilling adults with low skills who are within, or close, to the labour market

We need to improve the supply of skilled labour entering, or already within the labour market. Improving basic skills (numeracy, literacy & digital) forms a significant part of this challenge.

Shropshire has several sectors where the shortage of skilled labour is causing problems for employers in terms of productivity and growth. The county also has a high number of micro businesses and self-employed people for who numeracy is a challenge. Two notable examples where we need to improve the quality of labour supply are:

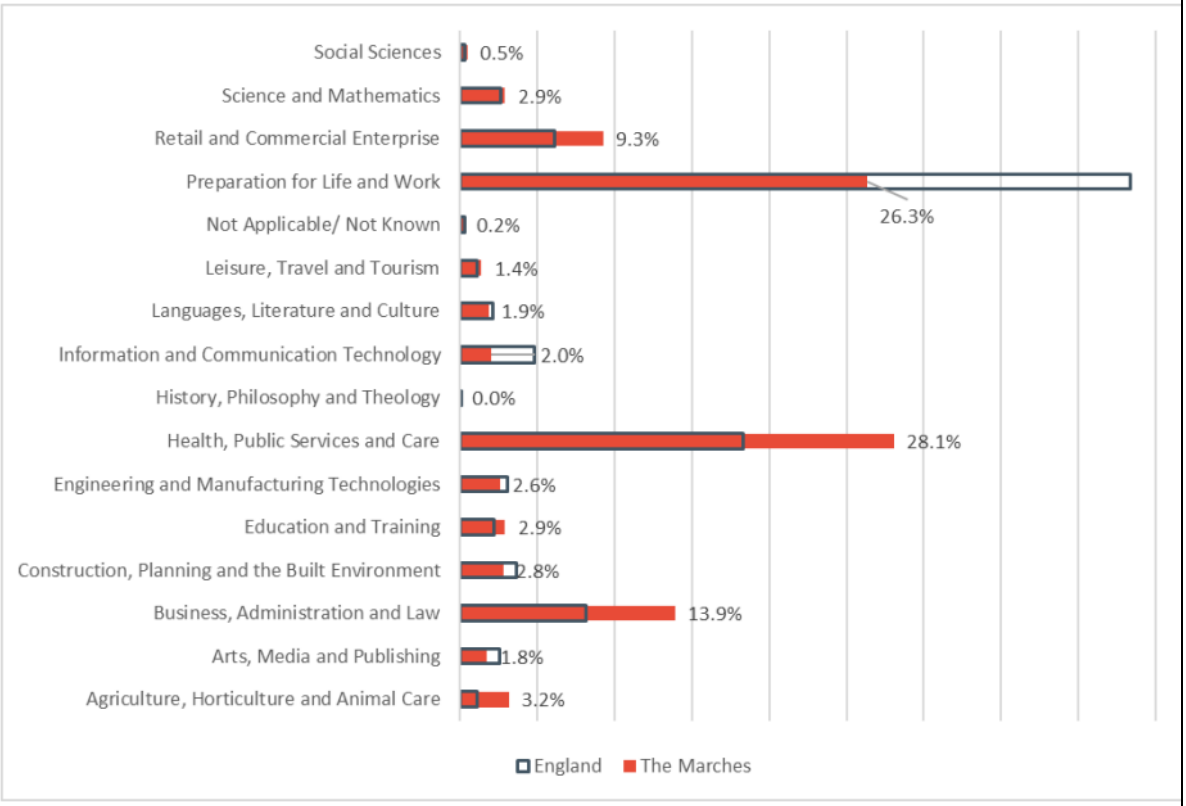
- The health and social care sector in the county, which is forecast to grow strongly and has three of the top five occupations for forecast growth. The number of jobs adverts in Health and Social Care in the Marches increased 151% between 2016 and 2020 and there are expected to be an additional 1,023 jobs in caring, leisure and caring personal service roles. Improving the supply of labour to this and other growing sectors that provide significant volume of jobs in the county is an imperative.

- Hospitality businesses are more than twice as likely as other industries to be experiencing challenges in filling vacancies compared with normal expectations for this time of year. Between 23 August and 5 September 2021, 30% of hospitality businesses said that vacancies were more difficult to fill than normal. This compares with 13% across all industries (up from 9% in early August).

An additional issue The Marches LEP (2022) highlight is that lower skilled people who are in work have little incentive to acquire new skills as they have jobs they can adequately undertake without additional training, and, unless their employer instigates training, they are unlikely to be

encouraged to invest their time in learning. Finding innovative ways of delivering numeracy courses in conjunction with employers is therefore a priority.

Low basic skills attainment also hinders upskilling in Shropshire for those adults who are already in learning. A significant number of individuals are unable to complete courses as they cannot successfully complete the basic skills element of their qualification. This limits their attainment progression ambitions and leads to many being put off learning for life. The relatively low attainment of 'Preparation for Life and Work' qualifications (compared to national levels) provides an indication of the scale of this issue in the county. **Improving basic skills attainment through UKSPF as a qualifications enabler is therefore a key priority for Shropshire.**



Source: Further Education & Skills data, DfE (published 2021)

A specific issue highlighted by The Marches LEP is the need to support those with **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities** (SEND) to improve their skills so they can enter employment. This requires specialist support and the cooperation of employers.

2. Retain and attract higher level skills within Shropshire to boost economic growth

Unemployment is low in Shrewsbury and Shropshire but there is an over-representation of low-wage, low-skill jobs within the economy which is weakening the local economy and constraining economic growth.

12.5% of jobs were lost between 2015 and 2020, and, more importantly, a high proportion of the town centre jobs that remain are in low skilled, less productive economic sectors. Thus, at £556 gross per week average earnings in Shropshire are £29.20 below the regional average and £57 below the national average.

This low-wage, low-skill economy is also evident in weakened productivity of businesses in Shropshire. In 2019 GVA per job stood at £40,341 in Shropshire; 20.5% less than in the West Midlands and 30.1% less than in the UK. The gap between the Shropshire and regional and national averages has widened since 2020, with the GVA value in Shropshire rising by 14.6% compared with growth of 24.7% in the West Midlands and 23.1% in the UK.

This lack of higher skilled, higher paid jobs is means that young people are migrating out of the town centre and the wider county, leaving future economic growth to be driven by an ageing resident population. By 2043 one-third of Shropshire's population will be aged 65 years or older.

This is creating a tight labour market and making it more difficult for higher value sectors to grow and create more jobs. We need to break this cycle by bringing forward employment sites that are attractive to higher value employers through our Levelling Up Fund projects

To address this we need to grow higher value sectors and strengthen some of our existing sectors to create better quality jobs.

2. Improving progression in and to the labour market by targeting people with low skills, and those who do not engage in learning, to improve their basic and other skills

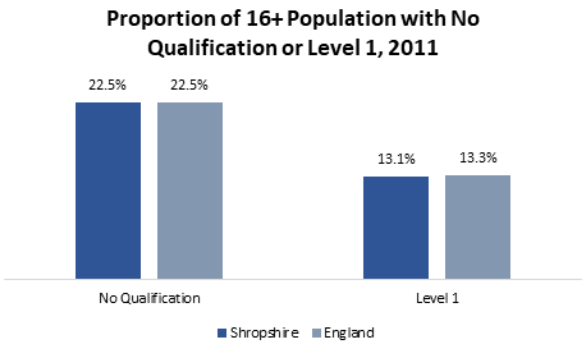
Boosting the supply of skilled labour in the Shropshire economy is essential to increase productivity, ease recruitment difficulties and facilitate economic growth. It is also key to improving income levels, particularly of those currently with low incomes (either in employment, economically active or potentially economically active).

The OECD's adult skills survey revealed that circa one in four working-age adults in England have low literacy and/or numeracy. The results in Shropshire are consistent with this overall picture for England; 42,748 (23.9%) people in Shropshire have low literacy and/or numeracy.

Of these:

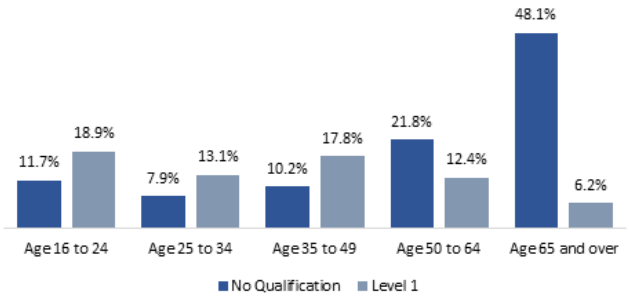
- 87% (37,218) are aged 25-64, with 32% (11,797) of these out of work.
- 13% (5,530) are 16-24, with 83% (4,614) of these being qualified at level 2 or below.

Looking back at 2011 Census data shows that this picture has altered little over the past decade. The 2011 Census showed 22.5% of adults had no qualifications, while 13.1% held Level 1 qualifications. More than a third of the 16+ population in Shropshire had either Level 1 qualifications or no qualifications at all. These proportions were almost identical to the national average at that time.



The 2011 Census showed that those aged 50 and above were much more likely to have no or low qualifications, with almost half of those aged 65 and with no qualifications at all. Whilst this data is 11 years old, it is still likely to be the case that low literacy, numeracy and digital skills are more prevalent in older age groups.

Levels of Qualification by Age, 2011



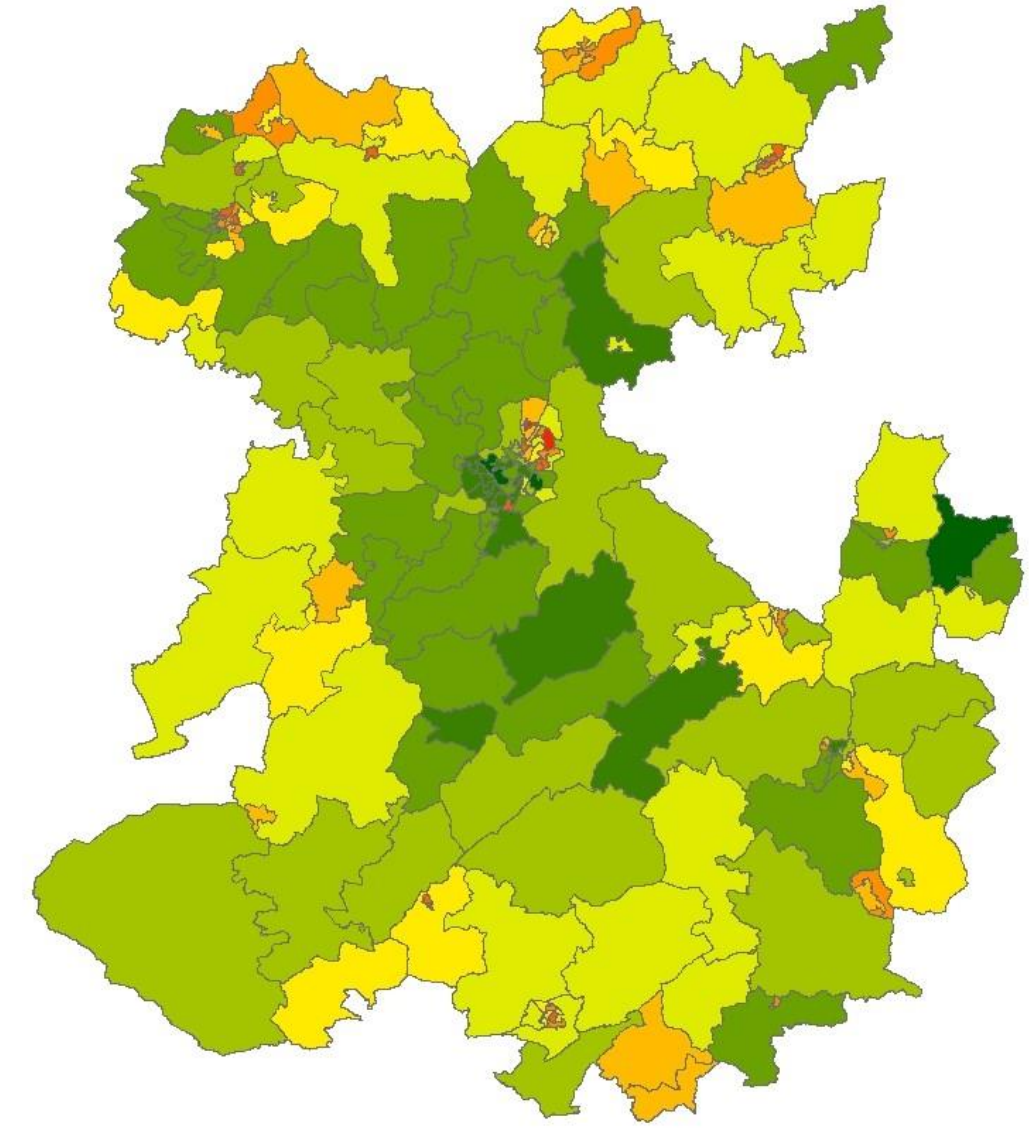
3. Geographical variation highlights the challenge of improving skills in rural Shropshire

Skills need in Shropshire is distributed across the county with the highest concentrations in our numerous rural settlements and market towns.

Whilst Shropshire's overall relative deprivation scores from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) do not indicate any major deprivation in the county, drilling down into the Adult Skills Sub-Domain reveals a significant skills disparity with many of the county's Lower Super Output Areas within the 10% most deprived nationally.

The Annual Population Survey (ONS, Dec 2020) showed that the proportion of workless households in Shropshire was 14.9% compared to 13.6% nationally. Whilst historically the county has tracked below the national rate there does appear to be convergence between Shropshire and the national average over the past few years, with the national rate falling faster than Shropshire. This indicates that **there is likely to be a need to target workless households, with those in more isolated rural settlements a priority for support**.

Adult Skills Sub-Domain from the 2019 IMD National Deciles



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Skills attainment is not spread evenly across Shropshire. There are areas above average and others below. However, even in areas with the lowest percentage of adults with low skills there are significant numbers of people in need of support to improve.

Highest Need Wards.

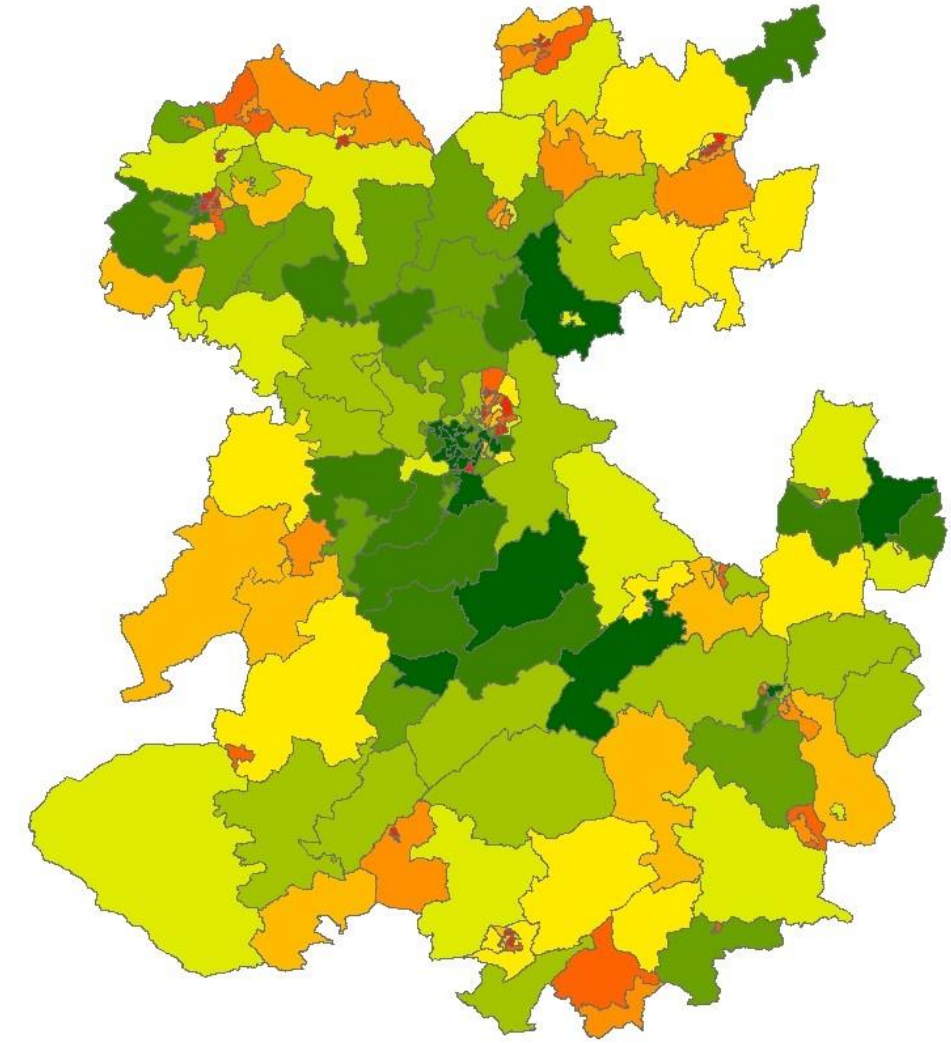
- Monkmoor (26%, 709 people);
- Gobowen, Selattyn and Weston Rhyn (25%, 1094);

- Harlescott (25%, 780)

Lowest need Wards:

- Copthorne (19%,464);
- Shifnal South and Cosford (20%, 686);
- Belle Vue (20%, 599).

Adult Skills Sub-Domain from the 2019 IMD
Shropshire Deciles



Adult Skills Sub Domain Shropshire Decile 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 = most deprived, 10 = least deprived

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Beneficiary statistics from the recent delivery of the Building Better Opportunities programme in Shropshire, (which targeted those with very low qualifications and multiple barriers to learning) provides some insight into the nature of local need and demand:

- 1,000 participants had a maximum of lower secondary school education (i.e. no GCSE's/formal qualifications)
- 12.3% of these participants had no formal education, either primary or secondary
- 3.4% had no numeracy qualifications

Our provider information indicates that UKSPF and Multiply funded provision could target of range of groups which would benefit from specific tailored support. In particular, based on local demography we would anticipate that key groups should include:

- Older people
- Adults with low/no skills who do not engage in learning.

ARE THERE ANY LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY THAT YOU INTEND TO SUPPORT? (In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland this should also include challenges relating to Multiply)

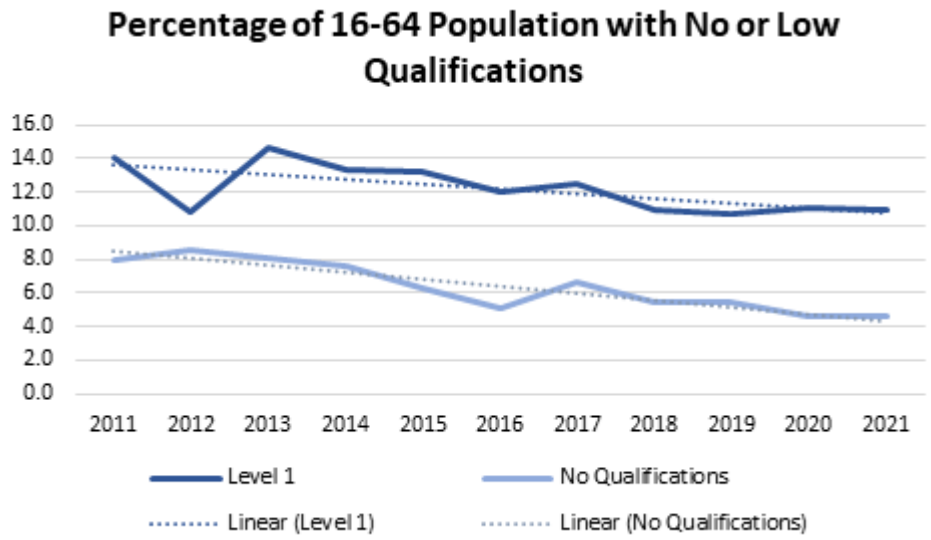
(If yes) Describe these opportunities, give evidence where possible

An improving skills profile

Shropshire's working-age population skills profile is improving. Our UKSPF and Multiply investments will aim to continue this progress and improve workforce and labour supply skills.

We also need to ensure retired people have the skills that enable them to access services and activities to minimise exclusion and optimise their quality of life. This is especially pertinent to those living in rural areas where access to essential service (such as banking) is more limited.

According to the Annual Population Survey there were 19,600 working age people in Shropshire whose highest qualification was Level 1 and an additional 8,300 people with no qualifications at all. This represents 10.9% of the 16-64 population and 4.6% respectively. The qualifications that people attain has risen over the last decade, with the proportion with no qualifications and low qualifications has been in steady decline, as shown in the graph below.



In 2011, there were 14,700 people aged 16-64 with no qualifications – there are now 6,400 fewer (a decline of 44%). The number qualified to Level 1 and no higher has likewise fallen – by 24% or by 6,200 people.

The proportion of the population with no qualifications is lower than the national average (6.4% in 2021). 9.6% of the working age population are qualified to Level 1 only in England – a slightly lower proportion than is the case in Shropshire.

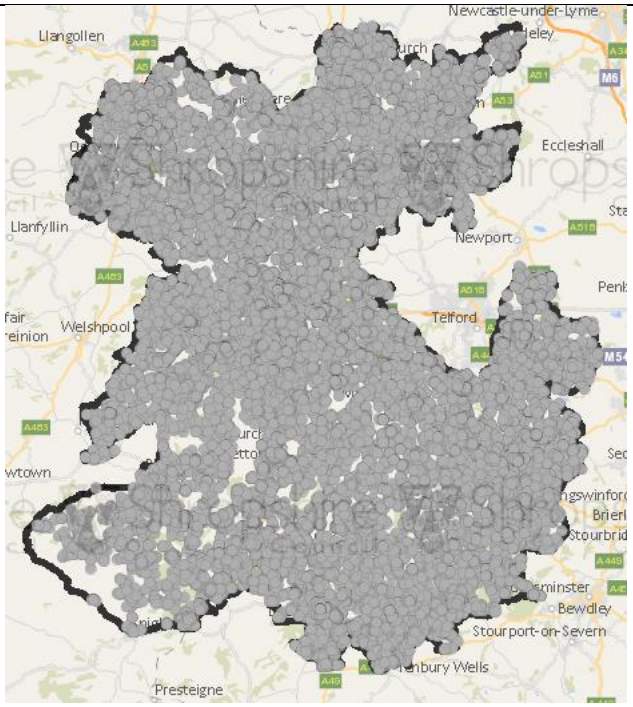
Green skills and the green economy

Offering a wealth of natural assets, a commitment to renewable energy, and increased focus on agri-tech built upon Shropshire's traditional agricultural industry heritage, a range of opportunities exist to encourage engagement with keyworker support and additional services, boost the number of people in employment (including self-employment) following support, and the number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills through promotion of green skills development and the green economy. Offering support for both informal and formal skills sharing, training and qualifications which will allow local people to develop knowledge and attitude required to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society - building upon the assets and growth sectors already in place in Shropshire - will allow for transitioning towards more environmentally sustainable modes of production and consumption. Skills and qualifications linked to environmental sustainability, auditing, management, planning and communications, sustainable construction methods, and development of technical and digital skills which inform effective crop production and livestock management, engineering and data skills which offer new approaches for farming, including incorporation of skills related to the increasing move towards plant based-diets and the impact this has on how food production is undertaken, will all benefit local people both in terms of volunteering, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities related to the existing and increasingly diversified visitor economy, renewable energy, and agricultural sectors in Shropshire and also in respect of their overall health and wellbeing. This will not only offer increased skills development for future growth sectors, but also link to the potential investments outlined in the communities and place and supporting local business investment priority opportunities sections, adding overall value and positioning Shropshire as a leader in the green economy.

Improving Digital Connectivity to overcome rurality

The Shropshire Plan 2022-25 priorities include: Quick access to information, advice, and answers to questions using suitable mechanisms such as digital technology, will includes forming healthy behaviours and supporting good mental health and wellbeing. Improving digital connectivity is thus essential so that we ensure equal opportunity for residents to access training provision particularly as businesses, educators and training providers are increasingly using internet driven delivery methods.

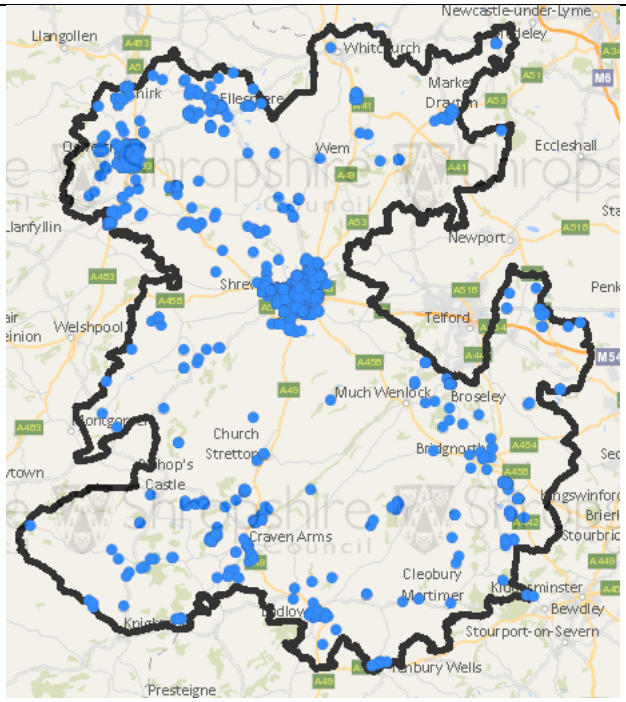
The map below shows the Superfast Broadband (>30Mbps) coverage in Shropshire is very good and provides an excellent opportunity to engage and provide digital learning and blended learning to the vast majority of people within Shropshire.



Source: Connecting Shropshire; Shropshire Council

However take-up and access is not yet ubiquitous with 50% of over 75's, 30% of 65-74 year olds and 2% of households with children without digital access. These are likely to be disadvantaged households who need support to overcome digital exclusion.

The Shropshire Plan 2022-25 highlights that the council is working with key stakeholders to meet the aspiration to provide all premises in the area with access to superfast broadband (>30mbps) by 2025, and encouraging wider commercial 5G deployment. Collaborating with Building Digital UK (BDUK) on Project Gigabit, to ensure that as much gigabit broadband coverage as possible is achieved by 2025. The following map shows the planned ongoing rollout of Superfast Broadband across Shropshire up to 2023.



Source: Connecting Shropshire; Shropshire Council

Retraining and upskilling local people for digital jobs and digital infrastructure job roles is also a significant opportunity for Shropshire. This needs to form part of our strategy to create high skill, high wage jobs to Shropshire and improve our lagging productivity rates.

Interventions

In this section, we will ask you about:

- Interventions you've chosen for each year of funding
- Outcomes you want to deliver
- Any interventions that are not listed here
- How these interventions fall under the UKSPF investment priorities, and your rationale for them
- Interventions not included in our list will be assessed before being approved, where you will need to show a clear rationale, how the intervention is value for money, what outcomes it will deliver and how you will monitor and evaluate the intervention. This may include a theory of change or logic chain.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.	
Outcome	**Tick if applicable**
Jobs created	

Jobs safeguarded	
Increased footfall	**Yes**
Increased visitor numbers	
Reduced vacancy rates	**Yes**
Greenhouse gas reductions	**Yes**
Improved perceived/experienced accessibility	
Improved perception of facilities/amenities	
Increased number of properties better protected from flooding and coastal erosion	
Increased users of facilities / amenities	
Improved perception of facility/infrastructure project	
Increased use of cycleways or paths	
Increase in Biodiversity	**Yes**
Increased affordability of events/entry	
Improved perception of safety	
Reduction in neighbourhood crime	
Improved engagement numbers	
Improved perception of events	
Increased number of web searches for a place	
Volunteering numbers as a result of support	**Yes**
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support	**Yes**
Increased take up of energy efficiency measures	
Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	**Yes**
Number of premises with improved digital connectivity	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.
Intervention *A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.*
E1: Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs.
E4: Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer.
E6: Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities.
E11: Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups.
E14: Funding to support relevant feasibility studies.

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE LIST?
State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these
No, the programme will deliver investment that fits within the indicative interventions provided above.

Explain how each intervention meets the Communities and Place investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.
n/a
Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**
Yes / No
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.
n/a

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?
Describe these projects, including how they fall under the Communities and Place investment priority and the location of the proposed project.
The process for applying for the UKSPF funds will be open and transparent through a call and application process and projects will be appraised and scored against set criteria. The process for this is to be determined. Therefore, whilst discussion has been undertaken with partners around potential activity this has just been undertaken to inform the selection of the indicative intervention areas, alongside stakeholder engagement through the Investment Priority Working Groups. There are broad aspirations to support the continuation of activity that has been funded through the European Structural and Investment Fund and that has been developed through the Marches Growth Hub (Shropshire) but all projects will be required to respond to the planned bidding opportunities.
Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**
Yes / No
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.
n/a

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.	
Outcome	**Tick if applicable**
Jobs created	**Yes**
Jobs safeguarded	**Yes**
Increased footfall	
Increased visitor numbers	
Reduced vacancy rates	**Yes**
Greenhouse gas reductions	**Yes**
Number of new businesses created	**Yes**
Improved perception of markets	
Increased business sustainability	
Increased number of businesses supported	**Yes**
Increased amount of investment	
Improved perception of attractions	
Number of businesses introducing new products to the firm	
Number of organisations engaged in new knowledge transfer activity	**Yes**
Number of premises with improved digital connectivity	
Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	**Yes**
Number of new to market products	**Yes**
Number of R&D active businesses	
Increased number of innovation active SMEs	
Number of businesses adopting new or improved products or services	
Increased number of innovation plans developed	
Number of early stage firms which increase their revenue following support	
Number of businesses engaged in new markets	
Number of businesses engaged in new markets	
Number of businesses increasing their export capability	
Increased amount of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure installed	**Yes**
Number of businesses with improved productivity	**Yes**
Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	**Yes**
Increased number of properties better protected from flooding and coastal erosion	
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.
Intervention *A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.*
E16: Investment in open markets and improvements to town centre retail and service sector infrastructure, with wrap around support for small businesses.
E17: Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours and tourism products more generally.
E20: Research and development grants supporting the development of innovative products and services.
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local networks.
E26: Support for growing the local social economy, including community businesses, cooperatives and social enterprises.

E29: Supporting decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy. Taking a whole systems approach to invest in infrastructure to deliver effective decarbonisation across energy, buildings and transport and beyond, in line with our legally binding climate target. Maximising existing or emerging local strengths in low carbon technologies, goods and services to take advantage of the growing global opportunity.
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth, particularly in areas of higher unemployment.
E31: Funding to support relevant feasibility studies.

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS LIST?	
State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these	
No, the programme will deliver investment that fits within the indicative interventions provided above.	
Explain how each intervention meets the Supporting Local Business investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.	
n/a	
Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**	
Yes	No
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.	
n/a	

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?
Describe these projects, including how they fall under the Supporting Local Business investment priority and the location of the proposed project.
The process for applying for the UKSPF funds will be open and transparent through a call and application process and projects will be appraised and scored against set criteria. The process for this is to be determined.

Therefore, whilst discussion has been undertaken with partners around potential activity this has just been undertaken to inform the selection of the indicative intervention areas, alongside stakeholder engagement through the Investment Priority Working Groups. There are broad aspirations to support the continuation of activity that has been funded through the European Structural and Investment Fund and that has been developed through the Marches Growth Hub (Shropshire) but all projects will be required to respond to the planned bidding opportunities.

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**	
Yes	No
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.	
n/a	

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO DELIVER UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.	
Outcome	**Tick if applicable**
Number of economically inactive individuals in receipt of benefits they are entitled to following support	
Increased active or sustained participants of UKSPF beneficiaries in community groups [and/or] increased employability through development of interpersonal skills	
Increased proportion of participants with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	**Yes**
Number of people in supported employment [and] number of people engaging with mainstream healthcare services	
Number of people sustaining engagement with keyworker support and additional services	**Yes**
Number of people engaged in job-searching following support	
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	**Yes**
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	**Yes**
Increased employment, skills and/or UKSPF objectives incorporated into local area corporate governance	
Number of people in education/training	
Increased number of people with basic skills (English, maths, digital and ESOL)	**Yes**
Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment and into skills provision	
Increased number of people familiarised with employers' expectations, including, standards of behaviour in the workplace	
Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment and into skills provision	
Number of people gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences, and skills	**Yes**

Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education, and training.	
Number of people engaged in life skills support following interventions	
Number of people with proficiency in pre-employment and interpersonal skills (relationship, organisational and anger-management, interviewing, CV and job application writing)	
Multiply only - Increased number of adults achieving maths qualifications up to, and including, Level 2.	
Multiply only - Increased number of adults participating in maths qualifications and courses up to, and including, Level 2.	**Yes**
None of the above	

SELECT THE INTERVENTIONS YOU INTEND TO USE WHICH MEET THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY. YOU CAN SELECT AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.
Intervention *A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.*
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people: Intensive and wrap-around one-time support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills (digital, English, maths* and ESOL) support where there are local provision gaps.
E36: Intervention to increase levels of digital inclusion, with a focus on essential digital skills, communicating the benefits of getting (safely) online, and in community support to provide users with the confidence and trust to stay online.
E37: Tailored support to help people in employment, who are not supported by mainstream provision to address barriers to accessing education and training courses.
E39: Green skills courses targeted around ensuring we have the skilled workforce to achieve the government's net zero and wider environmental ambitions.

DO YOU PLAN TO USE ANY INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS LIST?	
State the name of each of these additional interventions and a brief description of each of these	
No, the programme will deliver investment that fits within the indicative interventions provided above.	
Explain how each intervention meets the People and Skills investment priority. Give evidence where possible, including why it is value money and the outcomes you want to deliver.	
n/a	
Do you consider that any of these interventions may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the intervention's planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**	
Yes	No
Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the intervention is a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.	

n/a

ENGLAND ONLY: People and Skills interventions can only be used in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 if you have identified a local voluntary and community provision, previously supported by the European Social Fund, at risk of closure. If you have not identified a suitable provision, you will not be able to select interventions for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 and your investment plan will not be approved.

HAVE YOU ALREADY IDENTIFIED ANY PROJECTS for 2024-2025 WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

No

Describe the projects for 2024-25, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.

n/a

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity?
All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.

n/a

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.

n/a

HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED A LOCAL VOLUNTARY PROVISION AT RISK AS PART OF YOUR PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITIES?

Yes	No

(If Yes) Describe the local voluntary provision at risk and your rationale for supporting it.

The ESF-funded Building Better Opportunities programme is delivering in Shropshire until 30 June 2023, although the final quarter is for financial completion only, and has been providing support to the economically inactive through a local partnership of VCS organisations.

An ESF ESFA NEETs contract is also being delivered by a VCS organisation for Shropshire and this contract is due end on 31st March 2023.

This activity relates to the E33 and E36 Intervention Areas of employment support for economically inactive people and without funds being made available from UKSPF in 23/24 this provision will disappear.

Provide the European Social Fund Project Names and Project References for this voluntary and community provision at risk.

Building Better Opportunities
project ID 0010293500
Project outline ThMa/2/1

ESFA NEETS Shropshire Name: SUPPORTING NEETS - The Marches LEP Contract Ref: ESFA-5097 Master Contract Ref: ESFA-15074

What year do you intend to fund these projects? Select all that apply.		
2022-2023	**2023-2024**	**2024-2025**

Describe the projects for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, including how they fall under the People and Skills investment priority and the location of the proposed project.
To ensure consistency in the approach to the appraisal and awarding of funding to projects through UKSPF, there will need to be an open call for proposals based around a replacement for BBO and ESFA NEETs that target the same beneficiary groups and which meet the outcomes of the E33 and E36 intervention areas. The specification for the call will set out the requirements for the project delivery, including geographic coverage, but at this stage it is not possible to confirm the arrangements of this other than to state that it is a priority of Shropshire to ensure that similar provision to BBO and NEET support is continued beyond the current delivery period.

Do you consider these projects may provide a subsidy to potential recipients of the funding under the proposed planned activity? **All bids must also consider how they will deliver in line with subsidy control as set out in the guidance.**	
Yes	**No**

Detail the assessment you undertook to consider whether the proposed projects constitute a subsidy and any specific measures you will take to make sure the subsidy is permitted.
This will be considered as part of the call specification explained above.

Approach to delivery and governance

In this section, we will ask you about:

- Structures you have in place to support delivery
- Support you have from stakeholders and the local community
- How you've engaged with MPs as part of your investment plan
- Opportunities you have identified to work with other places

Places need to show how MPs that cover the lead local authority have been engaged on the investment plan and whether they support it. More detail on the role of MPs can be found here.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT		
Have you engaged with any of the following as part of your investment plan? Select all that apply.		
Public sector organisations - **Yes**	Private sector organisations - **Yes**	Civil society organisations - **Yes**

Describe how you have engaged with any of these organisations. Give examples where possible.
Widespread consultation has been undertaken across all sectors. A summary of activity is provided below: Public Sector: • Report submitted to Shropshire Council Cabinet in June to gain delegated authority for Director of Place and Director of Resources to submit UKSPF Investment Plan. The

Cabinet will need to approve the Investment Plan in its final state once Investment Plan approved by Government

- Briefing on development of Investment Plan and governance structures provided to Shropshire MPs by Director of Place in July
- Standing agenda item at monthly Shropshire Economic Growth Task Force (ref governance structure) meetings, which includes Marches LEP representation
- Standing agenda item at monthly Future Funding Group (an internal cross-directorate group that looks at external funding opportunities)
- Consultation through virtual higher education / knowledge transfer group with representation from Wolverhampton, Harper Adams, Chester, Aston and Birmingham universities
- Consultation with a range of public sector bodies through the UKSPF working groups, reflecting the specific Investment Priority areas of UKSPF
- Consultation with the two main Shropshire College groups through the development of the Multiply Investment Plan and the People and Skills working group
- Consultation with the other two Marches LEP area local authorities, Telford and Herefordshire, particularly in relation to the potential continuation of EU funded activity
- A number of individual meetings with a range of departments, including adult and social care, public health, low carbon, economic growth, culture and leisure and education.
- Shropshire's approach to UKSPF reported to Marches LEP Board in July

Private Sector:

- Standing agenda item at monthly Shropshire Economic Growth Task Force (ref governance structure) meetings, which includes Marches LEP, NFU and Shropshire Business Board representation
- Specific consultation held with Zero Carbon Shropshire – a business-led group that looks at the business need and requirements for moving towards a zero-carbon economy
- Specific consultation with private training providers through the development of the Multiply Investment Plan and the People and Skills Investment Priority
- Consultation with a range of private sector bodies through the UKSPF working groups, including Business Improvement Districts, private and social enterprises and business networks
- Shropshire's approach to UKSPF reported to Marches LEP Board in July

Community Sector:

- Standing agenda item at monthly Shropshire Economic Growth Task Force meetings, which includes representation from the community and voluntary sector
- Consultation with relevant community and voluntary sector organisations through a dedicated VCS group for the development of the Multiply Investment Plan
- Consultation with a range of community and voluntary bodies through the UKSPF working groups, reflecting the specific Investment Priority areas of UKSPF
- Direct consultation with the VCS through the Voluntary Sector Assembly

Summarise the governance structures you have in place, including how any advisory panels or associated partnership groups are made up

It is anticipated that the key groups which have had oversight of and/or informed the development of the Investment Plan will transition into the groups that will oversee the delivery of UKSPF. These groups are the Shropshire Economic Growth Task Force and the UKSPF Investment Priority Working Groups.

Under the emerging governance arrangements, the Shropshire Economic Growth Task Force, which initially was established to oversee the creation of the new Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy, will become the Economic Growth Partnership Board and this Board will have responsibility for the delivery of UKSPF as part of a wider remit. The draft Terms of Reference for this group are enclosed with this submission.

Under the draft proposals, the Partnership Board will have a MP reference group, to ensure MP involvement in UKSPF and the wider work around the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy. The Board will also be supported by the 'officer' working groups that will have responsibility for a range of workstreams, including activity around UKSPF. It is anticipated that the working groups will be the appraisal groups for the UKSPF application process, and they will make recommendations to the Partnership Board on the applications for funding made to UKSPF. Details are still being development but the groups within the governance arrangements will all be subject to a declaration of interest protocol to ensure that any awarding of public funds is transparent and not open to abuse.

The draft structure is as follows:

Confirm all MPs covering your lead local authority have been invited to join the local partnership group.	
Yes	No
Are there MPs who are not supportive of your investment plan?	
Yes	**No**
(If Yes) Who are the MPs that are not supportive and outline their reasons why.	

PROJECT SELECTION	
Are you intending to select projects in any way other than by competition for funding?	
Yes	**No**
(If Yes) Describe your approach to selecting projects, and why you intend to do it this way.	
All projects will need to respond by submitting a standard application form through open call windows and applications will be assessed competitively against standard criteria.	

DO YOU INTEND TO WORK WITH OTHER PLACES ON ANY OF THE INTERVENTIONS WHICH FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE INVESTMENT PRIORITY?	
Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.	
Intervention	**Tick if applicable**
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.	
Describe any interventions not included in this list?	
n/a	
Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?	
For community and place-based activity, Shropshire Council does not at this stage anticipate collaborating with other local authority areas in delivery terms however opportunities could present themselves through the work being progressed through County Deals and this will be considered during future phases of UKSPF delivery.	

DO YOU INTEND TO WORK WITH OTHER PLACES ON ANY OF THE INTERVENTIONS WHICH FALL UNDER THE SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?	
Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.	
Intervention	**Tick if applicable**
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.	
E20: Research and development grants supporting the development of innovative products and services.	Yes
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local networks.	Yes
E29: Supporting decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy. Taking a whole systems approach to invest in infrastructure to deliver effective decarbonisation across energy, buildings and	Yes

transport and beyond, in line with our legally binding climate target. Maximising existing or emerging local strengths in low carbon technologies, goods and services to take advantage of the growing global opportunity.	
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth, particularly in areas of higher unemployment.	Yes

Describe any interventions not included in this list?

n/a

Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?

For potential activity relating to the continuation of business support activity, particularly ERDF-funded work, Shropshire will collaborate with the relevant local authorities and other organisations to reflect that several projects delivered over a regional geography by range of delivery partners. Discussion is ongoing with Worcestershire, Birmingham, Herefordshire and Telford local authorities. Collaboration will ensure best value in project delivery and a smooth transition from the EU-funded programmes.

DO YOU INTEND TO WORK WITH OTHER PLACES ON ANY OF THE INTERVENTIONS WHICH FALL UNDER THE PEOPLE AND SKILLS INVESTMENT PRIORITY?

Which interventions do you intend to collaborate on? Select all that apply.

Intervention	**Tick if applicable**
A full list of nation-specific interventions is available in the relevant annex to the Prospectus.	
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people: Intensive and wrap-around one-time support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills (digital, English, maths* and ESOL) support where there are local provision gaps.	Yes
E36: Intervention to increase levels of digital inclusion, with a focus on essential digital skills, communicating the benefits of getting (safely) online, and in community support to provide users with the confidence and trust to stay online.	Yes
E37: Tailored support to help people in employment, who are not supported by mainstream provision to address barriers to accessing education and training courses.	Yes
E38: Support for local areas to fund local skills needs. This includes technical and vocational qualifications and courses up to Level 2 and training for vocational licences to local area needs and high-value qualifications where there is a need for additional skills capacity that cannot be met through mainstream funding.	Yes

Describe any interventions not included in this list?

n/a

Who are the places you intend to collaborate with?

For potential activity relating to people and skills provision, particularly ESF-funded work, Shropshire will work with local authority areas which shared delivery of ESF-funded contracts, including Telford and Herefordshire. Collaboration will ensure best value in project delivery and a smooth transition from the EU-funded programmes.

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

How have you considered your public sector equality duty in the design of your investment plan?

Through the development of the UKSPF working groups and wider consultative activities, Shropshire Council has attempted to consult with a broad range of organisations, including from the VCS and social enterprise sectors. These sectors had representation on each of the three working groups and have been provided the opportunity to input into discussion and comment on the intervention areas included within the Investment Plan.

Additionally, there is also VCS representation on the Economic Task Force which will become the local investment board for UKSPF delivery.

A separate VCS stakeholder group was also created for the development of the Multiply Programme.

The selection of the intervention areas within the Investment Plan reflects the inclusive approach taken by Shropshire Council during the process.

How will you consider your public sector equality duty when implementing your investment plan, including in the selection of projects?

Shropshire Council recognises its responsibilities in targeting UKSPF towards deprived or underperforming parts of the county, to include a diverse range of groups and that people who could benefit from this provision might have complex needs. Therefore, an inclusive approach to delivery is required and projects will be expected to ensure they reflect the key Missions of Levelling Up within their design and delivery.

We will ensure that the UKSPF will be open and accessible to a range of organisations and groups by promoting the call windows widely and to encourage the development of projects within areas that need the most support to Level Up, particularly in relation to the Community and Place and People and Skills Investment Priorities.

The application form will be available in accessible formats and support will be provided to organisations and groups in relation to the completion of the forms by the UKSPF Team

Project applications will be assessed on their commitment to crossing cutting themes, including social inclusion, to ensure that the benefits of UKSPF investment are felt within deprived areas and hardest-to-reach communities.

RISKS

Have you identified any key risks that could affect delivery, for example lack of staff or expertise?

Yes	No

(If Yes) Describe these risks or issues, including the contingency measures you have in place to mitigate them.

Description of risk	**Actions you will take to mitigate**	**After mitigation what is the likelihood of the risk occurring?**	**After mitigation what would be the impact of the risk materialising?**

Technical issues with IT system that will be employed for the administration of UKSPF	**Ensure development and testing of system is undertaken well in advance of the launch of the programme**	**Unlikely**	**Medium**
Lack of high-quality applications seeking UKSPF funding	**Consult and work with organisations in advance of the application process to ensure demand has been stimulated.** **Review process should initial applications rounds be unsuccessful**	**Possible**	**Medium**
Delay in contracting with project deliverers	**Provide dedicated resource and or identify appropriate members of staff to undertake contracting.**	**Unlikely**	**Minor**
Poor performance of projects	**Include break clauses within contracts and ensure regular project monitoring**	**Possible**	**Medium**
Delay in recruitment of UKSPF support staff	**Ensure recruitment process commences as soon as possible to ensure suitable person is identified in advance of programme delivery**	**Unlikely**	**Medium**

Have you identified any key fraud risks that could affect UKSPF delivery?	
Yes	No

(If Yes) Describe these risks or issues, including the contingency measures you have in place to mitigate them.

Description of risk	**Actions you will take to mitigate**	**After mitigation what is the likelihood of the risk occurring?**	**After mitigation what would be the impact of the risk materialising?**
Fraudulent claims or financial mismanagement by applicant bodies	**Implement a rigorous claims process, project monitoring and audit regime**	**Unlikely**	**Major**

Capacity and capability

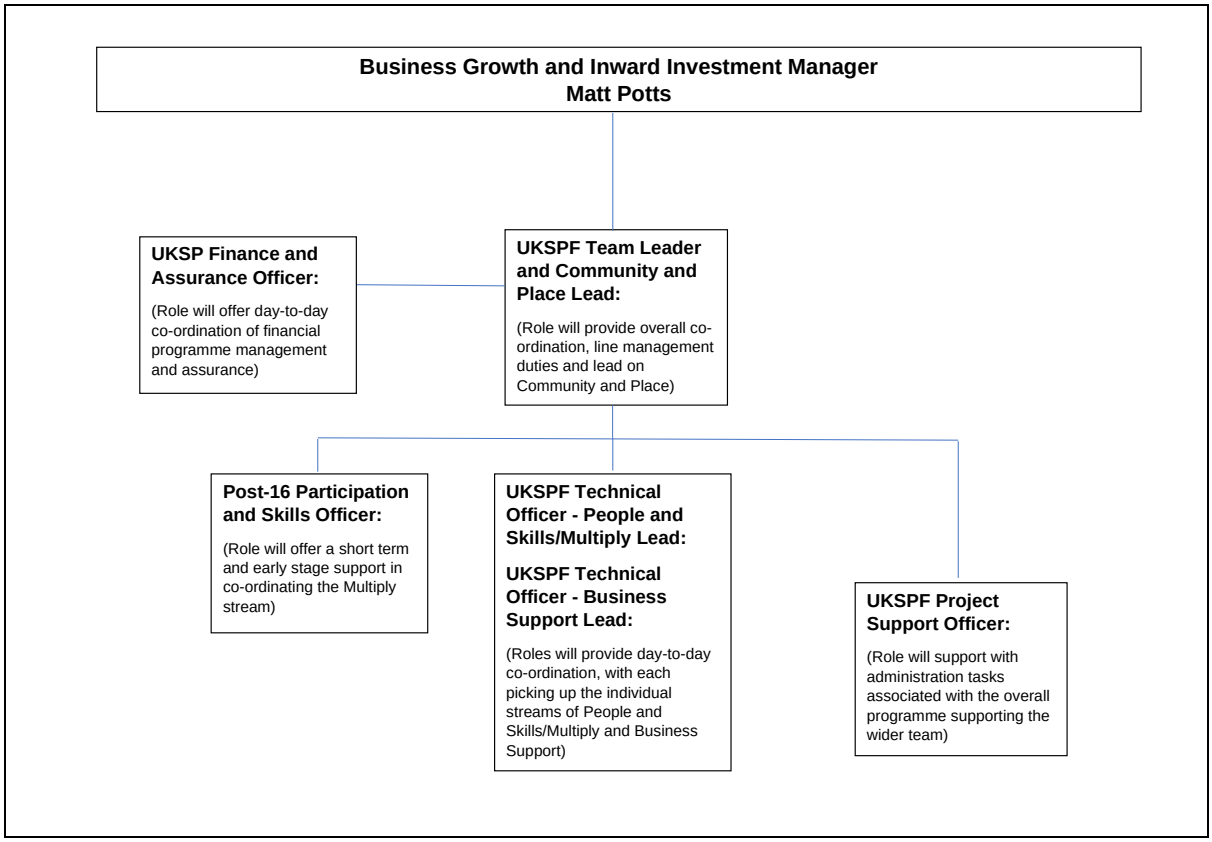
In this section, we will ask you about:

- The capacity and capability of your team to manage funding
- The resources you have in place for work related to UKSPF

Your answers here will help us know how to support you with delivery. They will not affect the amount of funding you will get.

Answer as honestly as possible.

TEAM RESOURCE
How many people (FTE) will be put in place to work with UKSPF funding?
Shropshire Council intends to utilise the full amount available for management and administration of UKSPF, including Multiply. The 4% allowance for UKSPF is £443,800 and this will be supplemented with the 10% allowance for Multiply M&A. It is estimated that the M&A allowance will cover 4 to 5 FTE posts, including on costs, for at least the 2.5 years of UKSPF delivery from October 2022, as well as a small allocation for incidental expenses like room hire and, potentially, bespoke expertise, e.g. subsidy control. Depending on the recruitment process and internal approvals, certain posts could commence before October 2022. Certain aspects of UKSPF delivery will be covered by existing members of staff as part of their day-to-day duties around areas such as procurement and contracting and as such these costs will be absorbed within the council's operating budget.
Describe what role these people will have, including any seniority and experience.
Provisional team and hierarchy is as follows:



- Strong capability: Has extensive experience and/or a proven track record of delivery in this area.
- Strong capacity: High degree of confidence that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area.
- Some capability: Has previous experience of delivery in this area.
- Some capacity: Confident that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area.
- Limited capability: Does not have previous experience and/or no track record of delivery in this area.
- Limited capacity: Limited confidence that there is enough staffing/resource to manage funding in this area. Additional resource may be needed to support delivery.

CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY		
How would you describe your team's current experience of delivering funding and managing growth funds?		
Very experienced	Some experience	No previous experience
How would you describe your team's current capacity for delivering funding and managing growth funds?		
Strong capacity	**Some Capacity**	Limited capacity
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for procurement?		
Strong capacity	**Some capacity**	Limited capacity
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for subsidies?		
Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for subsidies?		
Strong capacity	Some capacity	**Limited capacity**

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY		
Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the Communities and Place interventions you have select?		
Yes	No	
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for Communities and Place interventions?		
Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability
Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering Communities and Place interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.		
Shropshire Council already has strong partnership working in the larger towns through the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan and Future Oswestry, working with the town councils and Business Improvement Districts. Similar arrangements are being explored in the other market towns, through the Place Plan work and in general for place-based activity there will be clear process for bringing forward activity. There is a similar process for community-based activity through the work of the Voluntary Sector Assembly. Culture and tourism development is being taken forward through the development of the destination management plan and the cultural compact, informed by development of strategies as referenced in the challenges and opportunities section of this form.		
Describe what further support would help address these challenges.		
Shropshire Council and its partners are developing an number of exciting place-based initiatives and UKSPF will not fulfil their ambitions by itself, which is why support through the Level Up Fund for the strategic projects in Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Craven Arms is vital.		
How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Communities and Place interventions?		
Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability
Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering Communities and Place interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.		
A key delivery challenge relates to the capacity required to develop and administer programmes and projects, particularly the delivery of small grant schemes which are important to the VCS and local organisations but are admin heavy. Therefore, there will need to be an acceptance by the Council and partners that such activity requires investment in resources to manage delivery effectively.		
Describe what further support would help address these challenges.		
Shropshire Council would want recognition from Government that for the effective delivery of schemes, particularly across a large rural authority, a realistic amount of UKSPF funding will need to be used on the management and administration of programme and project delivery.		

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY	
Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the Supporting Local Business interventions you have select?	
Yes	No
How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for Supporting Local Business interventions?	

Strong capability	Some capability	Limited capability

Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering Supporting Local Business interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

Shropshire Council has extensive experience in delivering business support activities, either directly or in partnership with other authorities. Experience covers a range of ERDF programmes, working with different partners from the public and private sectors, the provision of the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire, and the recent delivery of the business support package through the government-funded Additional Restrictions Grant (COVID).

However, the key challenge around business support will be managing the transition between the ERDF funding regime and UKSPF. This will involve a lot of dialogue with a range of organisations to ensure that UKSPF can build on the successes of the ERDF programme in the Marches, whist managing expectations and preventing a funding void, which will be particularly felt during a crucial time for the UK economy.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

Government should recognise that a good deal of capacity and time is needed in bringing forward new programmes and projects whilst avoid duplication and ensuring that fresh activity reflects the findings of the ERDF summative assessments and reflects local business need.

Therefore, we ask that Government is mindful of these challenges and offers flexibility for areas to reprofile expenditure into following years should there be a clear rationale for this.

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for Supporting Local Business interventions?

Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability

Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering Supporting Local Business interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

Shropshire Council has an active Business Growth and Investment Team which provides a range of support to local businesses, including Growth Hub Shropshire, and has experience of delivering externally funded programmes and projects. It has specialisms in inward investment, skills and funding.

However, resourcing the team remains challenging particularly in view of the reducing scale of funding through the Marches LEP for the provision of the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

Shropshire Council sees the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire as the key model for business engagement and support but would like Government to consider ways that this could be funded long—term outside of time-limited funding arrangements.

PEOPLE AND SKILLS CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Does your local authority have any previous experience of delivering the People and Skills interventions you have select?

Yes	No

How would you describe your team's current capability to manage funding for People and Skills interventions?

Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability

Describe the key capability challenges (if you have any) for delivering People and Skills interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

The main challenge is that Shropshire Council does not have an extensive background in direct delivery of people and skills interventions, although does have some experience in relation to its Enable Team which provides specific support into employment for service users, such as people with disabilities.

However, the Council has had a strategic role through in the delivery of ESF contracts through the Marches ESIF delivery structures and therefore has recent experience of delivering a programme-based approach to People and Skills, and this resource will be strengthened through the proposed UKSPF delivery team, which will have dedicated officers relating to People and Skills including Multiply.

Additionally, the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire has the connections within the business community to ensure that delivery of the E37 and E39 interventions will gain the necessary traction within the relevant sectors, through marketing, promotion and networking.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

Shropshire Council would find it useful if DLUC could provide areas with information on best practice and collaborative opportunities, possibly through facilitating regional networks.

How would you describe your team's current capacity to manage funding for People and Skills interventions?

Strong capability	**Some capability**	Limited capability

Describe the key capacity challenges (if you have any) for delivering People and Skills interventions. This may include challenges within your local authority and/or your local/regional delivery system.

The capacity required to develop and administer programmes and projects in a rural area, particularly the delivery of small grant schemes, which are important to the VCS and local organisations, are likely to be relatively expensive to deliver and have a high unit costs.

Describe what further support would help address these challenges.

Based on recent experience through ESF contacts, Government should recognise that the unit costs for delivering people and skills interventions in rural areas like Shropshire will be relatively higher than those delivered within urban areas.

SUPPORT TO DELIVER UKSPF

All lead authorities can use up to 4% of their UKSPF allocation to support the delivery of their chosen interventions but by exception, lead authorities will be able to use more than 4%. Are you planning to use more than 4%?

Yes	**No**

(If Yes) Explain why you wish to use more than 4%.

Approvals

Before submitting your investment plan, you should have approval from your:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Section 151 Officer
- Leader of your lead authority

Do you have approval from your Chief Executive Officer for this investment plan?

- **Yes**
- No

Do you have approval from your Section 151 Officer for this investment plan?

- **Yes**
- No

Do you have approval from the leader of your lead authority for this investment plan?

- **Yes**
- No

If you do not have approval from any of these people, please explain why this is:
Shropshire Council's cabinet approved the delegation of the approval of Shropshire's UKSPF Investment Plan to our Section 151 Officer and the Executive Director of Place. See Item 13 of https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=4591&Ver=4

Additional documents

You will have received an email giving you access to a folder where you will need to upload supporting evidence to your investment plan. All applicants must complete and upload the following spreadsheet to the folder prior to submitting their investment plan:

- UKSPF Expenditure Profile spreadsheet
- UKSPF Indicative Deliverables spreadsheet

Your investment plan submission will be considered incomplete without the required documents.

Have you completed and uploaded the two spreadsheets to the SharePoint folder as requested?

- Yes
- No

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APPENDIX A

SHROPSHIRE UKSPF AGGREGATED KEY OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Business Support	Achieved 22-25	Achieved 25-26	**Total achieved to date**	**Forecast 25-26**
Outputs				
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	1351	341	**1692**	**28**
Number of enterprises receiving grants	182	19	**201**	**11**
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	40	44	**84**	
Outcomes				
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent (FTE)	183.34	6.04	**189.38**	**8**
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	7	10	**17**	
Number of organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	108	19	**127**	
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	116	49	**165**	**4**
Number of new to market products (numerical value)	22	12	**34**	
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	6631	3510	**10141**	
Increased visitor numbers		430000	**430000**	
Increase in visitor spending		£ 109,000,000	**£ 109,000,000**	
Community and Place				
Outputs				
Amount of public realm created or improved	250		**250**	
Number of amenities/facilities created or improved	6		**6**	
Amount of green or blue space created or improved	94051		**94051**	**1214654**
Number of Tourism, Culture or Heritage assets created or improved	3		**3**	
Number of organisations receiving grants	43	30	**73**	
Number of local events or activities supported	731	694	**1425**	
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	610	649	**1259**	
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	9		**9**	
No of organisations receiving support other than grants (no)	386		**386**	
Total length of new or improved cycle ways or foot paths (km)			**0**	**9.47KM**
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support		17	**17**	
Outcomes				
Improved Engagement Numbers (people)	17964	14698	**32662**	
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support		83	**83**	
Number of volunteering opportunities created as a result of support		122	**122**	
People and Skills				
Outputs				
Number of people receiving support to gain employment (numerical value)	575	259	**834**	
Number of people retraining (numerical value)	147		**147**	
Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence (numerical value)	412		**412**	
Number of people receiving support to sustain employment		346	**346**	
Outcomes				
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support		41	**41**	
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months		7	**7**	
Number of People reporting increased employability through development of interpersonal skills		208	**208**	
Community and Place RURAL				
Outputs				
Amount of green or blue space created or improved (m2)	9900	66404	**76304**	**66826**
Total length of new or improved cycle ways or paths (KM)	10893		**10893**	**1.57KM**
Number of organisations receiving grants		7	**7**	
Number of new or improved cycleways or footpaths	23		**23**	
Increased use of cycleways or foot paths			**0**	**2656**
Increased visitor numbers			**0**	**3984**
Outcomes				
Business Support RURAl				
Outputs				
Number of enterprises receiving grants	63	23	**86**	**4**
Outcomes				
Jobs created	21		**21**	

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Funded by UK Government

Shropshire Council
UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme
Evaluation

Delivery Area: Shropshire

March 2026

PAULA ROGERS CONSULTING

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CONSULTING

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Contents

	Page No.
Executive Summary	5
1. Context	9
1.1 Context - Introduction	9
1.2 Objectives of the Evaluation	9
1.3 Evaluation Methodology	9
1.4 Policy Context- National	10
1.5 Policy Context - Local	13
1.6 Programme Context	13
1.7 Contracting Processes	15
2. Relevance	18
2.1 Relevance - Introduction	18
2.2 Context	18
2.3 Programme Design and Project Implementation	21
2.4 Reflections of Project Implementation	21
2.5 Communities and Place - Reflections of Project Implementation	23
2.6 Supporting Local Business - Reflections of Project Implementation	25
2.7 People and Skills - Reflections of Project Implementation	
2.8 Relevance – Lessons Learned	26
	28
3. Performance	30
3.1 Performance - Introduction	30
3.2 Spend Performance – Programme Level	30
3.3 Output and Outcome Performance – Overview	31
3.4 Communities and Place – Output and Outcome Performance	31
3.5 Supporting Local Business – Output and Outcome Performance	33
3.6 People and Skills – Output and Outcome Performance	34
3.7 Performance – Lessons Learned	35
4. Impact	37
4.1 Impact- Introduction	37
4.2 Importance of Local Administration	37
4.3 Communities and Place – Beneficiary Impact	38
4.4 Supporting Local Business – Beneficiary Impact	42
4.5 People and Skills – Beneficiary Impact	47
4.6 UKSPF Programme Team Support and Impact	50
4.7 Considerations for Future Delivery	51
4.8 Case Studies	52
4.9 Impact – Lessons Learned	56
5. Management and Delivery	58
5.1 Management and Delivery - Introduction	58
5.2 Programme Governance and Oversight	58
5.3 Programme Delivery Structure	59
5.4 Finance and Legal Support	59
5.5 Staffing and Capacity Changes During Delivery	60
5.6 Delivery Across the Three Investment Priorities	62
5.7 Public Sector Equality Duty	67
5.8 Management and Delivery - Lessons Learned	67

6. Value for Money 69
6.1 Value for Money – Introduction 69
6.2 Communities and Place 69
6.3 Supporting Local Business 71
6.4 People and Skills 73
6.5 Overall Conclusions 74
6.6 Value for Money – Lessons Learned 75

7. Conclusions 77
7.1 Conclusions – Introduction 77
7.2 Main Findings 77
7.3 Considerations for Future Delivery 78

Tables:
1. Consultations Undertaken 10
2. Provider Survey Response Rates 10
3. Main UKSPF Programme - Original Profiled Spend (Capital and Revenue) 14
4. Rural Fund – Original Profiled Spend (Capital) 14
5. Main UKSPF Programme Revised Profile Spend July 2023 (Including Management and Admin) 15
6. Rural Fund Revised Profile Spend July 2023 (Capital) 15
7. Shropshire's Call Windows and Eligible Activity 22
8. Main UKSPF Programme Spend Performance 30
9. Rural Programme Spend Performance 31
10. Challenges in Delivery (Communities and Place) 39
11. Additional Benefits (Communities and Place) 42
12. Challenges in Delivery (Supporting Local Business) 44
13. Additional Benefits (Supporting Local Business) 47

Appendices:
1. Shropshire UKSPF Main Programme and Rural Fund Projects Supported and UKSPF Funding Allocated at Point of Approval 81
2. High Level UKSPF Logic Model 84
3. UKSPF Investment Priorities and Objectives (UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Prospectus, Updated 17 December 2025) and Missions 85
4. Shropshire UKSPF Programme – Call Windows 87
5. Expenditure Achieved by Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund (excluding Management and Administration) 90
6. Outputs and Outcomes Achieved by Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund 92

Executive Summary

Context

In September 2025, Shropshire Council commissioned Paula Rogers Consulting to evaluate delivery of the Shropshire UKSPF and the Rural Fund up to 31 March 2025. Collectively referred to as 'the Programme', the two Funds represent a combined investment of £13.4 million aimed at building pride in place, increasing life chances and strengthening local economic resilience across Shropshire. The evaluation examines delivery across the three UKSPF Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills and assesses the complementary role of the Rural Fund in supporting rural communities and enterprises.

The evaluation has reviewed programme performance in terms of expenditure, outputs, outcomes and value for money. Evidence has been gathered through analysis of management data, documentation and stakeholder consultations, including discussions with key Council Officers and the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, alongside survey feedback from funded providers. Case studies have been used to illustrate the impact of local interventions and identify the factors contributing to effective delivery and outcomes.

Findings from the evaluation are intended to inform both national and local learning. They will contribute to the Government's wider evaluation of the UKSPF while helping Shropshire Council and local partners to identify what has worked well, what challenges were encountered and how future regeneration and renewal programmes can build on this experience.

Relevance

The Programme was developed from a robust evidence base, reflecting Shropshire's distinctive economic, demographic and geographic profile. It addressed issues such as an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, while capitalising on opportunities to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies.

The open call process adopted by Shropshire Council supported fairness, transparency and geographic balance, with projects spanning community infrastructure, cultural engagement, business innovation and employability support. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer said that this approach 'was recognised both internally and externally as a great success, being structured, fair and auditable'.

While delivery was largely effective and achieved wide thematic and geographic reach, Technical Officers noted that the late approval of funding and phased sequencing of Calls constrained opportunities for integration across Priorities. Nevertheless, the Programme delivered significant local outcomes, built organisational capacity and generated valuable learning for future funding rounds.

Key lessons include the need for earlier planning, longer delivery windows and more coordinated, cross-priority Calls to maximise alignment, sustainability and long-term impact across Shropshire's communities, businesses and residents.

Performance

Despite a delayed start and a compressed delivery period, the Programme achieved a high level of financial delivery overall. By 31 March 2025, 92.6% of the Main UKSPF Programme allocation and 80.9% of the Rural Fund allocation had been spent, equating to 90.4% of the combined target. This represents a notable achievement given the scale and complexity of managing multiple Investment Priorities, capital and revenue budgets and parallel delivery of the Rural Fund. Overall, expenditure performance reflects effective financial oversight and delivery capacity within a challenging timeframe.

Output performance was generally high across Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, with many interventions exceeding participation, engagement and activity targets. Significant levels of community involvement, cultural activity, business advisory support, innovation uptake and skills participation were achieved. In several areas, high engagement levels were achieved early with longer-term outcomes, such as sustained employment, business growth and increased footfall, expected to materialise over time.

Where outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the longer timescales associated with capital investment and economic or labour market change. Overall, the Programme has delivered wide reach, early evidence of impact and a solid foundation for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

Impact

Despite a compressed delivery period, the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund have delivered clear and wide-ranging impacts across Shropshire's communities, businesses and residents. Through a combination of place-based capital investment, targeted business support, skills intervention and employability support, the Programme has generated tangible short- and medium-term benefits, with further impacts expected to continue to emerge beyond the formal funding period.

Shropshire Council's local oversight played a key role in shaping impact, enabling funding to be aligned with local priorities, mobilised quickly and managed transparently. This approach supported effective management of public funds, high levels of partner engagement and flexible delivery across all three Investment Priorities.

Revenue and capital investment under Communities and Place delivered visible improvements to community facilities, cultural assets, green spaces and public realm, alongside high levels of participation in cultural and community activity. These interventions strengthened volunteering, organisational capacity and local pride, while establishing foundations for longer-term outcomes such as increased usage, footfall and wellbeing.

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority generated significant economic benefits, with extensive enterprise engagement, innovation support and grant funding. Businesses reported improved productivity, resilience and confidence, alongside job creation and early growth outcomes. Capital investment, through the Rural Fund, supported rural businesses to modernise, adopt new technologies and improve operational efficiency, with further economic impacts expected to accrue over time.

Within People and Skills, interventions supported economically inactive and working residents to improve employability, gain qualifications, develop essential and vocational skills and enhance digital inclusion and capacity. Participants progressed into employment pathways and demonstrated improved readiness for work, recognising that sustained employment outcomes require longer-term engagement.

Looking ahead, the evaluation highlights that future impact will be influenced not only by the choice of interventions, but also by programme design and delivery conditions. Longer delivery timescales, proportionate monitoring and reporting and structured opportunities for collaboration and shared learning would support delivery partners to plan more effectively, embed activity and maximise long-term outcomes. Overall, the Programme has provided a firm platform for future investment by improving places, supporting jobs, developing businesses and improving workforce skills and employability across Shropshire.

Management and Delivery

The Shropshire UKSPF Investment Programme was delivered through a structured governance and operational framework, overseen by the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, which included public, private, education and voluntary sector representatives. The Board provided strategic oversight, ensuring alignment with the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–27, while Shropshire Council retained final approval and contracting authority. Three Delivery Groups initially supported project Calls across the Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. The Business and Place Groups were later disbanded due to inconsistent attendance, leaving the Skills Group to continue with broader representation.

Programme delivery was coordinated by an experienced and capable UKSPF Programme Team, led by the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer and supported by three Technical Officers, alongside Finance and Legal Services. The Team managed Calls, appraisals, contracting, monitoring, compliance and reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG. Despite compressed timescales, complex capital and revenue streams and high administrative demands, the Programme successfully met spend requirements and delivered tangible outcomes across all Investment Priorities, including accessible support that complemented and reinforced national and local strategies.

The Programme also highlighted practical lessons for future delivery. Clear role definitions, early mobilisation, dedicated staffing, proportionate change-control mechanisms and integrated cross-team coordination were critical to maintaining momentum and managing risk. Longer programme durations, smaller governance groups and realistic timelines for capital-intensive projects would further enhance efficiency and impact. Overall, the Programme demonstrated effective management, robust governance and adaptability, delivering meaningful benefits to communities, businesses and skills development while promoting equality, inclusion and local strategic priorities.

Value for Money

The Shropshire UKSPF Programme delivered a credible level of Value for Money despite compressed delivery timescales and external economic pressures. Across the three Investment Priorities, the Programme combined competitive commissioning, intermediary-led delivery and use of established local partners to maximise reach and impact while controlling costs. Partners' existing infrastructure, networks and delivery experience reduced mobilisation costs and enabled a high proportion of funding to reach frontline activity quickly.

Total expenditure across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund reached over 90% of allocations, reflecting effective financial management and rapid mobilisation under a challenging timeframe. In addition, the Programme successfully secured significant third-party match funding, including private sources, Shropshire Council and other government funding programmes, enhancing leverage and enabling a greater scale and quality of interventions than could have been achieved through UKSPF resources alone. This additional investment amplified social, economic and environmental benefits, supporting local businesses, communities and skills development.

Efficiency was achieved through intermediary delivery models, coordination between partners and focus on enhancing existing assets rather than creating wholly new provision. Effectiveness is demonstrated through high additionality, outcomes exceeding expectations in business support, community participation and skills and employment development and the creation of full-time equivalent jobs contributing to local economic growth. Equity was embedded across the Programme, with targeted support for rural areas, underserved communities and under-represented groups, alongside alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework.

Overall, the evidence indicates that the Programme optimised resources, maximised impact and delivered significant Value for Money for Shropshire.

Conclusions

This Evaluation concludes that the Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with national priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded effectively to Shropshire's distinctive challenges, including rural isolation, workforce shortages, low productivity and limited connectivity, through a coherent, place-based approach spanning Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and the Rural Fund. Robust use of local data and intelligence ensured that interventions addressed identified gaps and emerging needs.

Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery timescales, the Programme achieved notable financial and operational performance, with over 90% expenditure across both funds and generally positive output delivery. Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations and where interventions were targeted and flexible, generating meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes across communities, businesses and individuals. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond programme closure.

Locally managed, partnership-led delivery added clear value, supported by an experienced Programme Team, established partnerships and robust programme management systems. However, programme design complexity, compressed timescales and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness, limiting opportunities for integration, shared learning and agile decision-making. Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money, acting as a catalyst for wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Looking ahead, future place-based programmes would benefit from longer delivery periods, proportionate governance and administration, enhanced cross-priority coordination and improved mechanisms to capture wider outcomes, interim and longer-term impact.

1. Context

1.1 Context - Introduction

1.1.1 In September 2025, Paula Rogers Consulting was commissioned by Shropshire Council to undertake an evaluation of the Shropshire UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) covering activity up to 31 March 2025. For the purposes of this evaluation, the Shropshire UKSPF is referred to as 'the Main UKSPF Programme' and the REPF as 'the Rural Fund'**.** When discussed collectively, they are referred to as 'the Programme'**.**

1.1.2 The evaluation examines the performance of the Main UKSPF Programme across its three Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. It also examines the contribution of the Rural Fund, which supports the Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business Investment Priorities. The different sections within the evaluation examines the Programme's relevance, performance against expenditure and achievement of outputs and outcomes. It draws on feedback from project deliverers to assess impact, as well as insights from those involved in programme delivery to review management and delivery arrangements. The evaluation also includes an assessment of value for money and concludes with a summary of key findings and considerations for future programme design and delivery.

1.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

1.2.1 The evaluation will enable the Programme to feed into national strategies or evaluations, but also identify what local interventions have worked, in what context and by what means.

1.2.2 The Evaluation will:

- Review the effectiveness and impact of the local programme management and delivery that will enable Shropshire Council to feedback into the national evaluation process;
- Report on the effectiveness of interventions adopted as part of the UKSPF Submission; and
- Highlight any learning that will shape future delivery of regeneration and renewal programmes.

1.2.3 On 9 July 2024 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) was renamed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). For consistency, the evaluation will refer to 'DLUHC' prior to 9 July 2024 and 'MHCLG' after 9 July 2024.

1.2.4 The intended audience of the Evaluation is the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Shropshire as the Lead Local Authority. Other interested partners include the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board and organisations delivering community activity, business support and skills and employment initiatives in Shropshire. The Evaluation provides the relevant information for the audience to understand how the Programme and its Projects performed between 5 December 2022 and 31 March 2025.

1.3 Evaluation Methodology

1.3.1 Documentation and data review have been undertaken to provide an understanding of the Programme's:

- Aims and objectives
- Management and delivery structure
- Impact in terms of forecasted and achieved spend and outputs

1.3.2 The documentation and data reviewed includes:

- Shropshire Investment Plan
- DLUHC/MHCLG Reporting - Programme Returns and Change Requests
- Reports to the SEP Board
- Internal monitoring and evaluation

1.3.3 Staff consultations conducted are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Consultations Undertaken

Internal – Shropshire Council	
Service Manager - Economy, Funding and Skills	Matt Potts
External Funding and Technical Lead Officer	Gary Spence
Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills Technical Officers	Hannah Smith, Joy Holland, Amy Farley
Growth and Infrastructure Team	Emma Chapman, Sarah Dodds
Strategic Financial Accountant	Nicola Higgins
External	
Chair of the SEP Board	Jeannie McGillivray

1.3.4 In November 2025, online surveys were distributed to providers delivering project activities across Shropshire to gather feedback on the outcomes, impacts and challenges of the projects they delivered. Some providers delivered more than one project. Responses were received from 32 providers, enabling valuable insights into the effectiveness of the initiatives. The number of surveys circulated and the response rates for each of the three Investment Priorities are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Provider Survey Response Rates

Investment Priorities	Numbers of Providers Surveyed	Completed Surveys	Response rate (%)
Communities and Place	22	16	73%
Supporting Local Business	24	13	54%
People and Skills	4	3	75%

1.3.5 In addition, all 50 project providers were contacted and asked to submit a short summary of their project's impact. In total, 28 project deliverers responded, representing an excellent response rate of 55%.

A list of projects supported, together with delivery organisations, the Investment Priority under each was funded and the amount of UKSPF allocated at point of approval is provided in Appendix 1.

1.4 Policy Context – National

UKSPF

1.4.1 UKSPF was launched in April 2022 as part of the previous UK Government's Levelling Up agenda and represents a significant component of its investment in local places across the UK. UKSPF provided £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025.

1.4.2 UKSPF replaced the European Structural and Investment Programme (ESIF) as the Government's domestic funding mechanism, providing lead local authorities with resources to support communities and place, businesses and people and skills. It aimed to deliver the Government's wider commitment to level up all parts of the UK by addressing the four Levelling Up objectives:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

1.4.3 The primary goal of UKSPF was to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, aligning closely with Levelling Up White Paper missions:

'By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing'.

Appendix 2 provides the High level UKSPF Logic Model that set out the missions, alongside Central Government and Local Place Inputs, Interventions, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts.

1.4.4 Underneath the overarching objective of building pride in place and increasing life chances, UKSPF was structured around three Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. Each Priority contained a defined set of objectives aligned with the relevant Levelling Up White Paper missions. Appendix 3 provides the defined set of objectives and the missions within the UKSPF Investment Priorities

1.4.5 REPF

Announced in September 2022, the Rural Fund was a complementary funding stream to the UKSPF. It provided capital investment for rural areas across England to improve productivity, strengthen communities and support economic growth. The Fund allocated £110 million nationally for the period 2023–2025 and served as the domestic successor to elements of the former EU-funded LEADER and Growth Programme schemes.

1.4.6 Administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) the Rural Fund was made available to eligible local authorities as an addendum to their UKSPF investment plans. It focused exclusively on capital projects and aligned with two of the three UKSPF Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business.

1.4.7 The Rural Fund enabled local authorities to invest in:

- Communities and Place: investment in community infrastructure and local assets, such as village halls, community hubs and small-scale tourism or heritage improvements that contributed to rural vitality: and

- Supporting Local Business: capital grants to micro and small rural enterprises to enhance productivity, innovation and diversification (for example, equipment upgrades, premises improvements and farm diversification).

1.4.8 In Shropshire, the Rural Fund was used to complement the Main UKSPF Programme by extending support to smaller rural settlements and enterprises that might otherwise have

limited access to local growth funding. Together, the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund formed an integrated investment programme aimed at improving prosperity, resilience and quality of life across both urban and rural parts of Shropshire.

1.4.9 National Growth and Industrial Strategy

'Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy' began its life as a Green Paper (published October 2024) outlining its long-term vision for economic growth and industrial development, aiming to position the UK a global leader in innovation and high-value industries. Since then, in June 2025, the government published a formal Industrial Strategy that builds on the Green Paper's proposals and sets out concrete commitments and mechanisms for implementation. The strategy is still structured around four key pillars:

i. Innovation: Encourages increased investment in research and development (R&D) and promotes technological advancements across sectors like artificial intelligence, robotics and clean energy. It emphasises the importance of partnerships between businesses, academia and government to drive innovation and make the UK a hub for cutting-edge industries.

ii. People: Focuses on developing a skilled workforce, supporting lifelong learning and addressing skills shortages in key industries. It aims to improve education and training opportunities, particularly in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and enhance vocational training.

iii. Infrastructure: Prioritises investment in modern infrastructure, such as transportation, digital connectivity and sustainable energy. The strategy aims to create a more integrated and efficient infrastructure network to support economic growth and reduce regional disparities.

iv. Business Environment: Seeks to create a competitive business landscape by improving regulations, supporting entrepreneurship and attracting foreign investment. It includes measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and facilitate access to finance.

The Strategy also emphasises sustainability, aiming for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 through investments in clean energy technologies and green industries. It represents a forward-looking plan designed to foster innovation and environmental responsibility.

1.4.10 The principles within 'Invest 2035' complement the objectives of both the UKSPF and the Rural Fund. Its focus on innovation, infrastructure and place-based growth aligns closely with the Funds' aims to:

- Strengthen rural economies through investment in small business productivity and diversification;
- Support rural infrastructure, including digital connectivity and sustainable transport;
- Promote inclusive skills development and employment opportunities; and
- Contribute to the transition towards a low-carbon, net-zero economy.

Together, these policy frameworks reinforce the Government's overarching ambition to boost local economic resilience and ensure that both urban and rural areas can contribute fully to the UK's long-term growth trajectory.

1.5 Policy Context – Local

1.5.1 The Shropshire UKSPF Investment Plan sets out the local challenges, opportunities and priorities that have shaped the content of all projects delivered under both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund. Each project has contributed to the overarching UKSPF goal of 'building pride in place and increasing life chances', while also supporting delivery of the wider Levelling Up missions.

1.5.2 The Investment Priorities and project activities align closely with Shropshire Council's strategic objectives and key local policies, including:

- The Shropshire Plan (2022–2025) and Corporate Plan - setting out the Council's overarching vision for a healthy economy and thriving communities;
- Economic Growth Strategy (2022–2027) - providing a framework for business growth, innovation and skills development;
- Commissioning for the Future (2014) - establishing principles for outcome-based investment and partnership delivery;
- Vibrant Shropshire: The Cultural Strategy (2021–2031) - highlighting the role of creativity and culture in place-making and wellbeing;
- Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2020) - underpinning commitments to a net zero carbon county; and
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022–2027) - supporting inclusive growth and improved quality of life.

1.5.3 The design and delivery of Shropshire's UKSPF and Rural Fund investments reflect a close alignment between national and local priorities. Nationally, both Funds have contributed to the Government's Levelling Up and Invest 2035 ambitions by promoting productivity, sustainability and inclusive growth. Locally, these ambitions have been translated into place-based action that has addressed the specific challenges of a large, sparsely populated rural county including connectivity, access to services, business resilience and community vitality.

The Rural Fund, in particular, complemented the Main UKSPF Programme by targeting rural capital investment that helped to sustain local enterprises, improve community infrastructure, enhance quality of life in villages and market towns and promote community infrastructure. Together, they formed an integrated approach to achieving Shropshire's long-term economic, environmental and social goals.

1.6 Programme Context

1.6.1 The Memorandum of Understanding between The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Shropshire Council (Lead Authority) was awarded on 5 December 2022 with approval for the Rural Fund addendum following in May 2023.

Shropshire was allocated £13,434,720. This comprised £10,845,217 from the Main UKSPF Programme and £2,589,503 from the Rural Fund. Within the Main UKSPF Programme the majority of the funding (£5,900,000, 54.4%) was allocated for projects within the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority followed by Communities and Place (£3,345,217, 30.8%) and People and Skills (£1,600,000, 14.8%). Funding was divided into Revenue (£8,645,217) and Capital (£2,200,000) with Communities and Place being the only Investment Priority to receive a capital allocation from the Main UKSPF Programme. All of the Rural Fund was capital funding and was split between Supporting Rural Communities Investment Priority (£1,589,503, 61.4%) and Supporting Rural Business (£1,000,000, 38.6%).

1.6.2 In the first two years of the Main UKSPF Programme's delivery (2022/23 and 2023/24) it focused on delivering the Supporting Local Business and Communities and Place Investment Priorities. The People and Skills Investment Priority was programmed to commence in 2023/24 to avoid overlap with existing EU-funded employment and skills provision which was still active during the early years of UKSPF. The original contracted allocations for the Main UKSPF Programme were split into the three financial years (2022/2023, 2023/2024 and 2024/2025) and are provided in Table 3. The original contracted allocations for the Rural Fund were split into two financial years (2023/2024 and 2024/2025) and are provided in Table 4.

Table 3: Main UKSPF Programme - Original Profiled Spend (Capital and Revenue)

Investment Priority	**2022/2023**		**2023/2024**		**2024/2025**		**Total Allocation and %**
	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	
Communities and Place	£131,617	£179,500	£342,203	£339,217	£1,726,180	£626,500	**£3,345,217 (30.8%)**
	£311,117		*£681,420*		*£2,352,680*		
Supporting Local Business	£0	£1,005,050	£0	£1,545,914	£0	£3,349,036	**£5,900,000 (54.4%)**
	£1,005,050		*£1,545,914*		£3,349,036		
People and Skills	£0	£0	£0	£405,000	£0	£1,195,000	**£1,600,000 (14.8%)**
	£0		*£405,000*		*£1,195,000*		
Total Allocation	**£131,617**	**£1,184,550**	**£342,203**	**£2,290,131**	**£1,726,180**	**£5,170,536**	**£10,845,217 (100%)**
	£1,316,167		**£2,632,334**		**£6,896,716**		

Table 4: Rural Fund – Original Profiled Spend (Capital)

Investment Priority	**2023/2024** (CAP)	**2024/2025** (CAP)	**Total Allocation and %**
Communities and Place	£589,503	£1,000,000	**£1,589,503 (61.4%)**
Supporting Local Business	£300,000	£700,000	**£1,000,000 (38.6%)**
Total Allocation	**£859,503**	**£1,700,000**	**£2,589,503 (100%)**

1.6.3 To access the Main UKSPF Programme, Shropshire Council was required to submit an Investment Plan by 1 August 2022. This plan set out how funding would be used across the three national priorities: Community and Place**,** Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. In November 2022, DEFRA offered rural authorities an additional 'top up' through the Rural Fund, which was secured by submitting an addendum to the original Investment Plan. The Main UKSPF Programme was approved in December 2022 and the Rural Fund addendum was incorporated 1 April 2023.

1.6.4 The Investment Plan was informed by consultation and development work with local stakeholders. National guidance required the Investment Plan to be signed off by a local governance group prior to submission. In Shropshire, this role was taken on by the Shropshire SEP Board**,** which continued to provide oversight of the Programme's delivery.

1.6.5 The total allocation was distributed across all three Investment Priorities, with the Investment Plan setting out a range of Intervention areas under each theme, as defined by Government guidance. In addition, the Rural Fund supported the Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business Investment Priorities.

1.6.6 Following Government approval for the Investment Plan in December 2022, working alongside the SEP Board, the Council established an open application process for awarding funds locally. The process was also used for the Rural Fund.

1.6.7 In the October 2024 Budget, Government announced that UKSPF would be extended by a further year to March 2026 and in December 2024 an additional £4.2m was awarded to Shropshire for delivery in 2025/26. Subsequently, Government confirmed an extension of the Programme's funding period to allow spend up to 30 September 2026, although no additional funding was made available for this extended period. This extension period does not form part of the scope of this evaluation.

1.6.8 DLUHC recognised the very late start to the Programme and, following a request to amend the Memorandum of Understanding in May 2023, approval was granted in July 2023 to roll over funding into 2024/2025 in the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund. The re-profiled spend is detailed in Tables 5 and 6. The Main Fund included 4%[1] allowance towards management and administration costs. The Revised Profile Spend combines 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 expenditure.

Table 5: Main UKSPF Programme Revised Profile Spend July 2023 (Including Management and Admin)

Investment Priority	2022/2023		2023/2024		2024/2025		Total Allocation
	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	CAP	REV	
Management and Admin		*£25,571*		*£171,747*		*£236,490.68*	**£433,808.68**
Communities and Place		*£14,687*	*£199,419.24*	*£335,687.68*	*£1,569,952.47*	*£1,197,183.57*	**£3,316,929.96**
	£14,687		*£535,106.92*		*£2,767,136.04*		
Supporting Local Business	*£50,708*	*£172,391*	*£20,193.70*	*£703,150.77*	*£359,726.59*	*£4,170,461.73*	**£5,476,631.79**
	£223,099		*£723,344.47*		*£4,530,188.32*		
People and Skills				*£286,914.12*		*£1,330,932.45*	**£1,617,846.57**
			£286,914.12		*£1,330,932.45*		
Total Allocation	**£50,708**	**£212,649**	**£219,613**	**£1,497,500**	**£1,929,679**	**£6,935,068**	**£10,845,217**

Table 6: Rural Fund Revised Profile Spend July 2023 (Capital)

Investment Priority	2023/2024	2024/2025	Total Allocation
Supporting Rural Communities	£34,573.75	£1,698,103.25	**£1,732,677**
Supporting Rural Business	£81,528.13	£775,297.87	**£856,826**
Total Allocation	**£116,101.88**	**£2,473,401.12**	**£2,589,503**

1.7 Contracting Process

1.7.1 UKSPF is a delegated fund, meaning that local lead authorities are responsible for determining how the funding is allocated and managed within their area. Lead authorities are able to procure, commission, deliver in-house or run competitive bidding processes in line with their Investment Plans and governance frameworks.

[1] UKSPF provides each lead local authority in England, Scotland and Wales to use up to 4% of their allocation by default to undertake necessary Fund administration, such as project assessment, contracting, monitoring and evaluation and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

1.7.2 Shropshire Council adopted a competitive call and application process to identify and select projects for funding. This approach was designed to ensure transparency, fairness and alignment with both local priorities and the objectives set out in the national UKSPF and Rural REPF prospectuses.

For the People and Skills, particularly those requiring specialist expertise or where direct delivery was more efficient, the Council also used procurement and commissioning routes. This blended model ensured flexibility in delivery while maintaining robust governance and accountability.

1.7.3 Working in partnership with the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, the Council developed and publicised an open call for applications. Delivery Groups were established for each Investment Priority, bringing together Council Officers and representative organisations to shape the Calls. These were promoted widely across the County to encourage applications from a diverse range of potential delivery organisations, including community groups, local businesses, FE and HE, training providers, voluntary and charitable organisations and internal Council services.

1.7.4 All applications received, including those submitted by internal Council teams, were subject to a consistent appraisal and scoring process. Applications were assessed against set criteria, which included:

- Strategic fit with the UKSPF and REPF investment priorities and Shropshire's Investment Plan;
- Deliverability and value for money;
- Contribution to local needs and outcomes such as building pride in place, supporting business growth and enhancing skills; and
- Capacity, governance and risk management.

1.7.5 Appraisals were carried out by both Council Officers and independent assessors. Each application was scored against criteria including need, impact, strategic fit, sustainable development, equality and diversity, outputs and outcomes and budget. Following appraisal, the scores were reviewed by a panel made up of representatives from the SEP Board Delivery Groups, who agreed recommendations for the SEP Board to consider. The SEP Board then reviewed these recommendations for endorsement before the proposals proceeded through the Council's internal governance process for final approval.

1.7.6 Successful applicants were issued with an outcome notification, followed by a standstill period before Grant Funding Agreements were issued. These Agreements set out the approved activities, outputs, outcomes, financial profiles and reporting requirements. They also included conditions relating to monitoring, audit and compliance, in line with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) guidance.

Context - Summary

In September 2025, Shropshire Council commissioned Paula Rogers Consulting to evaluate delivery of the Shropshire UKSPF and the Rural Fund up to 31 March 2025. Collectively referred to as 'the Programme', the two Funds represent a combined investment of £13.4 million aimed at building pride in place, increasing life chances and strengthening local economic resilience across Shropshire. The evaluation examines delivery across the three UKSPF Investment Priorities, these being Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills and assesses the complementary role of the Rural Fund in supporting rural communities and enterprises.

The evaluation has reviewed programme performance in terms of expenditure, outputs, outcomes and value for money. Evidence has been gathered through analysis of management data, documentation and stakeholder consultations, including discussions with key Council Officers and the SEP Board, alongside survey feedback from funded providers. Case studies have been used to illustrate the impact of local interventions and identify the factors contributing to effective delivery and outcomes.

Findings from the evaluation are intended to inform both national and local learning. They will contribute to the Government's wider evaluation of the UKSPF while helping Shropshire Council and local partners to identify what has worked well, what challenges were encountered and how future regeneration and renewal programmes can build on this experience.

2. Relevance

2.1 Relevance – Introduction

This section assesses the relevance of the Shropshire UKSPF Programme in responding to local needs, challenges and opportunities. It examines the evidence base underpinning the Investment Plan and Rural Fund Addendum, the alignment of Programme priorities with Shropshire's economic, social and environmental context and how strategic objectives were translated into delivery. The section also reflects on Programme design, the open call model and delivery experience, concluding with lessons to inform the delivery of future place-based funding programmes.

2.2 Context

2.2.1 The high-level Logic Model for the UKSPF, illustrates the step-by-step process of how the Fund's central and local inputs will support UKSPF interventions to generate outputs, outcomes and impacts (Appendix 2).

The Shropshire Investment Plan and the Rural Fund Addendum identified challenges and opportunities that contributed to the high-level Logic Model at a local level. The challenges responded to evidence gathered through statistics, reports, strategies, data, intelligence and surveys and the opportunities built upon best practice, collaboration, gaps in provision and strategic vision.

Each of the challenges and opportunities, within the three Investment Priorities and the Rural Fund Addendum, are detailed below:

2.2.2 **Communities and Place Challenges:**

(i) An ageing and imbalanced population structure, with a declining working-age population and limited cultural diversity, leading to pressures on health and social care services and challenges in retaining younger residents.

(ii) Disparities between Shropshire's 13 market towns and surrounding rural areas, where some communities face vacancy, dereliction and limited access to services, while others lack flexible spaces and cultural activity to support cohesion and local pride.

(iii) Rising isolation, food poverty and rural exclusion in dispersed communities, compounded by limited transport connectivity and unequal access to cultural, social and recreational opportunities.

(iv) Environmental vulnerabilities including recurrent flooding, climate change impacts and ageing infrastructure, increasing the need for investment in climate resilience, flood mitigation and sustainable urban design.

(v) A need to strengthen community connection to place by empowering residents to shape and participate in the future of their towns and local environments, building capacity, inclusion and civic pride.

Communities and Place Opportunities:

(i) Harness Shropshire's distinctive natural, cultural and heritage assets to strengthen the county's identity, promote pride in place and deliver sustainable regeneration across market towns and rural communities.

(ii) Improve the functionality, accessibility and appeal of town centres and public spaces through placemaking, greening, active travel routes and adaptive reuse of vacant buildings for community and cultural use.

(iii) Support volunteer-led and community-based initiatives that tackle isolation, deprivation and exclusion, enabling greater participation across generations and building self-sustaining networks of local support.

(iv) Promote understanding of and action on climate change, biodiversity and air quality through local environmental projects and investment in sustainable infrastructure and flood resilience.

(v) Build cultural capacity and strengthen social cohesion by supporting creative, heritage and community organisations to deliver locally led activities that connect people, culture and place.

(vi) Link with business and skills priorities to create spaces, services and opportunities that encourage learning, volunteering and employment, fostering more resilient communities.

2.2.3 **Supporting Local Business Challenges:**

(i) Operating within a period of significant economic, social and environmental change, with businesses recovering from the pandemic, Brexit and localised flooding while seeking to achieve net zero in a low productivity economy.

(ii) Difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled workers, particularly younger people, due to limited affordable housing, transport challenges and gaps in entry-level skills.

(iii) Need for accessible, high-quality business support for a large self-employed population and for micro and small enterprises with limited awareness of available provision.

(iv) Shortage of affordable, flexible and fit-for-purpose commercial space, compounded by heritage and flood risk constraints, limiting opportunities for business start-up, relocation and expansion.

(v) Dependence on traditional and lower-paid sectors such as tourism, hospitality and food and drink, with limited diversification into higher-value sectors.

Supporting Local Business Opportunities:

(i) Build on previous business recovery and resilience programmes to provide tailored, high-quality support enabling businesses to innovate, grow and boost productivity.

(ii) Support the diversification and growth of high-value sectors including the visitor economy, creative industries, low carbon and renewable energy, food and drink, agri-tech and green industries.

(iii) Encourage investment in research and development and attract new businesses to locate in Shropshire, particularly those aligned with sustainability and innovation goals.

(iv) Invest in infrastructure and flexible workspace provision in market towns, high streets and growth corridors to accommodate expanding businesses and remote workers.

(v) Strengthen collaboration with the Marches LEP, business improvement districts and partners to coordinate funding, maximise recovery support and promote business networks.

(vi) Align business support with workforce development and place-based priorities these being supporting skills, connectivity and housing to retain and attract a working-age population.

2.2.4 **People and Skills Challenges:**

(i) Shropshire faces a constrained labour market, with low unemployment, an ageing population and the loss of younger skilled workers. Covid-19 has worsened inactivity rates, particularly among older residents.

(ii) A significant proportion of adults have low numeracy, literacy and digital skills, limiting access to training, progression and higher-value jobs. Improving basic skills is essential to raise productivity and support inclusive growth.

(iii) Employers in key sectors , particularly health and social care and hospitality , face acute recruitment challenges. Innovative, employer-led approaches are needed to build a sustainable local workforce.

(iv) Shropshire's economy remains dominated by low-wage, low-skill jobs, constraining productivity and driving out-migration of young people. Boosting higher-level skills is key to supporting business growth and raising earnings.

(v) Skills needs vary across the county, with concentrations of low attainment in rural and market-town areas. Targeting support for adults with low or no qualifications and tackling rural isolation, remains a priority.

People and Skills Opportunities:

(i) Shropshire's skills base is improving, with fewer residents holding low or no qualifications. There is an opportunity to sustain this progress by upskilling adults, improving basic numeracy, literacy and digital skills and supporting older residents to stay connected and active, particularly in rural areas.

(ii) Shropshire's established agricultural base, natural assets and focus on renewable energy create opportunities to grow the green economy. Developing skills in sustainability, agri-tech, low-carbon construction and environmental management will support new business growth, higher-value employment and alignment with other investment priorities.

(iii) With good broadband coverage and ongoing rollout through Project Gigabit, there is potential to expand access to digital and blended learning. Tackling digital exclusion among older residents and disadvantaged households will be key, alongside developing digital skills for higher-value jobs and improved productivity.

2.2.5 **The Rural Fund Challenges:**

(i) Digital connectivity.

(ii) Rising energy costs.

(iii) Low productivity.

The Rural Fund Opportunities:

(i) Expansion of the visitor economy by supporting tourism attractions or accommodation.

(ii) Diversification of land-based businesses by moving into other sectors, such as tourism, food processing, retail, etc.

(iii) Growing Shropshire's key sectors – grants supporting the development of key sectors including land-based, food processing, environmental technologies and manufacturing.

2.3 Programme Design and Project Implementation

2.3.1 Lead local authorities set out their approach in an Investment Plan. Investment Plans were submitted to government in August 2022 with the Rural Plan Addendum following in November 2022. Due to unforeseen delays by government, contracting did not take place until later in the year. The Shropshire UKSPF Programme was formally contracted in December 2022 with the Rural Plan incorporated 1 April 2023.

2.3.2 Once approval was received, the Programme began its development and implementation phases with delivery commencing in February 2023. All Projects were scheduled to be completed by 31 March 2025. A list of all projects supported, together with delivery organisations and the value of UKSPF funding allocated at point of approval, is provided in Appendix 1.

2.4 Reflections of Project Implementation

2.4.1 The Calls for projects in January, April, May, September and November 2023 were designed to translate the strategic Opportunities and Challenges within Shropshire's UKSPF Investment Plan and Rural Addendum into practical, intermediary-led projects. Each Call addressed relevant aspects of communities, business, skills and rural priorities, ensuring alignment with Shropshire's broader economic, social and environmental objectives.

All Calls were funded through the Main UKSPF Programme and, in addition, the September 2023 Call included projects that could be funded through the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund and included revenue and capital funding.

The Call windows and eligible activity are summarised in Table 7 and detailed in Appendix 4.

Table 7: Shropshire's Call Windows and Eligible Activity

Call Window	Intervention Priority	Eligible Activity
January 2023 (Revenue)	Communities and Place Supporting Local Business	Feasibility
April 2023 (Revenue)	Communities and Place	Enhancing community connections, cultural engagement, environmental awareness and infrastructure to support employment, education and volunteering
	Supporting Local Business	Supporting business growth and innovation through R&D, workforce development and infrastructure investment, fostering collaboration and aligning with wider community, skills and place priorities to drive sustainable economic growth in Shropshire.
May 2023 (Revenue)	Supporting People and Skills	Providing targeted employment and skills support, promoting digital inclusion and building a skilled, inclusive workforce to drive sustainable economic growth
September 2023 (Revenue and Capital)	Communities and Place	Strengthening community assets, culture, environmental awareness and infrastructure to foster connections, wellbeing and opportunities for learning, work and volunteering.
	Supporting Local Business	Supporting business growth and workforce development, investing in infrastructure and co-working hubs, fostering collaboration through networks and funding and linking with Community and Place and People and Skills priorities.
December 2023 (Revenue)	Supporting People and Skills	Delivering tailored support and local skills initiatives to help people access education and training, meet net zero and environmental goals and build a skilled, adaptable workforce that drives sustainable economic growth.

2.4.2 The phased UKSPF Calls for Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills have delivered significant benefits for Shropshire. By targeting local priorities through intermediary organisations, the Programme has successfully supported a wide range of projects that improve community infrastructure, promote cultural engagement, improve employability, skills provision and digital inclusion and stimulate business growth. The approach has enabled tailored 'one-to-many' support, allowing projects to reach multiple beneficiaries, build local capacity and respond to the specific needs of communities, businesses and individuals.

2.4.3 The Calls have provided a valuable framework for investment in key sectors, reinforced social cohesion and encouraged engagement in sustainable and innovative initiatives across Shropshire.

2.4.4 The open call approach adopted by Shropshire Council was widely regarded as a fair and transparent way of allocating Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund resources. By requiring all applicants, including the Council itself, to compete for funding through a clear and auditable process, the model ensured that projects were selected on merit and that the Challenges and

Opportunities identified in the Investment Plan were effectively addressed. The model also enabled organisations to draw on their expertise and develop creative approaches to achieving the required outputs and outcomes, rather than following a prescriptive framework. As the External Funding and Technical Officer recalled:

'The delivery structure was an open call process. What we set out to do in the Investment Plan was largely achieved, with projects spread geographically across the county. The approach was recognised both internally and externally as a great success being structured, fair and auditable, with clear calls, weighted scoring and transparent decision-making through the SEP Board'.

2.4.5 Across all three Investment Priorities, the experience from delivery highlighted the importance of early planning, clear sequencing of Calls and well established internal coordination to support timely and integrated delivery. Technical Officers consistently noted that clearer guidance for applicants, streamlined internal approval processes and early engagement with delivery partners were important to enable reduced administrative burden and to allow projects to focus more effectively on implementation and impact.

Delays in funding confirmation from Central Government resulted in compressed delivery timescales and limited opportunities for cross-priority integration, particularly between business support and skills and employment provision. Technical Officers emphasised that launching Calls concurrently, or in a more coordinated way, would have enabled better alignment, clearer progression pathways and a more coherent programme-wide offer.

2.5 Communities and Place - Reflections of Project Implementation

2.5.1 The Communities and Place Priority was designed to support local organisations and initiatives that strengthen community cohesion, improve local infrastructure and enhance public spaces across Shropshire. Through the UKSPF open call process a wide range of organisations and projects were funded ensuring a good coverage of Shropshire. Projects included community hubs, town centre improvements, local heritage initiatives and volunteer-led programmes.

2.5.2 The open call approach ensured fairness and transparency, providing equal opportunity for all eligible organisations, including smaller community groups, to apply. It also allowed the Council to address the specific challenges and opportunities identified in the Investment Plan, ensuring that the funded projects aligned with both strategic priorities and local needs. All projects had to address clear need and demand as part of the application process, helping to avoid duplication of activity. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer highlighted that without UKSPF *'the Council could not have supported activities such as The Hive or Hands Together Ludlow, which make a visible difference to community life'.*

2.5.3 Project design under this Priority reflected a mix of organisational types, from grassroots community groups to larger delivery partners, which helped to bring a diversity of experience and capacity to the Programme. While the open call process encouraged alignment with the Council's strategic objectives, the Technical Officer, leading this Priority, often had to work under tight timescales, requiring rapid mobilisation and coordination with internal teams such as Finance and Legal Officers. As the Technical Officer for the Programme noted *'On my first day I wrote a Call,'* highlighting the fast-paced nature of Programme set-up and delivery. This combination of structured governance and flexible delivery enabled a wide geographic spread of projects and ensured that both urban and rural communities could access support, though, in some cases, the speed of delivery limited opportunities for more integrated, cross-project design. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer commented *'The spread of projects geographically has been good, not every community could be covered, but grant schemes ensured opportunities were available county-wide'.*

2.5.4 Implementation was largely effective, supported by the expertise and close teamwork. *'It was very busy and stressful…towards the end of the Programme, in the last quarter, I had to do a lot of changes to grant funding agreements, to get funding spent'* illustrating the pressure to mobilise funding quickly and ensure compliance.

2.5.5 Governance and appraisal systems were considered robust, with weighted scoring sheets providing transparency and auditable records. The Technical Officer explained, *'We aligned all the information that was asked in the calls. It was a very fair and transparent process. No applicants challenged any decisions that were made'.*

2.5.6 The geographic and thematic reach of the projects was extensive, with funding benefiting both urban and rural communities. However, the pace of delivery, particularly for capital projects, constrained the time available for mobilisation and compliant delivery. Projects were required to complete multiple stages, including funding confirmation, procurement and regulatory checks, within compressed timescales. As the Technical Officer noted *'Time constraints and lateness of the funding did not always give the projects much time to deliver after doing the Call, waiting for confirmation of funding, undertaking procurement and making sure all regulations were in place'.*

2.5.7 The Communities and Place Priority added significant value at both local and individual levels. Several projects delivered outcomes far exceeding the level of funding invested. Examples were highlighted including a Community Café in Ludlow, which provided invaluable support for both young and elderly residents and infrastructure projects such as the Cambrian Railway Station renovation, which would not have been possible without UKSPF investment. Many initiatives delivered outcomes beyond the original scope of the projects, including improvements to health, accessibility and social inclusion, which were often difficult to measure. The Technical Officer highlighted examples where this was evident including the Canal and River Trust projects (Montgomery Canal, Ellesmere Yard and Making Ripples) and enhancements to county park paths through the Council's Access to the Countryside projects. As the Technical Officer noted, *'It is easy to collect outputs but outcomes are more difficult to prove and understand'.*

2.5.8 Experience highlighted the value of clear, accessible guidance for applicants, particularly smaller voluntary and community organisations with limited capacity. The Technical officer observed that simplified application materials and clearer expectations around evidence, procurement and delivery requirements helped community groups engage confidently with the Programme and reduced delays during mobilisation. Supporting applicants through the process was particularly important given the pace of delivery and the varied capability across the community sector.

2.5.9 In summary, the Communities and Place Priority has delivered a rich and varied portfolio of projects that have strengthened Shropshire's social fabric and enhanced its community infrastructure. The open call model ensured transparency and inclusivity, allowing both established organisations and grassroots groups to access funding and deliver meaningful local change. Projects achieved far-reaching outcomes that extended beyond their original scope, demonstrating how modest investments can generate significant community benefit. As the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer reflected, *'A five-year model would have created more sustainable outcomes and allowed time for reflection and consolidation,'* reinforcing the importance of continuity, learning and sustained investment to build on the solid foundations established through this Programme.

2.6 Supporting Local Business - Reflections of Project Implementation

2.6.1 The Supporting Local Business Priority was designed to reinforce the resilience, productivity and growth potential of Shropshire's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Through the UKSPF open call process, the Council sought to enable projects that could enhance business competitiveness, stimulate innovation and improve access to support and infrastructure. Funded interventions included business grants, innovation support, sector-specific programmes and activities to stimulate local supply chains and entrepreneurship.

2.6.2 The open call approach created a transparent and competitive process that allowed a wide range of delivery partners, including local business networks, enterprise agencies and universities to apply. This ensured alignment with the local economic priorities set out in the Investment Plan while maintaining fairness and accountability. The process enabled the Council to identify projects that reflected both strategic priorities and the distinct needs of Shropshire's business base, which is largely rural, micro in scale and dispersed across a wide geography. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer observed that without UKSPF *'Shropshire Council would not have been able to maintain key economic functions such as Visit Shropshire, the Tourism Office or support for the Shrewsbury BID'.*

2.6.3 Project design under this Investment Priority reflected a diverse mix of delivery models, ranging from grant schemes for micro-businesses to specialist innovation and start-up programmes. This diversity allowed the Investment Priority to reach businesses across multiple sectors, while encouraging collaboration between delivery partners. The Supporting Local Business Technical Officer observed that the breadth of activity demonstrated the Council's commitment to ensuring business support reached all parts of Shropshire: *'We had everything from small independent traders to high-tech firms involved'.* However, the rapid implementation timetable, combined with the late approval of funding, meant that several projects had to be mobilised at pace, limiting opportunities for early integration or cross-project collaboration.

2.6.4 It was felt that the design also introduced complexity. The use of eight separate interventions, each with distinct reporting and monitoring requirements, was viewed as administratively burdensome and, at times, artificial. The Technical Officer questioned whether so many open Calls were necessary, suggesting that future programmes might retain greater flexibility and efficiency by commissioning some activity directly through trusted local partners. It was felt this would reduce transaction costs and allow more agile management of funding between priorities.

2.6.5 Implementation was generally effective, supported by robust governance and consistent appraisal processes. The Programme benefited from the Team's extensive ERDF and ESF experience, which enabled effective local systems to be developed quickly in the absence of national guidance. Weighted scoring systems were used to assess applications, ensuring transparency and providing a robust audit trail. Internal collaboration between Economic Growth, Finance and Legal teams enabled swift contracting once approvals were confirmed, though delays in internal sign-off processes occasionally created delivery bottlenecks. As the Technical Officer reflected, *'The open calls worked well, but the turnaround time was very tight. We were often developing, appraising and contracting almost simultaneously'.*

2.6.6 The geographic and thematic spread of projects was comprehensive, ensuring both urban centres and rural areas benefitted. However, several Technical Officers noted that greater coordination between Calls, particularly between Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, could have strengthened outcomes. For example, joint calls or staggered announcements could have supported a more coherent approach to workforce development and business growth. As one Technical Officer reflected, *'If People and Skills had gone out at*

the same time, we could have linked up training with the business support, there were missed opportunities to join things up'.

2.6.7 The Programme delivered tangible benefits to the local economy, enabling SMEs to invest, adapt and grow. Many projects exceeded their original outputs, demonstrating significant additionality in areas such as digital adoption, innovation and carbon reduction. Examples included sector-specific support for the visitor economy, initiatives to improve business productivity and capital investments that unlocked new workspace provision. The Technical Officer noted that the flexibility of the open call approach enabled *'projects that could really make a difference quickly'* while acknowledging that evidencing long-term business outcomes, such as job creation and increased turnover, was more challenging within the short delivery period.

2.6.8 Learning focused on the need for clearer pipeline development and earlier engagement with delivery partners and the business community. The Technical Officer identified that improved clarity on match funding requirements and earlier signalling of forthcoming Calls would have supported better developed projects and reduced uncertainty for applicants. There was also a view that presenting a more coherent, joined-up offer to businesses would have helped them better understand how different interventions related to one another. The Technical Officer commented, *'We need to get all the Calls ready before we launch so they connect and businesses can see the full picture'.*

2.6.9 In summary, the Supporting Local Business Priority delivered a broad and impactful range of interventions that have enhanced Shropshire's business ecosystem. The open call approach worked effectively in ensuring transparency and accessibility, while the diversity of funded activity reflected the County's varied economic landscape. Future funding rounds could build on this experience by promoting earlier integration with complementary priorities, enabling longer delivery windows for capital and business support projects and embedding clearer mechanisms for measuring long-term economic impact. As the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer reflected*, 'It's such a shame we spent so much time setting up the processes for it all to be over in three years,'* highlighting the importance of continuity and sustained investment to maximise the value of the systems and partnerships established through the Programme.

2.7 People and Skills - Reflections of Project Implementation

2.7.1 The People and Skills Priority complemented the other two Investment Priorities by addressing the underlying skills, employability and inclusion challenges that affect both business growth and community resilience. Through the UKSPF open call process, delivered via the Council's Delta eSourcing procurement portal, the Council sought to fund initiatives that supported individuals furthest from the labour market, enhanced employability and employment sustainability, improved access to basic skills and helped residents develop the capabilities needed to participate fully in Shropshire's economy. The Delta portal provided a transparent and structured mechanism for advertising and managing applications, while the Call itself represented the formal invitation for project proposals. Funded interventions included employability and confidence-building programmes, targeted digital inclusion activities and projects supporting progression into volunteering or work.

2.7.2 The open call approach ensured transparency and encouraged a range of delivery partners to apply, including local voluntary sector organisations, FE and HE, training providers and employment support providers. This diversity reflected the varied needs of residents across Shropshire's rural and urban areas and allowed projects to tailor their support to different cohorts, including young people, the long-term unemployed and those experiencing health-related barriers to work. The Technical Officer commented that, *'many of these projects filled*

gaps that national programmes simply didn't reach, particularly for residents who had fallen out of the mainstream system'.

2.7.3 Project design under this Priority reflected a clear focus on personalised, holistic support. Delivery partners adopted flexible approaches that addressed both practical and emotional barriers to participation, recognising that confidence, wellbeing and digital skills were often as important as formal qualifications. Collaboration with community-based organisations was a particular strength, as they were trusted by local residents and able to reach individuals who would not normally engage with statutory provision. The Technical Officer noted, *'Smaller organisations were able to adapt quickly, offering support that really met people where they were, something larger schemes often struggle to do'.* However, the timing of the open calls and delays to funding approval created challenges for early mobilisation and integration with other Priorities. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer noted *'The People and Skills call came out quite late and, by then some of the opportunities to link with the business support work had been missed'.*

2.7.4 The later launch of the People and Skills investment Priority, compared with other Calls, had a distinct impact on delivery. Compressed timescales limited opportunities for projects to build momentum, sustain participant engagement and establish referral pathways with employers and community-based initiatives. Technical Officers noted that earlier alignment with business and community activity would have improved participant progression into volunteering, training and employment, particularly for those furthest from the labour market.

2.7.5 The geographic and thematic spread of projects was comprehensive, covering both market towns and rural communities. Participants benefitted from a range of interventions that built confidence, improved wellbeing and supported re-engagement with learning and work. Quantitative outputs were achieved, but the most meaningful changes were often qualitative and more difficult to evidence within the short timeframe. As the Technical Officer explained, *'It's easy to capture numbers, but the real impact was often in softer outcomes such as someone feeling ready to volunteer again or gaining the confidence to apply for a course'.* The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer also said, *'Some of the outcomes were fantastic, people who hadn't worked for years got into jobs or training. The projects were small in scale but made a real difference locally'.*

2.7.6 Delivery capacity varied across the provider network. Many organisations had previous ESF experience and were well-placed to deliver, though several smaller providers faced challenges rebuilding delivery teams following funding gaps between ESF and UKSPF. The Council's supportive approach and flexibility in grant management helped mitigate these issues. The Technical Officer noted*, 'The experience was there, but some providers struggled to scale up at pace after the break between programmes, it took time to re-establish referral routes and partnerships'.*

2.7.7 The People and Skills Investment Priority generated valuable learning around innovation and partnership working. Several projects trialled new approaches such as work tasters with local employers, wellbeing and creative activity linked to employability and digital inclusion support for older residents. These models extended beyond traditional employment support and contributed to wider community resilience. However, all Technical Officers identified the need for improved mechanisms to capture soft outcomes and for longer delivery periods to enable lasting impact and partnership development.

2.7.8 In summary, the People and Skills Priority delivered targeted, person-centred support that addressed local skills and inclusion challenges, complementing the economic and community objectives of the wider Programme. Projects achieved demonstrable benefits for participants, particularly those furthest from employment, while also enhancing the local provider network.

Future funding rounds could build on this experience by launching Calls for all Priorities concurrently, simplifying monitoring requirements to capture qualitative outcomes more effectively and providing longer delivery windows to maximise impact and sustainability. The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer commented *'Next time, we need to plan the sequencing of Calls better. If People and Skills had gone out earlier, we could have created stronger links between employability and business growth'.*

2.8 Relevance - Lesson Learned

2.8.1 Overall, the Programme was highly relevant to Shropshire's local needs, responding clearly to the challenges and opportunities identified in the Investment Plan and Rural Addendum and aligning well with national UKSPF priorities. The Programme design translated strategic objectives into locally tailored interventions across Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills Investment Priorities, supported by a transparent open call approach. Despite the late start and compressed delivery period, projects were broadly well-aligned with local strategies and demonstrated clear coherence with the Programme's intended objectives and outcomes. Set out below are the key findings and reflections on the Programme's relevance:

(i) Well-established relationships with delivery organisations, dating back to the European Structural and Investment Funds , helped engage partners already familiar with the needs of local communities and businesses. These trusted organisations were crucial for local delivery, enabling projects to mobilise quickly. Their involvement encouraged locally led and inclusive activities and demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with Shropshire Council and other partners to deliver what was right locally**.**

(ii) The open call model proved effective in ensuring fairness, transparency and a wide geographic spread of projects. It enabled a varied mix of delivery organisations and addressed the opportunities and challenges identified in the Investment Plan. However, the staggered sequencing of Calls and limited delivery timescales constrained opportunities for coordination between projects and delivery partners. Opportunities to share information, refer participants or align delivery across organisations were sometimes missed due to time pressures rather than lack of willingness. This was particularly evident where People and Skills activity launched later, limiting the ability to connect employability support with community and business interventions.

(iii) The Programme's structure around individual Investment Priorities meant that some cross-cutting challenges were missed. Issues such as workforce development, rural isolation, digital exclusion, health and wellbeing, inclusion and the transition to net zero cut across all three Priorities were largely addressed through separate projects. Future programmes could benefit from cross-priority Calls or thematic frameworks designed to embed strategic coherence, sustainability and long-term impact.

(iv) Late confirmation of funding and compressed delivery windows placed pressure on both internal teams and delivery organisations. Experience highlighted the importance of early programme planning, clearer internal approval processes and timely regulatory and financial sign-off to support effective delivery. Simplified guidance and consistent communication between Technical Officers, Finance and Legal teams helped mitigate some of these challenges, but longer delivery periods would allow greater scope for partnership development, learning and consolidation of outcomes.

Relevance: Summary

The Programme was developed from a robust evidence base, reflecting Shropshire's distinctive economic, demographic and geographic profile. It addressed issues such as an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, while capitalising on opportunities to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies.

The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer said that this approach 'was recognised both internally and externally as a great success, being structured, fair and auditable'.

While delivery was largely effective and achieved wide thematic and geographic reach, Technical Officers noted that the late approval of funding and phased sequencing of Calls constrained opportunities for integration across Priorities. Nevertheless, the Programme delivered significant local outcomes, built organisational capacity and generated valuable learning for future funding rounds.

Key lessons include the need for earlier planning, longer delivery windows and more coordinated, cross-priority Calls to maximise alignment, sustainability and long-term impact across Shropshire's communities, businesses and residents.

3. Performance

3.1 Performance - Introduction

This section evaluates the Programme's performance of expenditure, outputs and outcomes in relation to the targets established in the UKSPF Memorandum of Understanding. It examines the impact of the Programme and its Projects by analysing achieved spend, outputs and outcomes and concludes with lessons learned.

3.2 Spend Performance – Programme Level

3.2.1 The overall Programme allocation totalled £10,845,217 for the Main UKSPF Programme and £2,589,503 for the Rural Fund**.** Within the Main UKSPF Programme, this comprised £433,809 for Management and Administration, £3,316,929.96 for Communities and Place, £5,476,631.79 for Supporting Local Business and £1,617,846.57 for People and Skills. The Rural Fund included £1,732,677 for Supporting Rural Communities and £856,826 for Supporting Rural Business.

During the final stages of the Programme, funding was reprofiled between projects and Investment Priorities to respond to delivery challenges and opportunities as they emerged. As a result, final allocations agreed for each project by Investment Priority differs from the original target allocations, while overall Programme objectives were maintained. A list of all projects supported, together with delivery organisations and the value of UKSPF funding allocated at point of approval, is provided in Appendix 1.

Tables 8 and 9 provide a detailed breakdown of Programme expenditure, showing both target spend and actual performance.

Table 8: Main UKSPF Programme Spend Performance

Investment Priority	**Target Spend 31 March 2025**		**Actual Performance 31 March 2025**	
	CAP	**REV**	**CAP**	**REV**
Management and Administration	*£0*	*£433,808.68*	*£0*	*£433,808.68*
Communities and Place	*£1,769,371.71*	*£1,547,558.25*	*£1,560,268.37*	*£1,547,558.75*
	£3,316,929.96		***£3,107,827.12***	
Supporting Local Business	*£430,628.29*	*£5,046,003.50*	*£430,628.02*	*£4,487,420.97*
	£5,476,631.79		***£4,918,048.99***	
People and Skills	*£0*	*£1,617,846.57*	*£0*	*£1,586,364.16*
	£1,617,846.57		***£1,586,364.16***	
Total Allocation	*£2,200,000*	*£8,645,217*	*£1,990,896.39*	*£8,055,152.56*
	£10,845,217		***£10,046,048.95***	

Table 9: Rural Programme Spend Performance

Investment Priority	Target Spend 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
Supporting Rural Communities	£1,732,677	£1,576,607.69
Supporting Rural Business	£856,826	£519,066.64
Total Allocation	**£2,589,503**	**£2,095,674.33**

3.2.2 The Programme's total target expenditure by 31 March 2025 was £10,845,217 for the Main UKSPF Programme and £2,589,503 for the Rural Fund, giving a combined total of £13,434,720. Despite a delayed start, the Programme achieved £10,046,048.95 (92.6%) of its Main UKSPF Programme allocation and £2,095,674.33 (80.9%) of its Rural Fund allocation. This equates to a total spend of £12,141,723.28, representing 90.4% of the overall target.

Total spend represents a significant achievement given the constrained timescales and the extensive development work required to mobilise delivery. This is particularly commendable given the complexity of managing funding across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, multiple interventions, a mix of capital and revenue budgets and the associated Management and Administration activities.

Overall, the Programme demonstrated resilient financial management and delivery capacity, ensuring that the majority of funding was effectively deployed within a condensed timeframe. This performance highlights the Council's careful oversight of public funds and provides a solid foundation for any future investment opportunities.

3.2.3 Appendix 5 sets out expenditure achieved under each Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme, broken down by Intervention, alongside expenditure across the Rural Fund Investment Priorities, showing actual performance as at 31 March 2025.

3.3 Output and Outcome Performance - Overview

3.3.1 Tables showing actual performance against output and outcome targets for each of the three Investment Priorities are provided in Appendix 6. An analysis of performance for each Investment Priority is presented below.

The Rural Fund, which supported capital projects, did not have specific outputs or outcomes contractually agreed with MHCLG. However, projects within the Communities and Place and Supporting Local Business Investment Priorities that received capital funding through the Rural Fund were required to deliver defined outputs and outcomes. These are presented separately in Appendix 6 and are analysed separately within the summaries below.

3.4 Communities and Place - Output and Outcome Performance

3.4.1 Main UKSPF Programme (Capital and Revenue Funding)

The Communities and Place Investment Priority in Shropshire has delivered a wide range of community-focused activity, with particularly impressive achievements in cultural engagement, event delivery and support for local organisations. Across several interventions, activity levels have gone well beyond original expectations, showing both high community demand and effective programme delivery. An analysis of the outputs and outcomes achieved under the different interventions is provided below:

(i) Under E4 (Enhancing Cultural, Historic & Heritage Institutions) the scale of green and blue space improvements has been significant, with over 940,000m² improved against

a target of 500m². This represents a major uplift in local environmental assets. Community involvement has been positive, with 25 volunteering opportunities created and 29 events supported, helping increase participation and local use of facilities.

(ii) The results under E6 (Local Arts, Cultural & Creative Activities) are particularly notable. Event delivery has been extremely high, with 688 local events and activities supported (compared with a target of 15) 386 volunteering opportunities and more than 13,000 engagement instances recorded. These achievements highlight a vibrant cultural scene and demonstrate the Programme's contribution to enabling accessible, community-led activity.

(iii) E11 (Capacity Building for Local Groups) also presents an encouraging picture. 386 groups received non-grant support, almost ten times the target, reflecting wide reach across local organisations. Engagement outcomes were also substantial, with 4,458 people involved in programme-supported activity.

(iv) While E1 (Town Centre and High Street Improvements) has delivered fewer physical outputs to date, notable progress has been made in several areas, including delivery of three out of four planned low-carbon infrastructure projects and half of the targeted public realm improvements. Changes to the way footfall and vacancy data were recorded make direct comparison difficult, but the programme has still generated tangible activity.

(v) Finally**,** E14 (Feasibility Studies) performed well above target, with nine studies completed and four already progressing into new projects, helping to build future investment opportunities.

3.4.2 Rural Fund (Capital Projects)

(i) Under E3 (Green Spaces and Natural Environment) capital investment through the Rural Fund delivered substantial physical improvements, with almost 9,900m² of green and blue space created or enhanced against a target of 6,020m². While fewer facilities were supported than originally anticipated, the scale of environmental enhancement achieved represents a meaningful long-term asset for local communities.

(ii) Investment under E7 (Active Travel Enhancements) delivered a high number of new or improved routes, exceeding the target for cycleways and footpaths (23 delivered against a target of 18). Although the total length of routes improved fell short of the original target, the outputs achieved indicate tangible improvements to local infrastructure. Outcomes relating to usage and footfall had not yet been recorded by March 2025, reflecting the time lag typically associated with infrastructure projects.

3.4.3 Overall Conclusions: Communities and Place

The Communities and Place Investment Priority has delivered a wide-ranging and impactful programme across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund.

The Main UKSPF Programme was particularly effective in driving community engagement, cultural participation and organisational capacity, with many outputs and engagement-related outcomes exceeding original expectations despite a compressed delivery period. The Rural Fund complemented this activity by supporting capital projects that created lasting community and environmental assets, notably through green space enhancements and active travel infrastructure.

While some outcome measures, such as increased footfall and usage, had not yet been achieved or recorded by March 2025, this reflects the longer timescales typically associated with capital investments. Overall, the Programme has established a robust foundation for continued benefits to be realised beyond the formal funding period.

3.5 Supporting Local Business - Output and Outcome Performance

3.5.1 Main UKSPF Programme (Revenue Funding)

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has delivered a wide range of activity across Shropshire, with several interventions achieving well above target, particularly in enterprise engagement and business advisory support. In addition 192 full-time jobs have been created across the Investment Priority, achieving 97% of the total target. This is an excellent achievement considering the short timescales in which the projects had to deliver. Although grant delivery has been lower than anticipated in some areas, the Programme has generated valuable business participation, capability-building and early innovation outcomes.

An analysis of the outputs and outcomes achieved under the different interventions is provided below:

(i) Under E17 (Visitor Economy Development) enterprise engagement has been particularly encouraging, with 147 businesses receiving non-financial support against a target of 50. Event activity has also exceeded expectations, with 35 local events supported compared with a target of 15, helping to stimulate local visitor-facing activity and visibility.

(ii) The work under E20 (R&D and Innovation Support) has been a significant area of delivery. 248 businesses received non-financial support (target 100) and adoption of new-to-firm technologies exceeded expectations (93 against 75). Although fewer new-to-market products have been recorded so far, the Programme has already contributed to 72 jobs created, highlighting early economic benefits from innovation-focused activity.

(iii) E23 (Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Support) has seen high levels of engagement. 286 enterprises received non-financial support (target 120) and 47 grants were awarded. 40 potential entrepreneurs were supported towards enterprise readiness and early outcomes include the creation of seven new enterprises and 17 jobs, indicating emerging growth within the local entrepreneurial landscape.

(iv) Delivery under E29 (Decarbonisation Support) shows notable levels of business engagement, with 159 businesses supported (target 80). Although physical infrastructure outputs are yet to progress, the programme reports an estimated 6,631 tonnes of CO_2 reductions, reflecting meaningful activity in carbon-saving practices.

(v) The performance of E30 (Business Support for Employment Growth) has been particularly productive. Over 550 enterprises received support and 108 grants were issued, resulting in over 82 jobs created, surpassing the target of 60.

(vi) Finally, E31 (Feasibility Studies) performed above expectations, with nine studies completed and early progression of two projects, helping build a forward pipeline of business development opportunities.

3.5.2 Rural Fund (Capital Projects)

(i) The Rural Fund provided targeted capital investment to micro and small enterprises in rural areas, with 63 businesses receiving grants against a target of 66. This demonstrates high take-up of capital support and effective delivery within the available timescales.

(ii) Early outcomes are encouraging, with 21 full-time equivalent jobs created (against a target of 29) and 54 enterprises adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes, significantly exceeding the original target of 33. This suggests that capital investment has supported productivity improvements and business modernisation, even where employment impacts are still emerging.

3.5.3 Overall Conclusions: Supporting Local Business

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has delivered extensive business engagement, advisory support and early economic impacts across both the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund.

The Main UKSPF Programme performed particularly well in enterprise reach, innovation support and employment growth, with several interventions exceeding targets for business participation, technology adoption and job creation. The Rural Fund complemented this by providing capital investment to rural businesses, supporting productivity improvements and early employment outcomes. The level of engagement and early productivity gains suggest that further economic impacts are likely to accrue after March 2025.

3.6 People and Skills - Output and Outcome Performance

3.6.1 Main UKSPF Programme (Revenue Funding)

The People and Skills Investment Priority has delivered substantial engagement across Shropshire, with several interventions exceeding their intended reach and contributing to higher levels of participation in training, upskilling and employment-related support. An analysis of the outputs and outcomes achieved under the different interventions is provided below:

(i) Under E33 (Employment Support for Economically Inactive People) the Programme has engaged 691 socially excluded individuals, close to the target of 750, showing wide take-up of support. The number of people helped to find employment has gone beyond expectations, with 575 individuals supported into job search or employment pathways, compared with a target of 360. Although basic skills delivery and sustained employment figures remain below target, the Programme has enabled 486 people to report improved employability, reflecting meaningful progress for many participants. Employment outcomes (86 into work and 24 sustaining work) indicate early movement toward longer-term goals, although significantly below target (360 into work and 90 sustaining work).

(ii) Delivery under E36 (Digital Inclusion and Essential Digital Skills) has been very positive. Uptake has surpassed targets in all areas, with 372 people supported to access basic digital skills and 350 supported with life skills, both above forecast levels. Outcomes have been particularly encouraging, with 354 participants gaining a qualification or completing a course, exceeding the target of 250.

(iii) The results from E37 (Support for the Employed to Access Courses) highlight a high level of engagement from the workforce. 280 people participated in education (target 200) and 147 retrained (target 125). This has led to 278 individuals gaining qualifications or skills, well above the target of 160, showing positive progression for those looking to advance within the labour market.

(iv) Under E38 (Local Skills Needs) delivery has remained on track, with 412 people supported to gain vocational licences and 409 economically active individuals participating in mainstream skills training, both slightly above target. These results contribute to local workforce readiness and sector-specific capability.

3.6.2 Overall Conclusions: People and Skills

The People and Skills Investment Priority has achieved high levels of engagement across Shropshire, with several interventions exceeding participation and qualification targets.

Delivery has been particularly effective in digital inclusion, workforce upskilling and progression into employment pathways. While sustained employment and some skills outcomes remain below target, this reflects the time required for individuals to convert support into long-term labour market outcomes.

Early evidence of improved employability, high course completion rates and progression into work-related activity indicates that the Programme has supported meaningful individual progress and laid solid foundations for future employment and skills outcomes beyond the reporting period.

However, the short delivery period and limited funding constrained the overall impact of the supported employment projects, which typically require 12–18 months of intensive engagement to achieve sustained employment outcomes. This highlights the importance of monitoring beyond Programme end dates to capture longer-term results. There was also evidence that available funding limited the extent to which support could meet local demand. In particular, digital and vocational upskilling provision could only partially address need, as illustrated by waiting lists of over 250 learners for the School of Coding programme, discussed further in Section 5.6.5 (vi).

3.7 Performance - Lessons Learned

3.7.1 Overall, the Programme achieved a high level of expenditure and delivery against outputs within a compressed timeframe, demonstrating effective performance management despite the scale and complexity of the funding arrangements. Set out below are the key lessons learned:

(i) Compressed delivery periods can still achieve high spend and output performance, but require early mobilisation, flexible intervention design and active performance management to mitigate the risk of underspend, particularly for capital activity.

(ii) Capital projects and outcome-heavy interventions need realistic timeframes, as many behavioural, economic and usage-related outcomes (e.g., footfall, sustained employment) are unlikely to fully materialise within short delivery periods. Where timescales or resources limit achievement during the Programme, mechanisms and resources should be in place to capture outcomes after the formal end date to understand and better reflect the full impact of investment.

(iii) High participation levels were often achieved earlier than measurable outcomes, especially within People and Skills and business support interventions. This demonstrates the need to recognise interim progress, including skills development, employability improvements and early business changes, as valid indicators of performance.

(iv) Programme complexity can obscure performance trends, particularly where monitoring spans multiple Investment Priorities, funding streams and intervention types. This can create challenges in aggregating and interpreting results, particularly where overachievement in some areas offsets underperformance in others.

Performance: Summary

Despite a delayed start and a compressed delivery period, the Programme achieved a high level of financial delivery overall. By 31 March 2025, 92.6% of the Main UKSPF Programme allocation and 80.9% of the Rural Fund allocation had been spent, equating to 90.4% of the combined target. This represents a notable achievement given the scale and complexity of managing multiple Investment Priorities, capital and revenue budgets and parallel delivery of the Rural Fund. Overall, expenditure performance reflects effective financial oversight and delivery capacity within a challenging timeframe.

Output performance was generally high across Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, with many interventions exceeding participation, engagement and activity targets. Significant levels of community involvement, cultural activity, business advisory support, innovation uptake and skills participation were achieved. In several areas, high engagement levels were achieved early with longer-term outcomes, such as sustained employment, business growth and increased footfall, expected to materialise over time.

Where outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the longer timescales associated with capital investment and economic or labour market change. Overall, the Programme has delivered wide reach, early evidence of impact and a solid foundation for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

4. Impact

4.1 Impact - Introduction

This section assesses the difference that investment through the UKSPF Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund has made across the three Investment Priorities. Evidence from multiple sources is brought together to provide an overview of the outcomes and impacts achieved to date. It examines the impact of the Programme and its projects by examining the importance of local administration and drawing on feedback from project deliverers gathered through online surveys and direct engagement. This section also includes four detailed case studies that illustrate delivery in practice and concludes with lessons learned.

4.2 Importance of Local Administration

4.2.1 The locally managed nature of the UKSPF Programme was a significant factor in its overall performance and impact. Shropshire Council's direct oversight enabled clarity of purpose, flexibility in decision-making and a more responsive delivery model than had been possible under previous regional arrangements. This local approach was consistently highlighted during staff and stakeholder interviews, particularly by the Service Manager for Economy, Funding and Skills, who emphasised that the ability to administer the fund within Shropshire brought meaningful advantages for Programme quality, accountability and local relevance.

4.2.2 The Service Manager noted that when previous business support activity was delivered through the Marches LEP, *'the third-party organisation overseeing the fund meant that we lost accountability of how the programmes were delivered'.* In contrast, local administration meant Shropshire Council could *'set our own priorities and drive it ourselves*', ensuring that funding decisions aligned closely with local economic and community needs. He also reflected on the variation across the Marches area, observing that *'we all manage the delivery of the projects differently, with different priorities',* reinforcing the value of having direct control over Shropshire's allocation.

4.2.3 The Council's approach to staffing and Programme management was also identified as a major contributor to the quality of delivery. The Service Manager described how the dedicated UKSPF Team enabled rapid mobilisation despite a delayed start, stating that *'as soon as they were appointed they reacted quickly, they made up the time we had lost'.* He highlighted the importance of recruiting capable staff, noting *'We knew the best way to manage the delivery of the Programme was to bring in good resources. Hannah, Joy and Amy have been fantastic, they just picked it up and ran with it. Gary has managed the overall Programme well too'.*

4.2.4 Local administration also enhanced fairness and transparency. The Service Manager emphasised the Council's commitment to ensuring that funding was allocated to the organisations best placed to deliver high-quality activity, even when this meant not delivering services in-house. As he explained, *'it would have been easy to give ourselves the funding… but we made sure that the right organisations delivered, even if it meant that the Council lost out'.* This was viewed positively by partners and contributed to constructive relationships across the county.

4.2.5 Overall, the evaluation finds that the local management model enabled a more coherent, place-focused and accountable approach to delivery. It supported wide geographic coverage, diverse participation and high levels of engagement from delivery partners, underpinned by clear local priorities and effective Programme oversight. The evidence also highlights how delivery arrangements and commissioning approaches shaped delivery in practice, particularly in the context of short timescales and the need to mobilise activity quickly.

4.3 Communities and Place – Beneficiary Impact

4.3.1 Overview of Activity

The Communities and Place Investment Priority was allocated £3,345,217 (30.8%) of the Main UPSPF Programme and £1,589,503 (61.4%) of the Rural Fund. In total, 38 projects were supported across the two funding streams, with the Main UKSPF Programme delivering capital and revenue activity and the Rural Fund delivering capital investments. Taken together, these projects reached communities across the whole of Shropshire, from larger market towns such as Shrewsbury and Oswestry to rural settlements and smaller local centres. All the projects supported are provided in Appendix 1.

4.3.2 Delivery under this Investment Priority was notably diverse, reflecting the breadth of needs and opportunities identified in the Investment Plan. Projects ranged from improvements to heritage assets (such as the Montgomery Canal, Ellesmere Yard and Shrewsbury Castle) to enhancements to community facilities and cultural spaces (including projects such as Beacon on the Hill, the Cultural Compact, Cultural Hubs and Spokes and the Vital Hive). Investments also enhanced civic infrastructure through initiatives such as the Strategic Infrastructure Partnership, Civic Crowdfunding, community climate projects, green space support and enhancements to local markets. Capital-focused Rural Fund projects complemented this activity by improving access to the countryside, supporting market infrastructure, investing in green spaces and enabling place-based improvements including the Cambrian Railway Station in Oswestry.

Collectively, these interventions were designed to help communities thrive, build local pride and support long-term resilience.

4.3.3 The Communities and Place portfolio was guided by four high-level opportunities set out in the Shropshire Investment Plan. These centred on:

(i) Building upon existing assets, resources and infrastructure, harnessing the potential of market towns to offer a wide range of activities, services and facilities that bring communities together and encouraging both physical and digital connection between different individuals, groups and localities;

(ii) Offering support to boost cultural capacity and social cohesion, leading to an increasingly diversified cultural offer which will benefit younger people, older people, existing residents and those moving to the area in the wake of the pandemic and changing lifestyle priorities – offering all sectors of the community the chance to recognise and explore their aspirations and achieve their potential;

(iii) Promoting understanding of climate change issues, environment and air quality, opportunities for carbon reduction and the benefits of active lifestyles, including working with the community through creation of new or updating existing defences for natural hazards – increasing healthy life expectancy, improving physical and mental wellbeing and enhancing pride in place; and

(iv) Linking with the other two investment priorities, building social and physical infrastructure which supports development of improved employment and educational opportunities and a better understanding of the role of volunteering in supporting socio-economic outcomes, delivered through a combination of skills sharing activities, connections and signposting and provision of high-quality, desirable community and cultural spaces.

4.3.4 The portfolio of Communities and Place projects reflects these priorities, with benefits emerging around improved amenities, more vibrant and inclusive cultural and community offers, greater environmental engagement and enhanced opportunities for people to participate locally.

4.3.5 Project Surveys – Communities and Place

22 surveys were forwarded to funded organisations (including to some organisations delivering more than one project) and 16 responses were received, representing a 73% response rate. This high level of engagement in the survey provides a robust and representative picture of the views and experiences of the projects supported through the Communities and Place Investment Priority. Detailed survey responses are presented in an addendum to this evaluation.

4.3.6 Activity

The responses indicate a diverse mix of activity. The most commonly selected categories were Heritage, Culture or Tourism and Community Engagement or Volunteering initiatives, each identified by over a third of respondents (six). Community Facility or Building Improvements were selected by a quarter of respondents (four). Smaller, but still notable proportions reported activity relating to Green Space, Environment or Nature projects (two respondents) and Town Centre or Public Realm Enhancements (two respondents).

In addition, four respondents selected 'Other', highlighting activity focused on active travel, children and young people, arts and cultural delivery and voluntary and community sector infrastructure support.

4.3.7 Levels of Success

Overall, respondents reported very positive levels of success for their Communities and Place projects. The majority (10 responses, 62.5%) felt their project had been very successful and a further five, 31%, described their work as mostly successful. Only one respondent reported mixed success and none felt their project had experienced limited or no success.

These results suggest that, despite the challenges faced, project deliverers generally view their activity as having achieved positive outcomes and made a meaningful contribution within their communities.

4.3.8 Challenges

Table 10: Challenges in Delivery (Communities and Place)

Can you indicate the challenges in delivering these activities?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Staffing or volunteer capacity	38.46%	5
Monitoring or reporting requirements	38.46%	5
Delays in approvals or procurement	23.08%	3
Delays in planning requirements/planning permission	15.38%	2
Supply chain or cost increases	15.38%	2
Community engagement or participation	15.38%	2
Engagement with referral partners	7.69%	1
Match funding or resources	7.69%	1
Other	53.85%	7

For Communities and Place projects, the majority of respondents (13, 81%) reported experiencing challenges during delivery, with only three, 19%, indicating they faced no difficulties.

Those respondents that experienced challenges, the most common issues were staffing or volunteer capacity and monitoring or reporting requirements, each affecting around 38% of projects. Delays in approvals, planning, supply chain issues and community engagement were also cited, though less frequently. Additionally, over half of respondents highlighted other challenges, particularly tight delivery schedules and adverse weather, with fixed deadlines often forcing outdoor work in winter. Some projects also faced capacity constraints, coordination across multiple organisations and quality or snagging issues. Overall, while administrative and staffing pressures were significant, timing and external factors such as weather were also key barriers to successful delivery.

'Completion dates of 31/3 mean that builds are done throughout the winter where the weather plays a massive part and can cause delays'.

4.3.9 Impact

The UKSPF-funded projects have delivered significant and lasting impacts across Shropshire, combining physical improvements with enhanced community engagement and increased local pride. In Shrewsbury, public realm enhancements, including lighting, greening and new art installations, have created safer, more welcoming spaces for walking and cycling, while large-scale events such as the Shrewsbury Movement Festival have attracted national attention and substantially boosted visitor numbers, with footfall increases of up to 26% compared with previous years.

Beyond Shrewsbury, the Programme has strengthened community activity, volunteering and wellbeing across Shropshire. Youth engagement and mental health support have been enhanced through The Hive, while Crowdfunding initiatives have supported almost 900 participants and enabled 39 VCSE organisations to access funding, training and capacity-building support. Projects have increased cultural participation, preserved heritage buildings, improved community facilities and promoted energy efficiency and climate awareness. Practical improvements, including market accessibility, safer road crossings and enhanced public spaces, have been complemented by initiatives fostering social inclusion, peer support and digital engagement.

Overall, the interventions have created more vibrant, resilient and connected communities, boosting both local quality of life and visitor engagement.

'The project as enabled community ideas to be supported and turned into delivery. A wide range of people have benefitted with outcomes including social inclusion, peer support, digital inclusion, improved wellbeing and health, tackling inequalities and disadvantage and celebrating arts and culture' - Crowdfund Shropshire (Civic Crowdfunding)

'The project has improved the facility for both the market traders and more importantly their customers, the building is more accessible and more attractive. Footfall has increased' – Oswestry Town Council (Oswestry Market).

4.3.10 Outcomes and Evidence

The majority of respondents (11, 69%) rated their projects as very effective in achieving intended outcomes, with the remaining five, 31%, describing them as quite effective and no projects being reported as only partly or not effective. This suggests overall considerable confidence in the ability of the interventions to deliver their goals. Evidence to support impact

was gathered using a variety of methods: social media and press coverage was the most commonly used (11, 69%) while before-and-after photos, participant feedback, visitor/usage data and case studies were each used by half of respondents.

Additional evidence included economic or footfall data, referral and retention figures and other metrics such as videos, stakeholder feedback, service outcome measures, social value data and quantitative activity participation.

Collectively, this demonstrates a robust approach to monitoring and evaluation, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to capture both tangible outputs and broader community impact, reinforcing the effectiveness of the projects.

4.3.11 Results and Achievements

Projects were invited to describe the difference their project had made locally. Some of the responses are provided below:

- In Shrewsbury, 180 subsidised e-bikes have been made available, 7 e-cargo bikes now support local businesses and 10 Safe Cycle Pods provide secure bike storage.
- Public-realm enhancements, including improved lighting, art installations, murals from 21 artists .
- Community engagement activities, including the Shrewsbury Movement Festival where over 110 people attended the launch event and the 2 day Market Square Festival that saw 26% increase in footfall compared to the previous Saturday.
- Five new parklets, have made spaces safer and more attractive.
- Across Shropshire, 30 projects supported by Vibrant Shropshire delivered 522 events, 374 volunteer opportunities and engaged 8,671 people, while Crowdfund Shropshire awarded 31 grants, enabling 106 activities and securing over £313,000 in investment.
- Heritage, green space and market improvements have enhanced facilities, increased usage and provided accessible opportunities for community participation, such as the Beacon on the Hill heritage site and Oswestry Greenway.
- The Cambrian Station Restoration achieved regional recognition, with the project winning the BAM Nutall Partnership Award at the National Heritage Railway Awards 2025
- Social and wellbeing impacts including the Vital Hive initiatives that have provided youth engagement, play therapy and counselling, with one project described as *'transformative and impactful'.*
- Armed Forces Outreach engaged 955 people and led 9 organisations to sign the armed forces covenant.
- Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support programme created 522 volunteering opportunities and supported 36 organisations.
- Climate and energy projects engaged 'hundreds' through workshops and training
- Culture Hubs & Spokes reached 2,250 audience members, with 40% attending for the first time.

Collectively, these interventions demonstrate lasting improvements in infrastructure, community engagement, environmental sustainability and social wellbeing. The UKSPF-funded projects have delivered tangible enhancements across Shropshire, improving community spaces, enriching cultural activity and creating a more connected, vibrant and resilient place for residents and visitors alike.

4.3.12 Additional Benefits

Table 11: Additional Benefits (Communities and Place)

Did the support offer any additional benefits beyond your expectations?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Strengthened local partnerships or community networks	75%	12
Increased community participation or volunteer engagement	56.25%	9
Improved wellbeing or social inclusion outcomes	56.25%	9
Generated positive media or local attention	56.25%	9
Improved local pride or sense of place	31.25%	5
Enhanced capacity of local organisations to deliver services	43.75%	7
Improved collaboration with local authorities or partners	43.75%	7
Attracted additional funding or investment into the area	43.75%	7
Greater use of community assets or spaces	37.50%	6
Other	6.25%	1

The survey responses provided in Table 11 indicate that the UKSPF Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund support delivered a range of benefits beyond initial expectations, reinforcing the wider impact of the Programme. Most notably, 75% (12) of respondents reported that their projects strengthened local partnerships or community networks, while over half highlighted increases in community or volunteer participation and engagement, improved wellbeing, social inclusion and positive media attention. Other outcomes included enhanced organisational capacity, greater use of community assets, improved collaboration with local authorities and additional funding or investment.

One respondent noted that *'all the above benefits were achieved and aligned with our expected outcomes,'* reflecting the programme's ability to exceed expectations and generate multiple positive effects across communities.

4.4 Supporting Local Business – Beneficiary Impact

4.4.1 Overview of Activity

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority was allocated £5,900,000 (54.4%) of the Main UKSPF Programme and £1,000,000 (38.6%) of the Rural Fund. Delivery was undertaken across a broad portfolio of business support, innovation, skills development and market-development initiatives, complemented by targeted capital investment through the Rural Fund. In total, 28 projects were supported across the two funding streams, with activity delivered in Shropshire's towns, rural communities, business corridors and key employment locations. All projects supported through this Priority are listed in Appendix 1.

4.4.2 Delivery within the Supporting Local Business Priority reflected the wide-ranging needs of Shropshire's diverse economy and the ambitions set out in the Investment Plan. Projects provided a mix of direct support to businesses, sector-specific growth programmes and strategic interventions designed to enhance the broader environment for enterprise. These included intensive specialist business support, targeted upskilling programmes, employer-focused services, start-up development and sectoral initiatives covering manufacturing, agri-tech, clean growth and low-carbon innovation. Complementary place-based interventions enhanced town centre vibrancy, supported local business networks, enhanced market town infrastructure and promoted Shropshire as an attractive place to work, invest and grow. Rural

Fund investment added a further dimension through capital support for small equipment purchases, enabling micro and small businesses to improve productivity, adopt greener practices and unlock growth opportunities.

4.4.3 The Supporting Local Business portfolio was shaped by four key-level opportunities identified within the Shropshire Investment Plan. These centred on:

(i) Providing the right tools and support to facilitate businesses to invest in research and development, relocate to Shropshire or expand and grow in their physical locations and workforce, particularly in relation to sustainability and green industry and the creative and cultural sectors;

(ii) Championing investment in wider infrastructure that underpins business investment, focused on town centres and high streets, business parks and growth corridors - recognising the potential to establish hubs providing support to supply chains and individuals moving into the county to access and develop its strengths and opportunities and exploring affordable, flexible co-working space in key locations;

(iii) Working collaboratively with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and business improvement districts, assisting businesses to gain support through recovery funds, UKSPF and other relevant funding; and

(iv) Linking with the other two investment priorities to provide appropriate housing, connectivity, networks and workplace progression through training and upskilling, so the County has the right workforce to enable economic growth and prosperity and can grow the working age population.

4.4.4 The Supporting Local Business portfolio demonstrates a broad and ambitious commitment to strengthening Shropshire's economic base, with projects delivering targeted support for start-ups, growth-oriented SMEs, manufacturers and agri-tech innovators. Collectively, the Programme is fostering more resilient enterprise networks, improved leadership and workforce skills, enhanced competitiveness and productivity and greater readiness for digital and low-carbon transformation.

4.4.5 Project Surveys – Supporting Local Business

24 surveys were forwarded to funded organisations and 13 responses were received, representing a 54% response rate. This high level of engagement provides a robust and representative picture of the views and experiences of the project deliverers supported through the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority. Detailed survey responses are presented in an addendum to this evaluation.

4.4.6 Activity

The responses show a clear concentration of activity around direct business advice and growth support, with nine respondents (69%) identifying this as part of their offer. This reflects an emphasis on improving business resilience, capability and performance. Around a quarter of respondents (three projects) delivered business growth grants, while a smaller proportion focused on start-up support (two respondents) and innovation, R&D or technology adoption (one) indicating that early-stage and innovation-focused interventions formed a more limited element of the overall Programme.

No respondents reported activity relating to exporting or internationalisation or premises or workspace adaptations, suggesting these areas were not a delivery priority within this cohort.

In addition, three project deliverers selected 'Other', highlighting activity including funded training for existing staff, feasibility studies to inform future growth strategies and events to test demand for new business networks.

Overall, the findings point to a Programme primarily centred on advisory and capability-building support, complemented by targeted grant funding and exploratory activity designed to shape future business growth opportunities.

4.4.7 Levels of Success

Overall, respondents reported highly positive assessments of their Supporting Local Business projects. Over three quarters (10, 77%) felt their project had been very successful, reflecting confidence in both the outcomes achieved and the value delivered to participating businesses. A smaller proportion (one, 8%) described their project as mostly successful, while two respondents (15%) indicated limited success, highlighting that for a minority of projects, challenges may have constrained delivery or impact. No respondents reported mixed or no success.

These results suggest that, on the whole, project deliverers view their work as having made a meaningful contribution to business growth and resilience, with only a small number experiencing more significant barriers to achieving their intended outcomes.

4.4.8 Challenges in Delivery (Supporting Local Business)

Table 12: Challenges in Delivery (Supporting Local Business)

Can you indicate the challenges in delivering these activities?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Business engagement or take-up	75%	6
Timescale for delivery	37.5%	3
Amount of funding available	25%	2
Engagement with referral partners, e.g. Growth Hub/Chamber	12.5%	1
Monitoring or reporting requirements	12%	1
Staffing or specialist expertise	0%	0
Costs and resources	0%	0
Other	25%	2

Respondents were asked to identify the challenges they faced when delivering their project/s. 61.5% (eight) of respondents reported experiencing challenges in delivering their projects, while a notable 38.5% (five) indicated they faced no challenges at all. This is a positive finding, suggesting that a substantial proportion of projects were able to deliver their activities smoothly and without significant barriers. The balance of responses indicates that, although challenges were relatively common across the Programme, many projects were well-planned, appropriately resourced or sufficiently aligned with business needs to proceed without major difficulties.

Most respondents identifying challenges reported experiencing at least one challenge, with business engagement or take-up emerging as the most widespread issue (six, 75%). Over a third of respondents also highlighted timescales for delivery, suggesting that compressed programme windows or fixed deadlines placed pressure on planning and implementation. A quarter identified the amount of funding available as a challenge, while individual respondents highlighted difficulties relating to engagement with referral partners and monitoring or reporting requirements.

The 'Other' responses provide useful context. One project noted exceptionally high demand that required an extension, while another emphasised that small businesses often struggle to find time for training or support, even when willing to engage. Taken together, these findings suggest that demand, capacity within small businesses and delivery timescales were the most prominent constraints, with administrative and partnership-related challenges affecting a smaller proportion of projects.

4.4.9 Impact

Respondents were asked what difference had their project/s made to local businesses. The responses indicate that UKSPF-funded business projects have delivered clear and meaningful benefits for enterprises across Shropshire, helping them to grow, adapt and build long-term resilience.

Grant support and tailored business programmes enabled firms to expand operations, safeguarded jobs and, in many cases, create new roles. Many businesses reported improved productivity, clearer strategic direction and more efficient systems, with several projects directly contributing to increased turnover, profitability and employment. Leadership and skills programmes also had a noticeable effect, with participants gaining confidence in decision-making, financial management and strategic planning. These changes have supported business growth and long-term development.

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has also fostered innovation and collaboration. Peer-learning groups such as the Evolving Business Cohort created new partnerships, joint projects and shared marketing opportunities, with many relationships continuing beyond the funded activity. Businesses involved in Visit Shropshire's destination marketing benefitted from increased visibility, higher enquiry levels and improved digital engagement. Workshops covering digital marketing, content creation, accessibility and sustainability helped hundreds of businesses enhance their skills, improve their online presence and add value to their customer offer.

Environmental and operational improvements have also been significant. Energy and sustainability projects supported businesses to reduce costs, cut carbon emissions and adopt more efficient processes. Specialist support for employers has helped build confidence in recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce. Feasibility studies and pilot initiatives have laid the groundwork for future growth in areas such as the green economy, local business networks and sector-specific development.

Overall, the Programme has helped create a more capable, connected and confident business community across Shropshire, with impacts expected to extend well beyond the funding period.

'Grant funding has enabled retailers and hospitality venues to adapt their operations, diversify their offer and respond effectively to challenging economic conditions. As a direct result, businesses have safeguarded existing jobs, created new roles, and strengthened their capacity to grow. Many participants report increased productivity, improved systems and clearer business direction thanks to tailored support through the Work in Shrewsbury programme'. Shrewsbury BID

'Business Performance Turnover: 75% of respondents reported an increase since completing the programme. Employment: Around 24% reported employment growth. Additionality: 78% of those with turnover growth and 71% with profitability growth attributed these improvements directly to Shropshire Leadership Programme'. Aston University

'The Shropshire Manufacturing Grant Programme improved productivity and sustainability, increased digitalisation, created job opportunities, and encouraged the adoption of innovative products and services'. Oxford Innovation Advice

'The Marches Energy Grant enabled cost savings, improved efficiencies and carbon reduction (tonnes co2)'. Worcestershire County Council

4.4.10 Outcomes and Evidence

Most business-facing projects reported positive progress toward their intended outcomes, with nearly two thirds (eight, 62%) describing their work as very effective and a further three, 23%, as quite effective. Only a small proportion (two, 15%) felt their projects had been only partly effective and none reported limited impact, indicating that the majority of interventions delivered meaningful benefits for participating businesses.

A wide range of evidence was used to assess impact, reflecting a balanced approach to monitoring. Business feedback and testimonials were the most common sources (11, 85%), while quantitative measures such as the number of businesses supported (10, 77%) and jobs created or safeguarded (four, 31%) provided additional insight into economic outcomes. Over half of respondents (seven, 54%) produced case studies and nearly half drew on social media or press activity to demonstrate their reach. Innovation indicators, such as new products or processes, were also captured by several projects.

Other forms of evidence included detailed energy audit reports and ongoing engagement with sector partners to identify emerging needs. Collectively, the variety of methods used, spanning qualitative narrative and numerical data, indicates that project deliverers were able to track both immediate outputs and wider business improvements, helping to demonstrate the value and influence of UKSPF-funded activity.

4.4.11 Results and Achievements

Projects were invited to describe the difference their project had made locally. Some of the responses are provided below:

- Future Shrewsbury Grants provided support to 52 businesses.
- The Visit Shropshire Destination Development Programme supported wider training and workshop programmes, engaging 173 businesses to improve skills in digital marketing, first aid, social media and experience development.
- Leadership and innovation initiatives supported 88 businesses through the Shropshire Leadership Programme.
- The Upskilling Project enabled 414 individuals from 161 businesses to undertake fully funded training.
- Environmental and net zero activity also delivered notable gains, including 261 tonnes of carbon saved annually through the Marches Energy Grant and over 7,000 tonnes of carbon savings identified by Shropshire Net Zero Leaders.
- Further added value was demonstrated by the £325,000 leveraged investment secured through the Green Growth and Severn Valley Water Management work.

Businesses reported enhanced online performance, new collaborations, improved customer engagement and the development of new products and visitor experiences. As one participant noted, the support *'opened the door to opportunities we would never have reached alone'.*

Collectively, these achievements highlight the significant economic and developmental impact delivered across Shropshire's business base.

4.4.12 Additional Benefits

Table 13: Additional Benefits (Supporting Local Business)

Did the support offer any additional benefits beyond your expectations?	Percentage %	Number of responses
Stronger business networks or collaborations formed	84.62%	11
Increased local supply chain activity	23.08%	3
New markets or customers identified	15.38%	2
Unexpected innovation or product development	15.38%	2
Improved staff retention or morale	30.77%	4
Raised business profile or reputation	76.92%	10
Increased investor or partner interest	15.38%	2
Additional funding or resources secured as a result	53.85%	7
Strengthened relationships with local authorities or support organisations	53.85%	7
Follow-on opportunities or funding identified	38.46%	5
Other	0%	0

The responses in Table 13 suggest that the UKSPF Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund created several unanticipated benefits alongside their core objectives. The most frequently reported outcome was the formation of enhanced business networks or collaborations (11, 85%) highlighting the Programme's role in fostering connections that extend beyond individual projects. Raised business profile or reputation was also significant (10, 77%) indicating that many businesses experienced increased visibility and engagement. Over half of respondents secured additional funding or resources or developed closer relationships with local authorities and support organisations, demonstrating clear added value. Other benefits included improved staff morale, new market opportunities and follow-on funding prospects.

One respondent highlighted the cumulative impact of this support, noting that *'the project helped us build partnerships and attract new interest we hadn't anticipated'.*

4.5 People and Skills – Beneficiary Impact

4.5.1 Overview of Activity

The People and Skills Investment Priority was allocated £1,600,000 (14.8%) of the Main UKSPF Programme. It was designed to strengthen the skills base, widen participation and support residents to access and progress in employment. Unlike the other two Investment Priorities, activity was phased to begin later in the Programme, with the project calls taking place in May 2023 (with delivery commencing from October 2023) and December 2023 (with delivery commencing from April 2024 onwards. All projects supported through this Priority are listed in Appendix 1.

4.5.2 Delivery was undertaken through a series of five targeted projects delivered by four specialist providers, spanning employability support, digital skills development, basic and life skills provision, employer-linked training and tailored in-work progression support. Together, these interventions aimed to build Shropshire's workforce capabilities, reduce digital exclusion and address local labour supply challenges.

4.5.3 The design and delivery of the People and Skills portfolio were shaped by the key opportunities identified in the Shropshire UKSPF Investment Plan. These centred on:

(i) Improving the skills profile of the working-age population, responding to the 19,600 residents with only Level 1 qualifications and the 8,300 with no qualifications. Enhancing basic, functional, vocational and higher-level skills remains essential to raising productivity and enabling residents to access better-quality employment;

(ii) Reducing digital exclusion, particularly among older people, rural residents and low-income households groups for whom limited digital access restricts participation in employment, training and essential online services;

(iii) Supporting older residents and those in rural areas to gain the skills required to remain socially connected, access digital public services and maintain independence and quality of life;

(iv) Maximising opportunities from digital infrastructure investment, including wider rollout of superfast broadband, gigabit capability and 5G, by upskilling local people for digital jobs and creating pathways into high-skill, high-wage sectors aligned with future growth; and

(iv) Supporting the transition to a more productive, future-ready labour market, where residents are equipped with transferable, technical and digital skills that enable them to progress, adapt and contribute to Shropshire's long-term economic resilience.

4.5.4 Delivery under the People and Skills Priority reflected the diverse needs and opportunities identified in the Shropshire Investment Plan, with a clear focus on improving skills levels across the working-age population, supporting economically inactive residents, tackling digital exclusion and enabling progression into higher-skill, higher-wage roles.

4.5.5 Project Surveys – People and Skills

Surveys were forwarded to the four delivery organisations and three responses were received, providing a representative view of the support provided through the People and Skills Investment Priority. Detailed survey responses are presented in an addendum to this evaluation.

4.5.6 Activity

Across the three respondents, projects focused primarily on training and skills development, with all deliverers providing structured learning opportunities. Two projects offered basic skills and employability or work-readiness support, reflecting a significant emphasis on helping participants progress towards the labour market. Digital skills development featured in one project, while another provided targeted support for those furthest from employment. Collectively, the activity represents a blend of practical training, foundational skills and tailored employability interventions aimed at improving participants' confidence, capability and future prospects.

4.5.7 Levels of Success

Respondents reported positive levels of success for their People and Skills projects, with all three deliverers indicating that their activity had achieved its intended outcomes. One respondent rated its project as very successful, while the remaining two described theirs as mostly successful. These findings suggest that, despite the varied needs of participants and delivery contexts, projects generally felt able to deliver meaningful support and create tangible benefits for individuals engaging with skills, training and employability activities.

4.5.8 Challenges

Most respondents (two out of three) reported no challenges in delivering their People and Skills activities, indicating that for the majority of projects, delivery ran smoothly and without

major barriers. One project did experience difficulties, primarily linked to engaging and retaining participants, as well as supporting individuals with complex needs. Low confidence and motivation among participants also contributed to these challenges. While issues were limited to a single project, they highlight the intensive support often required when working with individuals who face multiple barriers to skills development and employment.

4.5.9 Impact

The People and Skills projects have contributed meaningfully to improving participants' confidence, skills and readiness for work. Respondents reported that individuals gained practical abilities, enhanced digital capability and clearer pathways for career progression or change. The projects also supported personal development, including improved employability, communication skills and the confidence needed to sustain employment. These outcomes reflect the tailored, hands-on nature of the support provided, helping participants build both competence and motivation.

'Additional skills, and knowledge transfer related to a specific vocation for career progression or change of career'. - Shropshire Chamber of Commerce (Shropshire Skills Hub)

4.5.10 Outcomes and Evidence

The survey results indicate that People and Skills projects were viewed as highly effective in achieving their intended outcomes. One respondent rated their activity as very effective, while the remainder described their projects as quite effective. This reflects a clear sense that interventions are helping participants gain skills, confidence and improved readiness for work.

Projects used a varied evidence base to assess their impact. All respondents reported capturing qualification achievements, while two respondents used attendance or engagement tracking, participant feedback, pre- and post-programme assessments, progression data and referral information. Case studies and social media coverage were also used to demonstrate individual progress and wider engagement.

Taken together, these methods illustrate a balanced approach to evaluation, combining numerical measures with participant insight to evidence improvements in skills, confidence and employability.

4.5.11 Results and Achievements

Deliverers were asked to describe the difference their projects had made for participants. Key achievements included:

- Digital Shropshire supported 280 learners to develop essential digital skills, helping participants improve confidence, employability and readiness for further training.

- The UKSPF Shropshire Skills Hub funded 412 course places for 412 individuals, resulting in 409 qualifications, certificates or licences being achieved against a target of 400, demonstrating high levels of completion and progression.

- Step Up/Ignite (Apr–Nov 2025) received 180 referrals, with 35 people moving into employment, 83 reporting improved interpersonal or life skills and 121 receiving targeted support to move closer to work.

Collectively, these outcomes illustrate the positive contribution that UKSPF-funded skills activity has made in helping residents gain qualifications, build confidence and transition into work or further learning.

4.5.12 Additional Benefits

The survey indicates that projects delivered several positive outcomes for participants and the community, beyond initial expectations. Most commonly (two out of three respondents), reported that participants gained confidence or motivation, improved digital skills and progressed into further training, volunteering or employment. Wellbeing benefits were also reported, with one project noting improvements in mental health. Wider community impacts included increased awareness of available skills programmes and better reach into under-represented groups, demonstrating that activity extended beyond direct learning to support inclusion and local engagement.

Delivery organisations also reported added value. Two of the three providers experienced improved soft skills within their teams, enhanced staff learning and better employer links or placements. Collaboration with training providers and employers and the creation of new partnerships or networks was universal among respondents, highlighting significant relationship-building benefits. Some organisations also secured additional resources or noted higher engagement than anticipated, suggesting that Programme participation supported organisational development as well as learner outcomes.

4.6 UKSPF Programme Team Support and Impact

4.6.1 As part of the survey questions, all project deliverers in the three Investment Priorities were asked about any examples of how the Team may have added value or provided support beyond what they had expected and whether they had any suggestions for improving delivery or support in future programmes.

4.6.2 The UKSPF Programme Team was widely praised for being approachable, responsive and proactive, providing support beyond expectations. Key team members, including Gary Spence, Hannah Smith, Joy Holland and Amy Farley, were singled out for their reliability, problem-solving and guidance through complex processes such as reporting, eligibility and project delivery. Recipients valued upfront payments, flexible support and opportunities to collaborate or access wider networks. Suggestions for future improvements focused on:

- Streamlining reporting;
- Extending delivery timescales;
- Increasing engagement with small organisations; and
- Facilitating networking and alignment across projects.

Overall, the Team was considered an enabling partner, helping projects run smoothly, efficiently and with confidence.

'As our key contact Hannah has been supportive, approachable and reliable throughout the whole process'

'Joy and Gary were always available to chat things through… Extremely helpful and accommodating'

'Amy Farley regularly goes above and beyond to provide any help or advice that the School of Coding team requires'

'They are always quick to reply with positive and constructive advice and have a 'can do attitude''

'Efficient and timely processing and payment of claims'

'Time scale is always the challenge- but I appreciate this is outside of your control'

4.7 Considerations for Future Delivery

4.7.1 Within the survey, delivery partners were asked whether they had any suggestions for improving delivery or support in future programmes and if more funding was available, what would be the top priorities for supporting communities, businesses and individuals across Shropshire.

4.7.2 Feedback highlights a consistent set of assumptions and considerations that are likely to shape the effective delivery of any future programmes in Shropshire:

(i) Programme design, timescales and funding flexibility
Many organisations noted that short delivery windows, fixed financial year end dates and limited ability to carry funding forward constrained delivery, particularly for place-based, capital or seasonal activity. Longer programme durations, earlier award decisions and greater flexibility around spend profiles were seen as important for enabling delivery partners to plan, procure and embed activity more effectively. This was reinforced by calls for funding models that better reflect the operational realities of VCSE organisations, including consideration of payment in advance or mixed payment approaches and more realistic overhead allowances.

(ii) Proportionate monitoring and reporting
While delivery partners broadly recognised the importance of accountability, several highlighted that reporting requirements were resource-intensive, particularly for smaller organisations and community-led groups. Suggestions included streamlining defrayal evidence, adopting a core minimum dataset for smaller awards and tailoring monitoring expectations to project scale and risk. There was also appetite for clearer upfront guidance and onboarding support, such as webinars, to improve understanding of requirements and reduce administration during delivery.

(iii) Capacity building, collaboration and networking
Delivery organisations valued opportunities to connect with each other, share learning and collaborate, but felt these could be improved further through more structured networking, facilitated introductions and collaborative events. This applied equally to VCSE organisations, cultural projects, business support providers and external delivery partners seeking to integrate into Shropshire's local networks. There was also recognition of the importance of continued infrastructure support for the voluntary and community sector to sustain delivery capacity at a local level.

4.7.3 Looking ahead, delivery partners identified clear priorities for future investment that align closely with the challenges observed during programme delivery, these are as follows:

(i) Communities and Place: longer-term revenue funding for community wellbeing, youth provision, rural initiatives, grassroots organisations and climate-related activity, alongside continued investment in town centres, heritage, active travel and community infrastructure.

(ii) Supporting Local Business: sustained access to high-quality business advice, grants, skills development, innovation support and Net Zero activity, with an emphasis on progression, scalability and sector-specific support rather than one-off interventions.

(iii) People and Skills: partners highlighted the value of modular and progression-focused skills provision, closer integration with employers and continued emphasis on employability, work-readiness and in-work progression.

4.8 Case Studies

Cambrian Railway Station Shropshire Council

Cambrian Heritage Railways (CHR) is a volunteer-led charity dedicated to preserving and revitalising Oswestry's rich railway heritage. The Cambrian Station Building, a Grade II-listed Victorian landmark dating back to the 1860s, once served as both Oswestry's principal station and the headquarters of the Cambrian Railway. Although still used seasonally by CHR, decades of deterioration meant the building required urgent intervention to make it safe, prevent further decay and secure its future.

To address this, Shropshire Council secured £765,250 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Communities & Place) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund in November 2023, alongside £271,108 of its own capital. The funding enabled a substantial programme of essential external works, including replacing 300 ornate corbels, removing asbestos roof tiles and reinstating Welsh slate and fully repainting windows and doors in authentic Cambrian Railway colours. Ecological enhancements, such as bat roosting tiles and swift nesting boxes, were incorporated into the restoration. Local conservation specialists Phillips and Curry Ltd delivered the restoration, supporting heritage craftsmanship within the region.

The project had to be completed within a tight timescale and through challenging winter conditions, requiring careful coordination to keep the programme on track without compromising quality. As the Project Manager explained: *"The funding gave us the flexibility to do the work the right way, with a high degree of quality instead of just patching things up. The corbels will last over 100 years."*

Shropshire Council also commissioned Insall Architects to produce a conservation management plan, a full condition survey and a feasibility study. These now form the basis for future phases, including potential first-floor residential use and year-round operation with CHR.

The restoration has already achieved regional recognition, with the project winning the BAM Nutall Partnership Award at the National Heritage Railway Awards 2025. Judges praised the "outstanding" quality of the work delivered on a modest budget, commending the Council and its partners for safeguarding a landmark asset, working with local artisans and overcoming unplanned challenges while maintaining momentum.

Community response has been overwhelmingly positive. The Project Manager noted the public interest when the scaffolding was removed: *"We put out a press release and CHR planned a grand reopening at Easter. We were inundated with visitors, more people came to see what we'd done with the building than to visit the railway itself."* The reaction reflected a sense of local pride in seeing an iconic Oswestry landmark restored to prominence.

Without UKSPF and REPF investment, the Council would have been unable to address urgent safety issues or undertake the specialist studies required for long-term reuse. The funding has stabilised a highly significant heritage asset, enhanced Oswestry's visitor offer and laid firm foundations for future development and community benefit.

Vital Hive

HMM Arts Ltd (The Hive)

The Hive is a creative and wellbeing charity based in Shrewsbury, supporting children, young people, families and vulnerable adults across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. Its Vital Hive initiative has widened access to inclusive arts experiences for people facing challenges in their lives, including care-experienced young people, young carers, autistic young adults and families living in poverty.

The Hive secured £99,987 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Communities & Place) in November 2023 and delivered 120 creative activities, supported 28 volunteering opportunities and facilitated 101 community-led arts, cultural and heritage sessions by March 2025. This growth was enabled by expanded staffing, dedicated youth engagement roles and targeted outreach. As the CEO explained, *"We act as a conduit between projects and young people who are dealing with difficult things in their lives. Early intervention is critical and this funding has helped us to make that possible."*

A major development was the expanded Amplify project, offering workshops, mentoring, rehearsal space and opportunities to programme gigs. One young participant, who was awaiting a court date at the time of joining, made exceptional progress, as the Lead Programmes and Projects Manager explained '*he made new friends, re-wrote the narrative and really engaged. It not only helped him but also the whole family."* Amplify has since secured Youth Music funding to continue beyond March 2026.

Partnerships underpinned Vital Hive. Work with Shropshire Supports Refugees enabled access to families who rarely take part in cultural events, while activity in Meole Brace, on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, helped revitalise and restructure an existing youth club, encouraging many more young people to attend. The club is now a CIC and can apply for funding to support its future sustainability.

Volunteering became a defining feature of the project, with some young adults, who had accessed the support through Vital Hive, helping to deliver events including the 2024 Street Festival. *"Volunteering is an important aspect. It gives a sense of belonging"* the CEO noted. One young person has since joined The Hive's Board of Trustees.

UKSPF also supported extensive staff and volunteer development, enabling The Hive to invest in the skills, confidence and capability of everyone involved in delivery. Training included safeguarding, and active by-stander training, helping the organisation meet key quality assurance standards, improve practice and better meet the needs of participants. As the CEO noted, *"The amount of different training the project has provided has been incredible."*

While the project faced challenges, including short timescales in which to deliver and significant monitoring requirements, the support from Council was highly valued. The team noted that having responsive and accessible officers made a real difference to keeping the project on track *"Hannah and Gary were so helpful. Hannah turned things around so quickly and did everything she could to help."*

Without UKSPF, The Hive would not have been able to extend its offer at this scale. Vital Hive has created accessible creative spaces, broadened inclusion and delivered meaningful outcomes for young people and families across Shropshire.

Shropshire APF and AGRI

Aston University

Additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, is transforming product design and production, yet the high cost of industrial-grade technology places it beyond the reach of most SMEs. Aston University's Advanced Prototyping Facility (APF) was created to make this technology accessible, offering businesses hands-on design and manufacturing support. Building on its success in Birmingham, Aston University extended the model into Shropshire through two UKSPF-funded projects: Shropshire APF and AGRI. The Shropshire APF received £396,707 UKSPF and was open to all sectors based in Shropshire whilst AGRI received £274,972 and focused on agri-tech, food and drink businesses. The projects offered support with product design, prototyping and adopting additive manufacturing technologies. It also provided digital design support, software/tools and advice for design-for-manufacture. Both projects aimed to help SMEs innovate, adopt new technologies and strengthen in-house design and digital capability.

Drawing on previous ERDF experience, the University was able to mobilise quickly with Shropshire APF launching in July 2023 and AGRI following in November. The support provided by UKSPF funding mainly covered staffing, placement students and commercial software licences, while the University provided specialist equipment and expertise. This enabled fully funded technical support enabling businesses to work directly with engineers and designers to refine products, test materials and build innovation confidence.

The two projects achieved strong engagement. Shropshire APF supported 111 SMEs, 52 of which engaged in knowledge transfer and 12 adopted new technologies, creating 71 FTE jobs. AGRI supported 59 SMEs, engaging 34 in knowledge transfer, helping 40 adopt new technologies and developing 13 new-to-market products. A case study demonstrating support provided to a Shropshire business called Sonic Games Ltd can be found here.

The project also enabled valuable opportunities for Aston University students, who gained real-world client experience through placements. One student, Kate, said: *"It's very different working with a company compared to doing coursework. I'm really grateful — I wouldn't be such a good designer now if I hadn't had this experience."* Two students went on to achieve first-class degrees, and one helped to secure a £30,000 contract for the University.

Over the course of the project, demand shifted significantly. Initially, around half of businesses sought prototyping and half digital support; by late 2024, this had increased to 80% digital support. The falling cost of 3D printers and the growing importance of branding and web presence drove this change. The introduction of a digital services strand, covering website creation, SEO and cyber audit further increased relevance and reach.

Paul Gretton, Senior project Manager, observed that while Aston University would have continued this work without UKSPF, progress would have been far slower and on a smaller scale. He said: *"UKSPF has enabled us to reach far more businesses in Shropshire and tailor our support to what they actually need. The mix of design, prototyping and digital skills has made a real difference to their ability to innovate and grow."*

Paul confirmed that Aston University intends to continue the work, albeit at a smaller scale, beyond the UKSPF period. Future delivery may adopt a low-cost, pay-to-participate model to maintain engagement with established client businesses. However, sustaining the same level of reach and impact will depend on access to external funding. Continued investment would ensure that this valuable support remains inclusive and that innovation among smaller businesses is not constrained by cost.

Ignite

Enable – Supported Employment Services Shropshire Council

The Ignite programme, funded through £417,590UKSPF, provided personalised employability and wellbeing support for people in Shropshire who were economically inactive or not currently able to consider employment. The programme offered a holistic package including confidence-building, emotional resilience, employability skills, careers advice, digital support and in-work assistance. Each participant was matched with a dedicated key worker who guided them from initial engagement through to employment or further training.

Key support workers played a central role in delivery. Their day typically involved working one-to-one with participants, completing a vocational profile, helping them build CVs, prepare job applications, practise interview skills and explore realistic career pathways. One support worker described face-to-face contact as one of the most effective aspects of the programme, enabling rapport to be built quickly and allowing support to be tailored to individual need. Early assessment and the use of personalised SMART action plans helped ensure that different ages, backgrounds and confidence levels could be supported appropriately.

Ignite served people with diverse and often complex needs. Participants included long-term unemployed, young people unsure about next steps, individuals recovering from poor health or people with limited qualifications and experience. Key workers adapted their approach to each person to build trust and identify what could make the biggest difference.

Despite challenges, particularly working with a wide age range and participants with multiple barriers, the programme delivered significant outcomes. Examples highlighted by a support worker included young people achieving the grades they needed to progress into their chosen careers and several participants, with criminal convictions, gaining their CSCS card and securing employment in construction. For Ignite, success was measured not just by job outcomes, but by stability, confidence, regular income and individuals feeling *"happy and content"* in their working lives.

Ignite also achieved wider community impact beyond its formal outputs. In Shrewsbury, the key worker noted that Ignite had become the 'go-to programmes' for young people needing support, with Jobcentre staff, community groups, parents and teachers routinely signposting individuals to the service. This visibility and trust allowed the programme to reach people who may otherwise have fallen out of the system.

Looking ahead, Enable suggested the programme could be strengthened by tailoring delivery by age group and involving experts-by-experience in group workshops, helping participants relate to stories from people *"in similar situations."* Without UKSPF, the support would be far more limited, reduced to brief community-based meetings, ad-hoc training referrals and a single in-work support call before case closure.

The UKSPF investment has enabled a far more intensive and person-centred model. As a result, Ignite has supported people to rebuild confidence, gain qualifications, enter work and see a future for themselves that previously felt out of reach.

4.9 Impact – Lessons Learned

4.9.1 Overall, the Programme has delivered clear and positive impacts across communities, businesses and individuals, with significant evidence of short- and medium-term benefits despite compressed delivery timescales. Impact was most evident where interventions were locally grounded, well-targeted and delivered by trusted organisations with established links to beneficiaries. Set out below are the key lessons learned in relation to impact:

(i) Future locally administered funds would benefit from clear local leadership, transparent decision-making and sufficient dedicated delivery capacity, enabling local authorities to shape programmes that respond effectively to local priorities. The evaluation also highlights that where delivery timescales are short, the direct commissioning of trusted delivery partners is critical to achieving timely and effective delivery, while avoiding disproportionate management and administrative burden on Programme teams.

(ii) Impact often manifested first through qualitative and intermediate outcomes before longer-term economic or behavioural change could be fully evidenced. Improvements in confidence, skills, organisational capacity, collaboration and local pride were consistently reported across all three Investment Priorities, particularly within Communities and Place and People and Skills activity. Recognising these intermediate outcomes is essential to capturing the full contribution of place-based programmes operating within short timeframes.

(iii) Partnership-based delivery amplified impact beyond individual projects. Many interventions generated additional benefits through strengthened networks, collaboration, referrals and shared learning between organisations. These relational impacts supported sustainability, follow-on activity and leveraged additional funding, indicating that UKSPF investment acted as a catalyst rather than a standalone intervention.

(iv) Place-based and capital investments delivered visible, tangible change that supported wider social and economic outcomes. Improvements to community facilities, public realm, heritage assets and market infrastructure enhanced accessibility, participation and local pride, while also supporting footfall, visitor engagement and business activity. However, the full value of these investments is likely to continue to accrue over time, reinforcing the need for longer-term monitoring of place-based impact.

(v) Supporting Local Business and People and Skills interventions demonstrated clear additionality where support was tailored, specialist and responsive to need. Evidence from these types of projects shows that targeted advice, grants and training contributed directly to improved productivity, employment outcomes, skills attainment and progression. Peer learning and cohort-based models were particularly effective in sustaining impact beyond the funded period.

(vi) Robust impact evidence relies on a mixed-method approach. Projects that combined quantitative indicators (e.g. participation, jobs, qualifications, carbon savings) with qualitative evidence (e.g. case studies, testimonials, before-and-after data) were best able to articulate both scale and depth of impact. Continued support for proportionate but consistent evaluation approaches would deepen understanding of long-term outcomes in future programmes

(vii) Evidence from delivery partners indicates that timescales, funding flexibility, monitoring requirements and opportunities for collaboration all influenced the scale, consistency and sustainability of outcomes achieved. Future programmes should be designed with

sufficient duration, proportionate administration and built-in mechanisms for coordination and shared learning, enabling delivery partners to maximise impact while reducing avoidable delivery pressures.

Impact: Summary

Despite a compressed delivery period, the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund have delivered clear and wide-ranging impacts across Shropshire's communities, businesses and residents. Through a combination of place-based capital investment, targeted business support, skills intervention and employability support, the Programme has generated tangible short- and medium-term benefits, with further impacts expected to continue to emerge beyond the formal funding period.

Shropshire Council's local oversight played a key role in shaping impact, enabling funding to be aligned with local priorities, mobilised quickly and managed transparently. This approach supported effective management of public funds, high levels of partner engagement and flexible delivery across all three Investment Priorities.

Revenue and capital investment under Communities and Place delivered visible improvements to community facilities, cultural assets, green spaces and public realm, alongside high levels of participation in cultural and community activity. These interventions strengthened volunteering, organisational capacity and local pride, while establishing foundations for longer-term outcomes such as increased usage, footfall and wellbeing.

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority generated significant economic benefits, with extensive enterprise engagement, innovation support and grant funding. Businesses reported improved productivity, resilience and confidence, alongside job creation and early growth outcomes. Capital investment, through the Rural Fund, supported rural businesses to modernise, adopt new technologies and improve operational efficiency, with further economic impacts expected to accrue over time.

Within People and Skills, interventions supported economically inactive and working residents to improve employability, gain qualifications, develop essential and vocational skills and enhance digital inclusion and capacity. Participants progressed into employment pathways and demonstrated improved readiness for work, recognising that sustained employment outcomes require longer-term engagement.

Looking ahead, the evaluation highlights that future impact will be influenced not only by the choice of interventions, but also by programme design and delivery conditions. Longer delivery timescales, proportionate monitoring and reporting and structured opportunities for collaboration and shared learning would support delivery partners to plan more effectively, embed activity and maximise long-term outcomes. Overall, the Programme has provided a firm platform for future investment by improving places, supporting jobs, developing businesses and improving workforce skills and employability across Shropshire.

5. Management and Delivery

5.1 Management and Delivery - Introduction

This section of the Evaluation reviews the management and delivery of the Shropshire UKSPF Investment Programme, focusing on Programme governance and management and delivery of the Investment Priorities. It also examines Shropshire Council's commitment in promoting equality and diversity in all its commissioned projects.

5.2 Programme Governance and Oversight

5.2.1 The Programme was governed by the SEP Board and represented by public, private, education and the voluntary sector. The SEP Board was established in December 2022 to provide the mechanism for delivery of the Economic Growth Strategy (EGS) 2022 – 27 and provide the required oversight for the delivery of the UKSPF government funding in Shropshire. Shropshire Council, as lead authority, retained the final approval and awarding contracts role. The Panel was Chaired by Jeannie McGillivray from the private sector.

5.2.2 The SEP Board was established to undertake the following duties:

- Provide a robust framework for ensuring that the EGS is implemented across partners, stakeholders, businesses and organisations and take collective ownership of the delivery of the EGS and Action Plan;

- Bring together partners and organisations to work collectively to develop, drive and own the strategy;

- Assume the role of the SEP Board for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), providing oversight for the delivery of this government funding in Shropshire as per the requirements for the administration of this fund set out by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; and

- Make recommendations to the Section 151 Officer of the Accountable body (i.e. Shropshire Council) in relation to how UKSPF and other agreed funding sources could be invested to support the delivery of the EGS and Shropshire Plan priorities.

5.2.3 Three Delivery Groups were established to support the design and planning of project Calls across the SEP Board's three themes, these being Place, Business and Skills. Each Group brought together Shropshire Council Officers and partner representatives to shape the focus, scope and timing of the Calls.

Once applications were received, they were assessed and scored by appointed independent appraisers, appraisers from partner organisations and Council Officers. An Appraisal Panel was then convened, comprised of individuals with no direct interest in the projects under review to ensure robust management of conflicts of interest (for example, a Business representative would appraise Community project applications). Following the Panel's review, the Delivery Groups considered the scores and submitted recommendations to the SEP Board for final endorsement.

5.2.4 Although the three Delivery Groups played an important early role, attendance was inconsistent and much of the work fell to the Technical Officers. Consequently, the Business and Place Groups were disbanded. The Skills Group, however, continued and broadened its membership, bringing in additional VSCE, HE and FE representatives, to support delivery of the Key Performance Indicators in the Shropshire EGS.

5.2.5 Jeannie McGillivray highlighted the breadth of the UKSPF and Rural Fund programme as one of the SEP Board's key successes, noting that support had reached community projects, businesses and initiatives strengthening employability and skills. The Chair felt the Programme had delivered tangible benefits to both service providers and the wider public. Oversight by the Board was described as transparent and inclusive, with representation from business, voluntary and public sector partners. The Chair also praised the UKSPF Programme Team, led by Gary Spence, for its professionalism, efficiency and fairness in administering funds:

'The process felt very transparent, clear and efficient. The UKSPF Team, with Gary Spence leading, worked extremely well'.

5.2.6 Towards the end of 2024/2025, the SEP Board began to lose momentum. While it had met regularly throughout most of the UKSPF Programme period, activity shifted increasingly to written procedures once UKSPF allocations had been confirmed. This approach still met Government requirements but it was felt by some members of the UKSPF Programme Team that it reduced opportunities for discussion and collective scrutiny.

5.2.7 Several Technical Officers reflected that the size of the SEP Board, around 37 members, made meaningful engagement challenging. Over the UKSPF delivery period attendance declined, email responses were limited and some Technical Officers felt the Board functioned more as a communications forum than an active decision-making body. Despite the large membership, the processes for managing conflicts of interest were reported as being clear, robust and consistently applied.

5.2.8 Administrative demands were also described as high, particularly given the number of interventions and the need to manage separate capital and revenue streams. Nevertheless, governance arrangements remained open and transparent and the SEP Board's role in endorsing decisions contributed to assurance and accountability. Despite the practical challenges identified, the overall delivery framework was effective and the Programme successfully met its spend requirements.

5.3 Programme Delivery Structure

5.3.1 All Projects were co-ordinated and managed by the UKSPF Programme Team, comprising the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer and three Technical Officers aligned to the Investment Priorities (Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills). The External Funding and Technical Lead Officer reported to the Service Manager for Economy, Funding and Skills.

5.3.2 The Programme Team was responsible for co-ordinating the open call process, supporting applicants, overseeing project delivery, administering change requests, undertaking monitoring and ensuring compliance with DLUHC/MHCLG requirements. Regular communication between the Technical Officers and delivery organisations was central to maintaining momentum and addressing emerging issues.

5.4 Finance and Legal Support

5.4.1 The Programme Team was supported by key corporate services, with financial oversight provided by the Strategic Financial Accountant within the Council's Financial Technical Accounting Team. This role covered budgeting, forecasting, monitoring and reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG, ensuring that claims and expenditure were accurately recorded and compliant with government requirements. Legal Services contributed to drafting and issuing grant funding agreements, as well as advising on contractual, procurement and compliance matters. Their input ensured that projects were delivered within statutory and regulatory frameworks and that risks were effectively managed.

5.4.2 Financial monitoring and reporting relied on a combination of UKSPF spreadsheets and internal systems. These had to account for multiple interventions, funding streams and revenue/capital allocations, which sometimes made tracking and reconciliation complex. Close collaboration between Finance and the Programme Team, particularly with designated Technical Officers, was essential to ensure that records were consistent and that quarterly claims could be reconciled and reported accurately. The Strategic Financial Accountant commented:

'It was difficult as we had to monitor against different interventions/capital/revenue/Rural fund/UKSPF. Some agreements covered so many different elements – it could get very complicated'.

5.4.3 The financial management systems were generally effective, but several challenges were reported. The volume of project and contract variations, particularly toward the end of 2024/25, created significant pressure on staff. Small grant schemes and community crowdfunding initiatives were particularly time-consuming relative to the resources available. The Strategic Financial Accountant highlighted the need for clear roles, dedicated finance staffing and sufficient lead-in time for reconciliation and approval to prevent delays.

'It is important in future we make sure staff resources are in place. Not replacing the Finance Officer who left the organisation was based on the assumption that the funds would end in March 2025, but there was another year'.

5.4.4 Effective delivery relied on good collaboration with Legal Services. Grant funding agreements were reviewed by both Legal and Finance to ensure eligibility, compliance and proper contractual arrangements. The Strategic Financial Accountant and Programme Team worked closely to establish reporting deadlines and reconcile claims, while Legal support was critical for contract variations and changes to project budgets. Interview feedback emphasised that timely input from Finance and Legal was essential for keeping projects on track, though staffing limitations and high volumes of variations sometimes caused delays. The Technical Lead Officer reported *'Any change to a project's budget meant we had to do a contract variation. Toward the end of 24/25 it got very bureaucratic with delays in having to get Legal to change contracts and Finance not providing their input until the contract was place'.*

5.4.5 Lessons from managing UKSPF and the Rural Fund finances include the importance of ensuring adequate staffing throughout the Programme, particularly in peak periods and for programmes extending beyond initial funding assumptions. Simplifying monitoring and reporting processes, providing clear guidance on tolerance thresholds and maintaining close collaboration between Finance, Legal and the Programme Team were identified as key enablers of smoother delivery. For future programmes, dedicated finance support and improved planning for end-of-year reconciliation would help balance administrative demands with programme delivery priorities.

'Internally it was very difficult. We had to strike a balance between being risk adverse and taking accountability'.

5.5 Staffing and Capacity Changes During Delivery

5.5.1 Midway through delivery, several staffing changes affected the Programme's supporting infrastructure. The Finance Officer who previously acted as the Programme Team's primary point of contact left her role and the position was not replaced. Responsibilities were transferred to the Strategic Financial Accountant, increasing workload and reducing capacity. As a result, financial checks and agreement reviews took longer to process. The Strategic Financial Accountant reported that *'it caused a bit of a transition time as I had to get to grips with the Programme and all of its projects'*.

5.5.2 Similarly, although a dedicated Legal Executive was appointed within Legal Services, their capacity was constrained by competing demands. As a result, the Legal Executive faced significant pressure at a time when the volume of funding agreements, claims and contract variations was at its highest.

5.5.3 Towards the end of 2024/25, the volume of contract variations increased significantly, coinciding with the budget-setting process for the following financial year. This created additional administrative pressure and extended processing times, compounded by capacity constraints within Finance during this particularly busy period in the financial cycle. Prior to March 2025, there were no tolerance thresholds in place, meaning all variations required formal approval through Finance. After March 2025, a 15% tolerance threshold was introduced, allowing changes below this level to be approved internally and helping to streamline the process.

Several Technical Officers reflected on these challenges:

'Grant Funding Agreement then had to be prepared and signed off by Finance. This took 6-8 weeks. A lot of external projects didn't want to start spending until they had their approval. It delayed spend. There were no tolerance thresholds in place. It all had to go through Finance'.

'We had to keep moving money around, for example between different Priorities and also within Interventions. Claims and Legal Contracts had to keep changing. Some contracts etc were inconsistent. There were not enough staff in Legal Team to oversee everything. It took way too long'.

5.5.4 Although the experience of the staff involved in delivering the Programme brought clear benefits, some staff reflected that there were occasions where opportunities for closer joint working and shared learning could have been further developed, particularly in relation to the Legal and Finance Teams supporting Programme delivery. More widely, increased homeworking following COVID, combined with hot-desking and the absence of a permanent shared workspace, was seen by some as further reducing informal opportunities for collaboration and cross-programme alignment.

'At times it was messy. We didn't all do it together and went our own way. Working from home also didn't help, we were working in silos a lot of the time. We often missed out on joining up opportunities'.

5.5.5 Technical Officers demonstrated competence and professionalism undertaking the delivery of their Investment Priorities but noted that the wider roles across the Team were not always clearly defined, which, at times, created confusion. Staff felt this stemmed from remote working, limited visibility of eachother's tasks, the urgency with which the Programme had to be delivered and the volume of work required.

'There has not been enough time to work out roles and responsibilities, but it needs to be looked at before another Programme comes on board'.

5.5.6 Despite these challenges, staff remained committed to delivering the Programme. There is a sense of achievement amongst staff and appreciation of each other's capabilities and the hard work that was undertaken up to 31 March 2025.

'It wasn't easy, but we stuck with it. Looking back, there's a real sense of achievement across the team and genuine appreciation for how hard everyone has worked'.

5.5.7 Overall, while the Programme benefited from a highly capable and motivated team, future programmes would benefit from roles and responsibilities being clearly defined from the outset, with particular clarity around the remit of each role within the Team.

5.6 Delivery Across the Three Investment Priorities

5.6.1 The Technical Lead Officer managed the delivery of the UKSPF and Rural Fund Programmes, overseeing the Technical Officers responsible for Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. In this role, the Lead Officer coordinated closely with internal teams, including Legal and Finance, to ensure robust governance, compliance and Programme assurance. The Lead Officer's responsibilities encompassed overall Programme oversight, reporting to the SEP Board, maintaining alignment with local strategies and priorities and guiding the operational work of the Technical Officers. The role evolved over time, expanding from initial oversight of Programme set-up, including recruitment of the Team and delivery structures, to broader responsibility for monitoring delivery, resolving challenges and maximising the impact of all the projects across the county. The Lead Officer also played a key role in fostering relationships with external partners and ensuring that the Programme supported Shropshire's strategic priorities.

5.6.2 Each of the three Technical Officers played a central role in shaping and delivering activity within their respective Investment Priority. Their responsibilities spanned the full Programme cycle, from designing Calls for projects and managing contracting to overseeing delivery, ensuring compliance and monitoring outcomes. This required close liaison with delivery partners, troubleshooting issues, coordination of reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG and ensuring projects remained aligned with local needs. As one officer described, *'we had to build everything from scratch',* reflecting the breadth and complexity of responsibilities under UKSPF.

An overview of delivery for each of the Investment Priorities is provided below.

5.6.3 Communities and Place – Delivery

(i) The Communities and Place portfolio was shaped through multiple Calls for projects in 2023, including a dedicated Rural Fund Call. The Communities and Place Technical Officer led the commissioning and allocation of funding across both UKSPF and the Rural Fund, managing a complex mix of capital and revenue streams. Her role spanned appraisal, contract preparation, claims management and later significant in-year adjustments to ensure funding was fully committed and spent. Toward the end of the Programme, this required intensive reallocation work, including transferring £400,000 of capital to revenue and tracking delivery separately for the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund.

'*It was really busy across the different Calls, but the process itself worked well — projects were treated fairly and consistently'.*

(ii) The resulting portfolio consisted of 28 projects spanning five interventions, these being green spaces, culture and heritage, active travel, capacity building/volunteering infrastructure and feasibility activity. The Technical Officer felt the mix of projects provided good geographic and thematic coverage, with applicants required to demonstrate clear need and demand. Most projects delivered successfully, though a small number of internal Shropshire Council-led projects did not progress, largely due to timescale, planning or procurement barriers.

'Capital was by far the most time-consuming — the checks, the evidence, the follow-up queries. It all added pressure'.

(iii) Alignment with wider community activity was generally good, with examples of co-ordination to avoid duplication including Energize, who worked with the Crowdfunding Team. However, an initiative around High Street/Town Centre intervention proved the most challenging. Applicants struggled to secure match funding and obtain planning consent in time, with the late arrival of Rural Fund capital compressing delivery windows further. The Technical Officer emphasised that while alignment mechanisms were effective, regulatory timescales were a structural barrier.

'Planning held up a lot of projects. Even when the funding was there, they just couldn't get their consents through in time'.

(v) Projects demonstrated substantial added value, though evidencing outcomes was more difficult. Claims processes required projects to report on outputs such as events, volunteer numbers and engagement metrics, which were straightforward to collect. However, assessing outcomes such as improved wellbeing, community cohesion or preventative benefits was far more challenging within the Programme timeframe, especially as many capital projects completed only in March 2025. Nevertheless, the Technical Officer highlighted several high-impact examples, such as the Ludlow Community Café, improvements to canal towpaths and infrastructure that supported preventative work with vulnerable groups.

'There were some lovely examples of how the funding supported preventative work, especially with vulnerable people….The Ludlow Community Café was a great example of something with real community benefit'.

(vi) Capital projects enabled significant physical improvements that would not otherwise have been possible, particularly through the Rural Fund. The Technical Officer noted examples where small investments unlocked much wider social or health benefits, for instance, enhanced park accessibility for families and wheelchair users or heritage improvements at Cambrian Railway Station. She also observed meaningful alignment with People and Skills projects, with cross-programme outcomes emerging in areas such as youth engagement and anti-social behaviour.

'A lot of the capital only finished in March, so the longer-term benefits will only be realised later'.

(vii) Delivery challenges were most pronounced around capital, which required extensive checks, regulatory compliance and follow-up queries. Time pressure was a recurring issue: late funding announcements, planning delays, procurement requirements and the sequencing of approvals left limited delivery time, especially for capital schemes. Match funding was also a constraint which was initially set at 30%. It hindered good-quality projects. Reducing match to 10% at year-end helped unblock delivery. The Technical Officer recommended more flexible match expectations in future programmes.

'Towards the end it became a juggling act — especially separating the Rural Fund from the main UKSPF allocation'.

(viii) Project management and commissioning processes were viewed as transparent, fair and auditable. Weighted scoring sheets and clear thresholds ensured consistency, with no applicants challenging any funding decision. While early use of Sub-Groups under the SEP Board created complications due to lack of member involvement, switching to written procedures streamlined the process. However, delays in finalising grant agreements,

linked to internal processes, caused hesitancy among external applicants to begin delivery and created pressure near year-end.

(ix) Communication with delivery partners was generally positive, although the breadth of project types made collective engagement difficult. As a result, the Technical Officer met with projects individually. This approach provided tailored support but was resource-intensive. To encourage collaboration across the Investment Priorities, the Technical Officers for Business and Skills were involved in discussions whenever relevant to ensure projects were aligned and well connected.

'Because the projects were so different, meeting people individually worked best — but it was very time-intensive'.

Communication challenges were most evident with Parish Councils, many of whom became aware of opportunities too late due to reliance on hearing about the programme through intermediary networks rather than direct communication.

(x) Reflecting on the Programme, the Technical Officer's key lessons emphasise the need for planning and regulatory consents to be secured prior to contracting, clearer role definitions during delivery and simplicity in funding conditions such as match requirements. She also highlighted the importance of strategic outreach, noting that while multiple channels were used, including the Invest platform, community networks and LinkedIn, engagement was uneven across sectors. Future Programmes would benefit from more structured and targeted communication, longer lead-in times and clearer responsibilities across the delivery team.

5.6.4 Supporting Local Business – Delivery

(i) The Technical Officer for Supporting Local Business managed the full end-to-end lifecycle for both revenue and capital programmes, delivering Calls in April and September 2023, overseeing contracting and ensuring compliance. The early workload was amplified by tight timescales and the need to develop processes in real time. Despite this, her background in ERDF/ESF helped the Programme mobilise quickly, with efficient systems put in place to support delivery partners and applicants.

(ii) The Technical Officer observed that the combination of Main UKSPF Programme revenue projects and Rural Fund capital grants created a well-balanced portfolio that supported businesses at different stages and across Shropshire. Although delivery appeared seamless from an applicant's perspective, internally it was far more complex. In particular, the eight Supporting Local Business Interventions were described as unwieldy, requiring frequent budget adjustments to keep delivery on track.

'*To the businesses it looked like one Programme but behind the scenes it was completely separate, with different reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG'.*

(iii) There was good alignment with wider business support provision and the Technical Officer emphasised that pre-contracting discussions were important in avoiding duplication. The projects provided good geographic coverage and cross-referrals worked well, supported by regular meetings and the countywide Expo event. The only area not progressed was the Social Enterprise intervention, where proposals overlapped with existing activity.

'*We ironed everything out up front and made sure nobody was competing with each other*'.

(iv) The Technical Officer believed the Programme added clear value to Shropshire's business community, with a number of projects demonstrating high demand and tangible outcomes, highlighting Aston University's rapid prototyping support as an example, noting it had a waiting list of businesses. Capital grants enabled investment that would not otherwise have happened, however they did create administrative burden, especially the small value grants. The absence of match funding helped pace of delivery but required thorough checks against double-funding.

(v) In terms of delivery, the Technical Officer felt the Programme worked well where experienced staff, transparent commissioning and collaborative working were in place. However, internal processes sometimes created delays and the Technical Officer also questioned whether more delivery could have been delegated, particularly to the Growth Hub, which felt '*would have saved so much work*' and offered valuable business insight.

(vi) Funding levels were generally appropriate, but the compressed timeframe created significant pressure. With DLUHC contracting only finalised in December 2022, *'we basically lost the first year*', which forced rapid mobilisation and repeated budget reallocations. While the Team responded quickly, the Officer noted that *'it makes much more sense to have a five-year programme*' to reflect the scale of work required to establish and coordinate delivery effectively.

(vii) Looking ahead, several improvements for future programmes were identified. These included simplifying interventions; reviewing overhead rates to ensure the most effective use of public funding; strengthening controls to ensure funding is appropriately targeted and does not substitute for posts that could reasonably be resourced within large organisations and reducing reliance on Open Calls by commissioning established delivery partners directly.

The Technical Officer emphasised the value of experienced staff being allocated to deliver specific Investment Priorities, however emphasised the disproportionate administrative effort given the short delivery window.

'The allocation of staff to each of the Priority Areas worked well. We all knew our areas inside out…however, it was a lot of effort for such a short programme. It would make so much sense to have a longer programme, 5 years plus'.

5.6.5 People and Skills – Delivery

(i) The People and Skills Technical Officer managed the end-to-end delivery, from designing Calls for projects to assessing applications, awarding funding and monitoring outcomes. The Technical Officer facilitated the Skills Delivery Group and engaged closely with the SEP Board, local employers, training providers and community organisations, ensuring that interventions addressed local skills gaps and supported inclusive growth. The Technical Officer noted that managing multiple projects simultaneously required careful coordination, particularly in light of the Delta procurement system and conflict-of-interest management.

'If I were to do it now I would just do it as Calls. When going through Delta you have a deadline and they are all in on that day. There's a lot of work to do all in one go. Having it as a Call process I could start looking at submissions as and when they came in and spread the workload'.

(ii) The People and Skills projects were designed to provide a balanced mix of support, including supported employment, digital skills and upskilling for both employed and economically inactive individuals. The Technical Officer stressed that activities were

informed by data and stakeholder consultation to meet local needs, though she noted that delays in project start dates and short funding windows limited impact. Despite these constraints, the programmes addressed foundational skills, vocational training and inclusion, supporting NEETs, older workers and people with disabilities.

(iii) Alignment with wider provision was largely positive, with projects complementing existing Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programmes and European Social Fund (ESF) legacy provision. Delivery partners, such as Enable and Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation, brought extensive experience, helping to avoid duplication. The Technical Officer highlighted some challenges, including inconsistent engagement from FE colleges and early confusion among Job Centre Plus work coaches, which was resolved through direct involvement in project groups. Overall, collaboration through the Skills Delivery Group and SEP Board helped maintain coherence across the local skills ecosystem.

(iv) People and Skills projects added value by filling gaps in mainstream provision. Without UKSPF funding, supported employment, digital skills and upskilling interventions would not have been available locally. The Technical Officer emphasised that participants gained confidence, social connections and improved mental health, with projects targeting those furthest from the labour market. Interventions integrated wraparound support such as mental health guidance, childcare, transport and digital inclusion, which are rarely funded through other programmes, providing additional social and economic benefits.

'Projects have reached individuals who are often underserved by mainstream employment and skills programmes, such as those furthest from the labour market, people with complex barriers and those in rural or deprived areas. By offering bespoke support, they've helped participants build confidence, gain qualifications and move closer to employment'.

(v) Project delivery was underpinned by collaborative working, with regular meetings facilitating referrals and problem-solving across projects. The Technical Officer highlighted successes including high engagement levels, tangible job outcomes, formal qualifications and improved employability skills. She noted significant results from School of Coding, Brightstar Boxing and sport-based learning initiatives, with beneficiaries describing support as '*life-changing*'. However, short-term funding cycles, multi-agency support needs and constrained employer engagement were persistent challenges.

(vi) The level of funding and compressed delivery timeframe limited the potential impact of People and Skills interventions. Working with individuals furthest from the labour market required intensive, long-term support, making six-month sustained employment targets challenging to achieve. While digital skills and upskilling projects overachieved on outputs, overall, the Technical Officer felt that increased investment and a longer programme window could have enabled broader impact and better outcomes for vulnerable and rural populations. The Technical Officer felt so much more could have been achieved, highlighting that the Digital Skills project had a waiting listing of over 250 people.

'Short-term funding cycles made it difficult to offer ongoing support or track long-term outcomes, particularly for individuals with complex barriers'.

'The School of Coding had a waiting list of over 250 individuals. The Programme's impact could have been significantly increased with more investment and extended delivery'.

(vii) The Technical Officer identified lessons for future People and Skills programmes, including rationalising governance structures, streamlining SEP Board engagement, building tolerance levels into programme design and improving employer engagement. Co-ordinated Call-based funding approaches in future would help to spread workload and

reduce pressure, ensuring longer delivery periods for supported employment and strengthening collaboration with community and business support initiatives.

5.7 Public Sector Equality Duty

5.7.1 Shropshire Council adheres to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that its policies, decisions and Programmes, including UKSPF, take full account of the needs of people with protected characteristics.

The Council's approach is underpinned by the three core aims of the Duty:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Fostering good relations between people from different backgrounds to promote understanding and inclusion.

Through this approach, Shropshire Council sought to ensure that UKSPF-funded activity not only met statutory equality requirements but also contributed to wider ambitions around fairness, accessibility and inclusive growth across the county.

5.7.2 At the project level, all organisations receiving UKSPF funding were required to demonstrate how equality and diversity considerations were embedded in their delivery, including the assurance that services were accessible, barriers faced by under-represented groups were addressed and proactive engagement with diverse communities across Shropshire took place.

These measures reflect the Council's commitment to promoting equality and inclusion throughout the design, commissioning and implementation of its UKSPF Programme.

5.8 Management and Delivery - Lessons Learned

5.8.1 Overall, management and delivery arrangements were effective and enabled the Programme to remain compliant, well-governed and responsive to local needs despite significant time pressures and complexity. Set out below are the key lessons learned:

(i) Compressed Programme timescales place significant pressure on delivery structures and require early mobilisation, stable resourcing and clearly defined roles to function effectively. Staff commitment and prior experience of external funding were critical success factors, highlighting the importance of early appointment, continuity and sufficient capacity throughout the Programme lifecycle.

(ii) Clear allocation of responsibility supported effective delivery. Assigning dedicated Technical Officers to each Investment Priority enabled focused oversight, better relationships with delivery partners and better alignment of activity within thematic areas. Looking ahead, incorporating a cross-cutting coordination function within existing structures would further strengthen future programmes by improving integration across Project Calls, aligning themes and interventions and supporting collaboration, referrals and partnership working between delivery partners.

(iii) Robust governance and compliance systems were essential in managing risk across a complex funding landscape. The involvement of Legal and Finance teams with external funding experience ensured effective controls around subsidy control, contracting and grant management. However, capacity constraints at peak periods created bottlenecks, demonstrating the need for flexible resourcing and contingency planning in these teams to maintain momentum.

(iv) Programme scale and governance structures influenced effectiveness. Large boards and sub-groups supported accountability but limited meaningful engagement and agile

decision-making. Smaller, more focused groups would enable more meaningful challenge, clearer direction and more active participation while maintaining appropriate oversight.

(v) Remote and distributed working practices, combined with fewer opportunities for informal interaction, limited collaboration across teams, including between delivery and support functions such as Legal and Finance. Future programmes would benefit from more structured opportunities for cross-team engagement, clearer definition of roles and interfaces and regular in-person meetings to support coordination, consistency and shared learning across large, multi-priority programmes.

(vi) Built-in flexibility within management arrangements improved delivery efficiency. The early introduction of tolerance thresholds for minor changes reduced administrative burden and avoided unnecessary delays, reinforcing the value of proportionate change-control mechanisms in grant-funded programmes.

(vii) Capital delivery is particularly sensitive to planning, procurement and regulatory requirements. Supply-chain constraints and approval processes limited delivery flexibility, reinforcing the need for longer lead-in times, realistic delivery schedules and early risk identification for capital-intensive interventions.

(viii) Short programme durations limit the ability to embed systems, build partnerships and maximise impact. A multi-year funding model would support more strategic planning, smoother mobilisation and more sustainable delivery, enabling management structures and partnerships to mature over time.

Management and Delivery: Summary

The Shropshire UKSPF Investment Programme was delivered through a structured governance and operational framework, overseen by the Shropshire Economic Partnership (SEP) Board, which included public, private, education and voluntary sector representatives. The Board provided strategic oversight, ensuring alignment with the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–27, while Shropshire Council retained final approval and contracting authority. Three Delivery Groups initially supported project Calls across the Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. The Business and Place Groups were later disbanded due to inconsistent attendance, leaving the Skills Group to continue with broader representation.

Programme delivery was coordinated by an experienced and capable UKSPF Programme Team, led by the External Funding and Technical Lead Officer and supported by three Technical Officers, alongside Finance and Legal Services. The Team managed Calls, appraisals, contracting, monitoring, compliance and reporting to DLUHC/MHCLG. Despite compressed timescales, complex capital and revenue streams and high administrative demands, the Programme successfully met spend requirements and delivered tangible outcomes across all Investment Priorities, including accessible support that complemented and reinforced national and local strategies.

The Programme also highlighted practical lessons for future delivery. Clear role definitions, early mobilisation, dedicated staffing, proportionate change-control mechanisms and integrated cross-team coordination were critical to maintaining momentum and managing risk. Longer programme durations, smaller governance groups and realistic timelines for capital-intensive projects would further enhance efficiency and impact. Overall, the Programme demonstrated effective management, robust governance and adaptability, delivering meaningful benefits to communities, businesses and skills development while promoting equality, inclusion and local strategic priorities.

6.0 Value for Money

6.1 Value for Money – Introduction

6.1.1 This section provides a light-touch assessment of Value for Money (VfM) for the Shropshire UKSPF Programme, structured around the four core dimensions of Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity. The assessment draws on Programme expenditure data, delivery evidence, output and outcome performance, Programme documentation and feedback from delivery organisations. It is intended to be proportionate, recognising the complexity of the Programme, the one-to-many delivery model adopted across priorities and the relatively short delivery timescales associated with UKSPF.

The VfM assessment is presented for each of the three UKSPF Investment Priorities: Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business and People and Skills.

6.1.2 Across the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, the combined target expenditure by 31 March 2025 was £13,434,720. Despite a delayed Programme start and compressed delivery period, total actual expenditure reached £12,141,723.28, representing 90.4% of the overall allocation. This reflects a credible level of financial performance given the scale and complexity of delivery across multiple Investment Priorities and funding streams.

6.2 Communities and Place

6.2.1 Economy

A combined total of £5,049,606.96 (Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund, excluding Management and Admin) was allocated to Communities and Place interventions. By 31 March 2025, actual expenditure totalled £4,684,434.81, representing 92.8% of the available allocation. This high level of spend demonstrates effective financial management and the ability to mobilise and deliver activity within a constrained timeframe.

In addition, the Investment Priority secured £939,199.73 (£137,391.24 revenue and £801,808.49 capital) in match funding from third-party sources, including Shropshire Council, private sources and other UK Government funding programmes. This additional investment enhanced the overall value of the Programme by increasing leverage, enabling a greater scale and quality of place-based interventions and reinforcing the longer-term economic and community benefits resulting from the funded activity.

Funding was awarded through competitive Calls for Proposals aligned to the approved UKSPF Investment Plan, the Shropshire Plan and the Economic Growth Strategy. Calls were targeted at intermediary and locally embedded organisations capable of delivering support at scale, using a one-to-many model to maximise reach and impact.

Economy was supported through the use of established intermediary organisations with local knowledge and proven delivery capacity, reducing mobilisation costs and enabling activity to commence quickly. Delivery focused on enhancing existing community assets and infrastructure, rather than creating wholly new provision, supporting economy through scale, consistency and efficient use of resources. Clear intervention-level allocations ensured that funding was targeted towards priority themes, including town centres, cultural and heritage assets, community capacity building and rural infrastructure, allowing investment to be focused on areas of highest need and potential impact.

6.2.2 Efficiency

Efficiency was supported through the use of grant-based and programme delivery models that enabled funding to reach multiple communities and beneficiaries within a constrained delivery

period. Interventions focused on improving existing assets and infrastructure, rather than creating wholly new provision, helping to maximise the return on investment.

Projects were required to demonstrate clear community impact and alignment with local strategies at application stage. The emphasis on intermediary delivery reduced administrative overheads for the Council while enabling local organisations to tailor delivery to place-specific needs. Capital-only rural funding was targeted at settlements below defined population thresholds, ensuring that resources were focused on areas where alternative funding sources are more limited.

The scale of delivery relative to funding indicates efficient use of resources, particularly where projects generated multiple benefits across wellbeing, participation, social cohesion and use of community assets.

6.2.3 Effectiveness

Evidence from delivery organisations suggests clear additionality and effectiveness. All respondents to the Communities and Place survey reported that they would not have been able to progress their projects without UKSPF support, indicating very low deadweight and a high degree of additionality.

Beyond delivery of core outputs, projects generated wider and often unanticipated benefits, including strengthened local partnerships, increased community participation, improved wellbeing and social inclusion, enhanced organisational capacity and attraction of additional funding. These outcomes reinforce the effectiveness of the Priority in delivering change that extends beyond the immediate scope of funded activity.

Capital investment through the Rural Fund complemented this activity by creating lasting environmental and active travel assets, providing a foundation for longer-term community benefits. While some outcome measures, such as increased footfall or usage, had not yet been fully realised by March 2025, this reflects the longer timescales associated with capital investment rather than weaknesses in programme design or delivery.

Overall, the evidence indicates that expenditure under this Priority has contributed effectively to improving local places and enhancing community infrastructure across Shropshire.

6.2.4 Equity

Projects within the Communities and Place Investment Priority targeted community-level activity and were designed to address spatial and social inequalities across Shropshire. Delivery focused in particular on rural towns, villages and hamlets (with Shrewsbury excluded from the Rural Fund) market towns acting as service hubs for surrounding rural areas and communities experiencing barriers to accessing services, facilities or cultural opportunities. This place-based targeting ensured that investment was directed towards areas less likely to benefit from market-led regeneration, supporting the equity and additionality of public funding.

Equality and inclusion considerations were embedded across funded activity, with projects required to demonstrate accessibility and promote participation across protected characteristics, including those with disabilities. The nature and scale of outputs achieved provide supporting evidence of this inclusive approach. For example, substantial investment in cultural, heritage and creative activity supported wide community engagement, with 688 local events and activities delivered under local arts and culture interventions and over 1,300 recorded engagements.

In addition, alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework reinforced inclusive outcomes. Projects promoted employment and skills development for local people, including

priority groups such as care leavers and people with disabilities, encouraged local supply chain spending, offered apprenticeships and workplace training and supported sustainable practices such as reducing carbon impact and waste. By embedding Social Value alongside equity, Communities and Place interventions delivered both inclusive access and broader social, economic and environmental benefits.

6.3 Supporting Local Business

6.3.1 Economy

A total of £6,333,457.79 was allocated to Supporting Local Business interventions across the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, excluding Management and Admin. Actual expenditure reached £5,437,115.63 by 31 March 2025, representing 85.8% of the available allocation. While this level of spend was lower than that achieved under other Investment Priorities, it reflects the inherent challenges of delivering business grant and capital investment schemes within a compressed delivery timeframe and during a period of economic volatility.

The Investment Priority also secured £1,130,048.27 in capital match funding from third party sources including Shropshire Council, private sources other government funded programmes. This significantly increased the overall value of the Programme and enhanced its leverage and impact by enabling a greater scale of business investment than could have been achieved through UKSPF resources alone.

Economy was supported through the use of established delivery partners, in-house expertise and existing business networks, reducing set-up costs and enabling delivery to commence quickly. Funding focused on intermediary-led delivery of business support and grant schemes, rather than direct one-off grants to individual businesses, supporting economy through scale and consistency. The combination of advisory support, grant funding and capital investment allowed resources to be targeted at areas of highest demand and potential impact.

The Supporting Local Business interventions have made a clear contribution to local economic growth, with 192 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs created as a direct result of Programme activity to date. GVA per employee is calculated using 2023 ONS data for filled jobs (smoothed) in the Programme area. The GVA average per filled job in Shropshire is £49,136[2].

Estimates of gross economic impacts (jobs created and GVA) are detailed below:

- GVA per employee: £49,136
- GVA (per annum) estimated from gross jobs created (192): £9,434,112
- GVA over a 3-year return period: £28,302,336

These economic outcomes align closely with the priorities set out in Shropshire's *Economic Growth Strategy (2022–2027)* which provides a strategic framework for supporting business growth, innovation and skills development across the county. The employment impacts achieved through the Programme reflect both the immediate benefits of job creation and the longer-term potential for supported businesses to generate sustained local economic value. In this context, the Programme's performance demonstrates close alignment with Shropshire's ambitions for resilient, inclusive and innovation-led growth.

2 https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/datasets/subregionalproductivitylabourproductivitygvaperhourworkedandgvaperfilledjobindicesbyuknuts2andnuts3subregions

6.3.2 Efficiency

The Supporting Local Business Priority delivered extensive enterprise engagement, non-financial support and grant activity across a wide range of interventions. Monitoring data shows that business participation and advisory outputs frequently exceeded targets, indicating that delivery mechanisms were efficient in reaching and engaging local firms.

Delivery through a mix of in-house provision and contracted partners supported coordination and reduced duplication, while the Rural Fund capital grants achieved high take-up among rural businesses. Although some employment and grant-related outputs remain below target, this reflects the longer lead times associated with business investment decisions rather than inefficiencies in delivery. Overall, the evidence suggests that available resources were used efficiently to maximise business reach and early productivity gains.

6.3.3 Effectiveness

The Supporting Local Business Investment Priority has been effective in building business capability, supporting innovation and stimulating early employment growth. Several interventions exceeded targets for business engagement, technology adoption and enterprise support, demonstrating close alignment between programme design and business needs.

Early evidence of job creation, productivity improvements and adoption of new technologies indicates that UKSPF funding has contributed positively to local economic outcomes. While some impacts are still emerging, particularly for capital-supported businesses, the level of engagement achieved and the nature of early outcomes suggest that further benefits are likely to accrue beyond the end of the Programme.

Survey evidence indicates high additionality. 77% of respondents stated they would not have been able to progress without UKSPF support, while the remainder reported that activity would have progressed more slowly. On this basis, the Programme can reasonably be assumed to have delivered full additionality by accelerating and enabling business growth that would otherwise not have occurred within the same timeframe.

Additional benefits reported by delivers included enhanced business networks, raised profiles, additional funding secured and improved relationships with local authorities, reinforcing the effectiveness of the Priority beyond core outputs.

6.3.4 Equity

While the Supporting Local Business Investment Priority in Shropshire was not explicitly targeted at specific under-represented groups, the Programme was designed as a universal, intermediary-led offer intended to support a wide cross-section of the local business base. By focusing on one-to-many delivery through business support organisations, networks and partnerships, the Programme aimed to maximise reach across sectors and geographies, including rural and market town economies. This approach helped reduce barriers associated with awareness, capacity and access to support, particularly for smaller firms and micro-businesses less likely to engage directly with public funding opportunities.

Evidence from delivery indicates that this model supported broad participation across the business community. For example, 1,391 enterprises accessed non-financial support across several interventions, including innovation and R&D support, decarbonisation activity and wider employment growth measures, with associated outcomes such as the adoption of new technologies and the creation of full-time equivalent jobs. In addition, the Rural Fund provided targeted capital grant support to micro and small enterprises in rural areas, contributing to job creation and business modernisation in locations where access to alternative finance is more limited.

Equity within Supporting Local Business was further supported through targeted projects addressing barriers faced by under-represented groups. The *Enable* project supported Shropshire employers to improve disability confidence, enhance equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices and achieve DDA compliance. The *Silverpreneurs®* project focused on individuals aged 50+, helping them pursue entrepreneurship beyond corporate careers and broadening access for an often under-represented age group. These initiatives, alongside alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework, demonstrate good practice in embedding equity. Future programmes could build on this approach by proactively engaging under-represented participants to ensure support reaches those facing additional barriers.

6.4 People and Skills

6.4.1 Economy

The People and Skills Investment Priority was allocated £1,617,846.57 from the Main UKSPF Programme, excluding Management and Admin, of which £1,586,364.16 was spent by 31 March 2025, representing 98% of the available budget. This very high level of expenditure reflects ongoing demand for skills and employability support and effective financial management across delivery partners.

Funding was awarded competitively to intermediary organisations delivering skills, employment and inclusion activity aligned to local needs identified in the Marches Local Skills Report. The use of existing training infrastructure, delivery partnerships and flexible provision models enabled a wide range of support to be delivered without significant additional overheads and ensured that funding was focused primarily on frontline delivery.

Delivery partners, including Enable, Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation the School of Coding and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, leveraged existing infrastructure and networks to provide tailored interventions. Using proven providers with prior experience in ESF and DWP programmes enabled rapid mobilisation of support without the costs associated with establishing new delivery channels. The Programme explicitly avoided duplication of mainstream services, focusing on groups not fully supported elsewhere, including economically inactive adults, those with complex barriers and individuals in rural or underserved areas.

Projects also contributed to upstream social and economic benefits, including reducing reliance on statutory services such as adult social care. By improving employability, confidence and independence, participants were less likely to require low-level support or early intervention from public services, representing cost avoidance for local authority budgets.

6.4.2 Efficiency

In total 1,383 people engaged with the employment and skills interventions, with participation levels and qualification outputs exceeding targets across several delivery strands. Delivery partners demonstrated flexibility in responding to local labour market needs and participant demand, optimising available resources to maximise outputs and reach priority groups.

While some longer-term outcome indicators, such as sustained employment, remain below target at this stage, this is consistent with the time typically required for participants to progress from training and employability support into durable labour market outcomes. This suggests that performance against these indicators should continue to improve as cohorts complete their interventions and move further along the employment pathway.

A notable example of efficiency and added value was the close working between People and Skills supported employment projects and the Integrated Care Board. This ensured alignment with the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Strategy and helped position supported employment activity alongside existing local services. As a result, individuals who

were out of work due to health-related barriers were better supported to move onto an employment pathway. The Technical Officer reported that relationships between these organisations developed positively over the course of the Programme, with clearer and more effective referral pathways, including into the Connect to Work programme.

Collaboration between delivery partners was a core feature of the People and Skills theme. Bimonthly project meetings provided a forum to discuss delivery barriers, share good practice and facilitate referrals between projects. This enabled participants to access multiple interventions in a coordinated way, reducing duplication and optimising the use of limited resources. Despite lower levels of funding compared to other UKSPF themes, participation exceeded expectations, particularly in digital inclusion, vocational qualifications and upskilling activity.

6.4.3 Effectiveness

The People and Skills Investment Priority has been effective in supporting residents to improve their employability, digital skills and workforce progression. The People and Skills survey demonstrated meaningful changes in participants' skills, wellbeing and social engagement, with delivery organisations reporting that some beneficiaries described the support as 'life-changing'.

The Programme's effectiveness was enhanced by tailoring support to the needs of individuals. For those requiring intensive support, including people with substance misuse histories or those experiencing social isolation, the flexible and holistic interventions enabled progress that would not have been achievable through mainstream provision.

Survey and interview evidence indicates high additionality with two out of the three delivery organisations who responded to the survey, reporting that outcomes would not have been achieved, or would have been delayed, without UKSPF funding.

6.4.4 Equity

Equity was embedded in the People and Skills theme, prioritising support for economically inactive residents and those facing structural barriers to participation, including people with disabilities, individuals with health-related conditions, older workers, NEETs and residents in rural areas. The delivery organisations focused on improving access for groups less likely to engage with mainstream provision, reducing barriers linked to confidence, transport and digital exclusion. The focus on wrap-around employment support and essential digital skills reflected inequalities identified in the Shropshire Plan, Marches Local Skills Report and Economic Growth Strategy, supporting more inclusive access to skills and employability support across Shropshire. As demonstrated in the outputs and outcomes 691 socially excluded individuals accessed support and 575 people were supported to gain employment, exceeding the original target.

Equity was also reinforced through alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework, which encouraged providers to prioritise inclusive employment practices, support workforce wellbeing and promote opportunities in sectors with high local demand, such as care. This helped ensure that skills activity was not only accessible, but also relevant to participants facing multiple disadvantages and to sectors offering realistic progression routes. The Programme's emphasis on collaboration with partners such as the DWP, health services and local delivery organisations further supported equitable access by enabling referrals between services and tailoring support to individual needs.

6.5 Overall Conclusions

6.5.1 The Programme effectively combined competitive commissioning, use of established delivery partners and intermediary-led approaches to maximise reach and impact while controlling

costs. The additional investment, leveraged through match funding, enhanced the scale of the Programme and the outcomes achieved. Importantly, the UKSPF Programme Team worked hard to ensure VfM, providing cost and administrative efficiencies while maintaining a flexible, high-quality approach. This enabled the successful delivery of a complex Programme despite economic challenges including a change of government during the implementation period.

Collectively, these factors indicate that the Programme provided excellent VfM, achieving significant impact while optimising resources.

6.6 Value for Money - Lessons learned

6.6.1 Overall, the Programme achieved a credible level of Value for Money despite compressed delivery timescales and external economic pressures. The VfM assessment highlights the following key lessons for future programmes:

(i) Partnering with established local organisations with existing infrastructure, networks and external funding experience reduced set-up costs, enabled rapid delivery and maximised the proportion of funding reaching frontline activity. This approach should continue to underpin future programmes.

(ii) Compressed timescales limited the ability to fully realise outcomes, particularly for capital investment, business growth and skills progression. While the overall duration of programme delivery is not always in the control of the managing authority, multi-year programmes would allow interventions to mature, improve outcome realisation and better reflect the time needed for behavioural and economic change.

(iii) The Programme successfully attracted third-party match funding and generated wider social, economic and environmental benefits beyond core outputs. Embedding social value and flexible match funding expectations at programme design stage can further enhance VfM by increasing leverage, sustainability and long-term impact.

Value-for-Money: Summary

The Shropshire UKSPF Programme delivered a credible level of Value for Money despite compressed delivery timescales and external economic pressures. Across the three Investment Priorities, the Programme combined competitive commissioning, intermediary-led delivery and use of established local partners to maximise reach and impact while controlling costs. Partners' existing infrastructure, networks and delivery experience reduced mobilisation costs and enabled a high proportion of funding to reach frontline activity quickly.

Total expenditure across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund reached over 90% of allocations, reflecting effective financial management and rapid mobilisation under a challenging timeframe. In addition, the Programme successfully secured significant third-party match funding, including private sources, Shropshire Council and other government funding programmes, enhancing leverage and enabling a greater scale and quality of interventions than could have been achieved through UKSPF resources alone. This additional investment amplified social, economic and environmental benefits, supporting local businesses, communities and skills development.

Efficiency was achieved through intermediary delivery models, coordination between partners and focus on enhancing existing assets rather than creating wholly new provision. Effectiveness is demonstrated through high additionality, outcomes exceeding expectations in business support, community participation and skills and employment development and the creation of full-time equivalent jobs contributing to local economic growth. Equity was embedded across the Programme, with targeted support for rural areas, underserved communities and under-represented groups, alongside alignment with the Council's Social Value Framework.

Overall, the evidence indicates that the Programme optimised resources, maximised impact and delivered significant Value for Money for Shropshire.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions - Introduction

This final section of the Evaluation presents the main findings and sets out considerations for future programme design and delivery. Key lessons learned have been integrated throughout the Evaluation, covering aspects such as relevance, performance, impact, management and delivery and value for money.

7.2 Main Findings

Relevance and Strategic Fit

(i) The Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with both national UKSPF priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded appropriately to Shropshire's distinctive challenges, including an ageing and dispersed population, low productivity, workforce shortages, limited connectivity and rural isolation, which were particularly acute across market towns and rural communities and exacerbated by environmental risk and economic uncertainty.

(ii) Overall, the Programme demonstrated a high degree of strategic coherence. By combining Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and Rural Fund interventions within a place-based framework, it effectively balanced short-term delivery priorities with longer-term ambitions to strengthen community assets, support business diversification and grow the green and visitor economies. Without UKSPF investment, Shropshire Council would not have been able to support a number of important activities that addressed identified gaps in provision and responded to emerging local needs. The use of robust local data and intelligence ensured that interventions were grounded in evidence and responsive to local context.

(iii) While the Programme was well designed and strategically coherent, compressed delivery timescales limited the ability to plan and launch funding calls concurrently. This reduced opportunities for integration, cross-project collaboration and shared learning across Investment Priorities and placed additional pressure on delivery teams and partners.

Performance and Delivery Effectiveness

(iv) Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery window, the Programme achieved a high level of financial and operational performance. Overall expenditure of over 90% across the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund represents a significant achievement given the scale, complexity and late mobilisation of activity.

(v) Output delivery was generally positive across all three Investment Priorities, with many interventions exceeding participation and engagement targets. While some outcome measures remain below target, this largely reflects the nature of capital investment and economic and labour market change, where impacts materialise over longer timescales. The evaluation highlights the importance of recognising intermediate outcomes achieved during delivery, particularly where final outcomes will not be fully realised until, or after, projects have concluded. Importantly, the Programme established a solid platform for continued benefits beyond the formal funding period.

Impact and Added Value

(vi) The Programme delivered clear added value through locally managed, partnership-led delivery. Shropshire Council's open call approach supported transparency, fairness and geographic balance, while local oversight enabled funding to be aligned with emerging needs and mobilised at pace.

(vii) Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations with established networks and where interventions were well targeted and flexible. Across all Investment Priorities, the Programme generated meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes, including improved community capacity and pride in place, strengthened business resilience and innovation and improved employability, skills and confidence among participants. The evaluation also demonstrates that relatively small-scale projects can make a significant difference and generate disproportionate impact when well targeted. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond the Programme's end.

Management, Delivery and Value for Money

(viii) The Programme benefited from an experienced Programme Team, established partnership working and robust programme management systems. These factors enabled rapid mobilisation once funding was confirmed and supported effective governance, compliance and delivery under challenging conditions. Clear roles and responsibilities within the Programme Team were essential to managing delivery and should be established prior to programme launch in future initiatives.

(ix) Programme scale and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness. While the use of boards and sub-groups supported accountability and assurance, their size and structure at times limited meaningful engagement and agile decision-making. Evidence suggests that smaller, more focused governance groups would have enabled clearer strategic direction, more effective challenge and more active participation, while still maintaining appropriate oversight.

(x) The design of the Programme, including separate reporting requirements for the Main UKSPF Programme and the Rural Fund, multiple interventions across Investment Priorities and the distinction between capital and revenue funding, increased the complexity of delivery management, financial monitoring and the evidencing of outputs and outcomes. While delivery was effective, these structural constraints limited the Programme's ability to fully embed activity and maximise longer-term impact.

(xi) Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money. The use of established delivery partners, intermediary-led models and alignment with existing assets reduced mobilisation costs, maximised reach and generated additional social, economic and environmental benefits, reinforced by significant match funding and leverage. Greater flexibility in match funding requirements would have further supported delivery, particularly for smaller organisations and community-led projects.

7.3 Considerations for Future Programmes

7.3.1 Drawing on the evaluation's overarching findings, the following considerations should inform the design and delivery of future place-based funding programmes:

(i) **Ensure continuity of funding and avoid gaps between programmes**
Sustaining funding over time, with minimal breaks between successive programmes, is critical to maintaining momentum, retaining high quality and experienced staff, safeguarding delivery capacity and ensuring continuity of provision for communities and businesses. Gaps in funding risk the loss of skilled personnel, institutional knowledge and trusted local relationships that are difficult and costly to rebuild.

(ii) **Design programmes with sufficient duration to support impact realisation**
Future programmes would benefit from longer delivery periods, particularly for capital, skills and business growth interventions. While high levels of spend and output can be

achieved within compressed timescales, longer durations are critical to embedding delivery, evidencing outcomes and maximising long-term impact.

(iii) **Strengthen cross-priority integration and coordination**
While the Programme achieved effective delivery within individual Investment Priorities, future programmes should place greater emphasis on cross-cutting design. Concurrent or thematic Calls would support better alignment across different priority areas, alongside dedicated coordination capacity to address complex challenges such as workforce development, rural isolation, digital exclusion and net zero transition more holistically.

(iv) **Build in structured opportunities for collaboration and shared learning**
Time pressures limited opportunities for delivery partners to collaborate, share learning and align activity. Future programmes should include planned mechanisms for collaboration, referrals and peer learning to amplify impact, reduce duplication and strengthen sustainability beyond the funded period.

(v) **Plan explicitly for post-programme impact capture**
As many outcomes materialise after programme closure, future funding rounds should recognise interim progress, such as skills development, improved employability and early business change, as valid performance indicators, alongside proportionate post-completion monitoring.

Monitoring frameworks should also consistently capture indirect outcomes, particularly where activity reduces pressure on local budgets (for example, through social inclusion and employability support that improves wellbeing and reduces reliance on NHS and Adult Social Care services). Systems to evidence these wider impacts should be designed from the outset and aligned with local strategies such as the Economic Growth Strategy and the Shropshire Plan.

Where pilots or feasibility projects are funded, programmes should include clear mechanisms to embed learning and support scale-up to maximise long-term impact.

(vi) **Maintain the benefits of local management while ensuring proportionate administration and governance**
Local oversight and established partnerships were key strengths of the Programme and should be retained. Future programmes should continue to streamline processes, ensure adequate resourcing across delivery and support functions and apply clear and proportionate processes for approving variations to projects, budgets and delivery plans**.**

Governance arrangements should also be proportionate to programme scale, with smaller, more focused boards or decision-making groups used where possible to support meaningful engagement, timely challenge and agile decision-making, while maintaining appropriate accountability. In addition, future programmes should consider retaining some delivery functions in-house and directly commissioning activity with trusted partners, particularly where timescales are limited, to reduce pressure on delivery teams and accelerate mobilisation.

(vii) **Experience from the Shropshire UKSPF Programme highlights the importance of aligning national programme design with local partnership ambitions.**
Competitive funding arrangements, while effective in driving delivery pace, can reduce incentives for delivery partners to collaborate or share learning where organisations are competing for the same funding. Future programmes would benefit from balancing competition with mechanisms that promote coordination, collaboration and supporting

joined-up delivery, shared learning and cumulative impact across communities, sectors and investment priorities**.**

Conclusions: Summary

This Evaluation concludes that the Shropshire UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund were highly relevant to local needs and well aligned with national priorities and local strategic objectives. The Programme responded effectively to Shropshire's distinctive challenges, including rural isolation, workforce shortages, low productivity and limited connectivity, through a coherent, place-based approach spanning Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, People and Skills and the Rural Fund. Robust use of local data and intelligence ensured that interventions addressed identified gaps and emerging needs.

Despite a delayed start and compressed delivery timescales, the Programme achieved notable financial and operational performance, with over 90% expenditure across both funds and generally positive output delivery. Impact was most evident where projects were delivered by trusted local organisations and where interventions were targeted and flexible, generating meaningful short- and medium-term outcomes across communities, businesses and individuals. Many longer-term impacts are expected to continue to emerge beyond programme closure.

Locally managed, partnership-led delivery added clear value, supported by an experienced Programme Team, established partnerships and robust programme management systems. However, programme design complexity, compressed timescales and governance arrangements influenced delivery effectiveness, limiting opportunities for integration, shared learning and agile decision-making. Overall, the Programme delivered credible value for money, acting as a catalyst for wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Looking ahead, future place-based programmes would benefit from longer delivery periods, proportionate governance and administration, enhanced cross-priority coordination and improved mechanisms to capture wider outcomes, interim and longer-term impact.

APPENDIX 1

Shropshire UKSPF Main Programme and Rural Fund Projects Supported and Funding Allocated at Point of Approval[3]

Communities and Place: UKSPF Main Programme

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Access to the Countryside (Phase 1)	Shropshire Council	£57,400
2	Armed Forces Community Outreach Project	Shropshire Council	£38,000
3	Attingham Park	National Trust	£245,000
4	Cambrian Station Building	Shropshire Council	£365,798
5	Civic Crowd Funding	Shropshire Council	£172,950
6	Co Working Space	Good 2 Great	£94,900
7	Community Kitchen	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£71,522
8	Community Partnership	Qube	£26,375
9	Cultural Compact	Shropshire Council	£163,950
10	Cultural Hubs and Spokes	Arts Alive	£75,600
11	Cycle Network	Shropshire Council	£30,000
12	Ellesmere Yard	Canal and River Trust	£112,000
13	Festival Square	Oswestry BID	£10,000
14	Flaxmill Cycle Hub	Flaxmill	£102,052
15	Footprint Gallery	Footprint Gallery	£12,000
16	Green Spaces Support	Energize	£62,682
17	Hands Together Ludlow	Hands Together Ludlow	£68,321
18	Highley Health and Wellbeing Centre	Shropshire Council and Partners	£20,000
19	Highly Health and Wellbeing Centre	NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	£150,000
20	Historic Towns	Shropshire Council	£19,250
21	Love Oswestry and Culture Connections	Shropshire Council	£120,500
22	Market Offer Oswestry and Wem	Oswestry Town Council	£10,000
23	Meadowside	Shrewsbury Town Foundation	£61,376
24	Montgomery Canal	Canal and River Trust	£20,000
25	On Your Bike	Shrewsbury BID	£434,372
26	Oswestry and Wem Markets	Oswestry Town Council	£93,385
27	Shrewsbury Castle	Shropshire Council	£30,000
28	Shrewsbury Sculpture	Shropshire Council	£132,470
29	Shropshire Community Climate Connectors	Marches Energy Agency	£165,488
30	St Johns the Beacon on the Hill	St Johns Church	£137,150
31	Strategic Infrastructure Partnership	Community Resource	£371,585
32	Vital Hive	The Hive	£99,987
		Total Value	**£3,574,113**

[3] The funding figures shown for each project represent the amounts **allocated** at the point of approval and do not necessarily reflect final **expenditure**

Supporting Communities and Place: Rural Fund

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
33	Access to the Countryside) Phases 1 and 2)	Shropshire Council	£522,100
34	Cambrian Station Building	Shropshire Council	£399,452
35	Crowdfunding - Green Spaces Grant	Shropshire Council	£120,000
36	Making Ripples	Canal and River Trust	£177,625
37	Oswestry Greenways	Shropshire Council	£500,000
38	Oswestry Indoor Market	Shropshire Council	£13,500
		Total Value	**£1,732,677**

Supporting Local Business: Main UKSPF Programme

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation – 3 (AGRI – 3)	Aston University	£274,972.87
2	BID	Bridgnorth Town Council	£30,000
3	Clean Growth Marches & Worcestershire	Worcestershire County Council	£209,933.00
4	Cool Shropshire Farm Focused	E4 Environment	£30,000
5	Digital Innovator	Remote Recordings Ltd	£29,978
6	Employer Disability Support Service	Enable	£114,892.96
7a	Intensive Specialist Business Support	Marches Growth Hub	£108,000
7b	Intensive Specialist Business Support	Shropshire Growth Hub	£231,791.78
8	Marches Forward Partnership	Shropshire Council	£100,000.00
9	Market Towns	Shropshire Council	£25,000
10	People Portal	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd	£20,000
11	Shrop APF	Aston University	£370,108.87
12	Shropshire Council Destination Development Programme	Shropshire Council	£270,695.60
13a	Shropshire Destination Programme Management	Shropshire Tourism (Uk) Ltd	£66,931.17
13b	Shropshire Destination Programme Management	Shropshire Tourism (Uk) Ltd	£263,137.29
14	Shropshire Leadership Programme	Aston University	£317,684
15	Shropshire Manufacturing Growth Programme	Oxford Innovation Services LTD	£392,712.00
16	Shropshire Net Zero Leaders	The Clean Tech Business Group LTD	£150,000
17	Shropshire Start Up	Good 2 Great LTD	£286,923
18	Silverpreneurs®	Marches Growth Hub	£100,058
19	Small Equipment Grant Scheme	Shropshire Council	£187,500.00
20	Sustaining Shropshire	Harper Adams University	£642,409.49
21	Taste Not Waste	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£15,840.00

22	Team Upskilling Programme	Shropshire Chamber of commerce and enterprise LTD	£373,000
23	Upskilling	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd	£11,000
24	Wem Business Network	Shropshire Council	£900
25	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£212,500
26	Work In Shrewsbury Programme	Shrewsbury BID	£447,772.60
		Total Value	**£5,283,740.63**

Supporting Local Business: Rural Fund

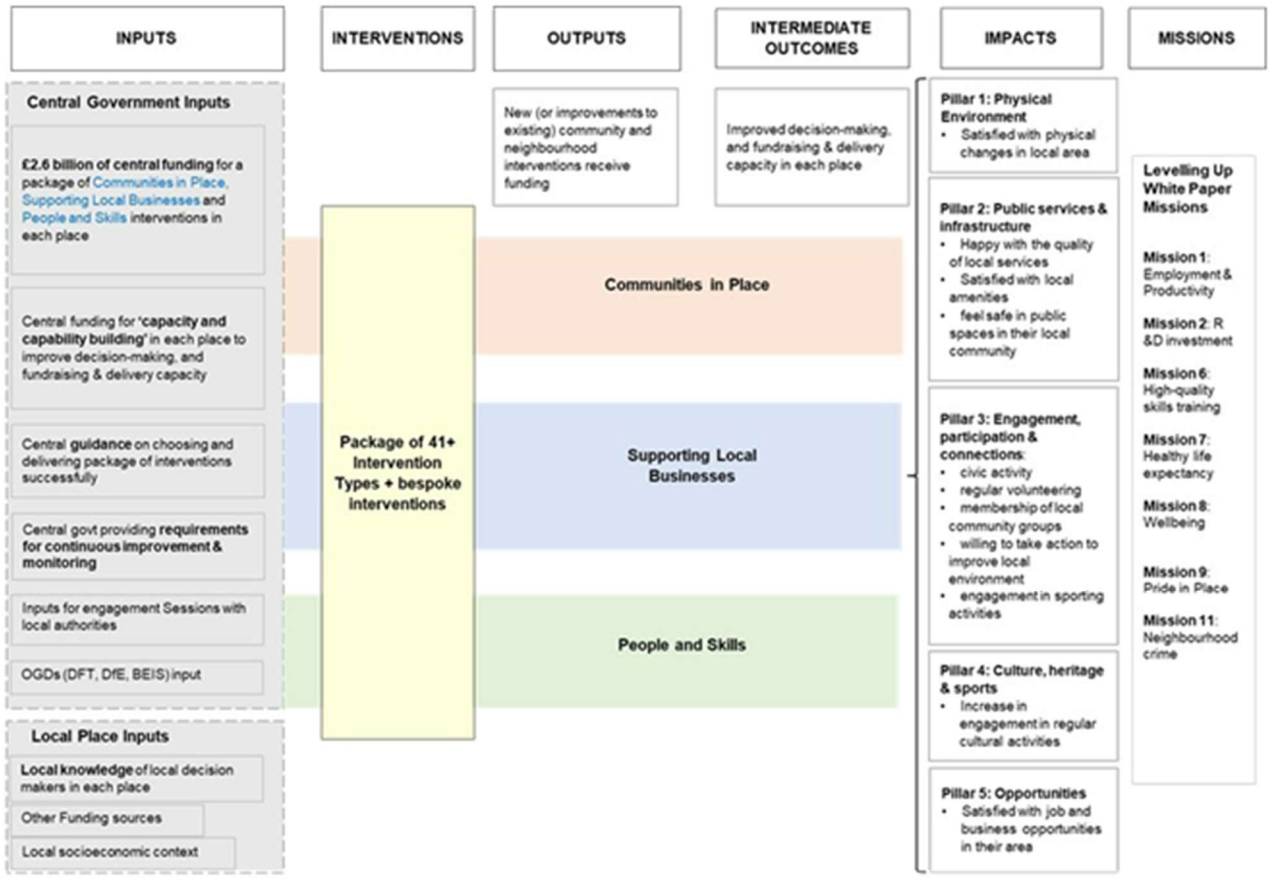
	Projects	**Delivery Organisation**	**Rural Fund Allocation £**
27	Shropshire Small Equipment Grant	Shropshire Council	£787,500
28	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£212,500
		Total Value	**£1,000,000**

People and Skills: Main UKSPF Programme

	Projects	**Delivery Organisation**	**UKSPF Allocation £**
1	Digital Shropshire	School of Coding Ltd	£240,000
2	Shropshire Skills Hub	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce	£384,000
3	Shropshire Sports Collective	Shrewsbury Town Football Club and Partners	£227,318
4	Step up (Ignite)	Enable	£442,682
5	Work and Learn	School of Coding Ltd	£192,000
		Total Value	**£1,486,000**

APPENDIX 2

High Level UKSPF Logic Model[4]



[4] UK Shared Prosperity Fund: evaluation strategy - GOV.UK

APPENDIX 3

UKSPF Investment Priorities and Objectives (UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Prospectus, Updated 17 December 2025) and Missions[5]

Communities and Place

- Strengthening our social fabric and fostering a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and amenities, such as community infrastructure and local green space and community-led projects.

- Building resilient and safe neighbourhoods, through investment in quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in, through targeted improvements to the built environment and innovative approaches to crime prevention.

Supporting Local Business

- Creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, through investments that build on existing industries and institutions and range from support for starting businesses to visible improvements to local retail, hospitality and leisure sector facilities.

- Promoting networking and collaboration, through interventions that bring together businesses and partners within and across sectors to share knowledge, expertise and resource and stimulate innovation and growth.

- Increasing private sector investment in growth enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium sized businesses to undertake new-to firm innovation, adopt productivity enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques and start or grow their exports.

People and Skills

- Boosting core skills and support adults to progress in work, by targeting adults with no or low level qualifications and skills in maths, and upskill the working population, yielding personal and societal economic impact, and by encouraging innovative approaches to reducing adult learning barriers (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only. In England, this is delivered through the Department for Education's Multiply programme).

- Reducing levels of economic inactivity through investment in bespoke intensive life and employment support tailored to local need. Investment should facilitate the join-up of mainstream provision and local services within an area for participants, through the use of one-to-one keyworker support, improving employment outcomes for specific cohorts who face labour market barriers.

- Supporting people furthest from the labour market to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to basic skills.

- Supporting local areas to fund gaps in local skills provision to support people to progress in work, and supplement local adult skills provision e.g. by providing additional volumes; delivering provision through wider range of routes or enabling more intensive/innovative provision, both qualification based and non-qualification based. This should be supplementary to provision available through national employment and skills programmes.

[5] UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK

Missions within the UKSPF Investment Priorities

Building Pride in Place and Increasing Life Chances

Communities and Place	Supporting Local Business	People and Skills
Mission 9. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.		
Mission 7. By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.	Mission 1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.	Mission 1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
Missions 8. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.	Mission 2. By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40% and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.	Mission 6. By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.
Mission 11. By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected areas.		Mission 7. By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.
		Missions 8. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

APPENDIX 4

Shropshire UKSPF Programme
Call Windows

1. January 2023 Call – Feasibility
Communities and Places, Local Business Support
Grants of up to £30,000 were available, with no match funding required for feasibility activities. Applications were assessed on how well proposed activities aligned with the priorities of Shropshire's UKSPF Investment Plan. Eligible applicants were formally registered legal entities undertaking activity for the wider benefit of Shropshire communities rather than solely their own organisation, aimed at intermediary organisations that provide support to organisations.

Eligible activity included externally commissioned work, research, feasibility and options analysis, consultation, proof-of-concept development and evaluation.

2. April 2023 Call
Communities and Place
The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver support, services, amenities or facilities benefiting local communities, typically through community and place initiatives or grant programmes operating on a 'one-to-many' basis. Projects were required to demonstrate a clear, positive impact on their community, with funding available across relevant investment areas.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Building on existing community assets, resources and infrastructure to strengthen physical and digital connections across market towns and localities.
- Boosting cultural capacity and social cohesion, diversifying the cultural offer and improving opportunities for participation across age groups.
- Promoting understanding of climate change, environmental and air quality issues, carbon reduction, and active lifestyles to enhance wellbeing and pride in place.
- Strengthening social and physical infrastructure that supports improved employment, education and volunteering opportunities, and developing high-quality community and cultural spaces.

Supporting Local Business
The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver initiatives or grant programmes providing business support on a 'one-to-many' basis designed to strengthen business resilience, innovation and growth across the County.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Providing the right tools and support to help businesses invest in research and development, expand or relocate within Shropshire, and grow their workforce—particularly in sustainability, green industries and the creative and cultural sectors.
- Championing investment in infrastructure that underpins business growth, including town centres, business parks and growth corridors, and exploring opportunities for affordable, flexible co-working spaces in key locations.
- Encouraging collaboration through existing networks and partnerships such as business improvement districts, and helping businesses access recovery funds, UKSPF and other relevant funding streams.
- Linking with the Community and Place and People and Skills priorities to support housing, connectivity, workforce development and upskilling, ensuring Shropshire can attract and retain the talent needed for long-term economic growth and prosperity.

3. May 2023 Call

Supporting People and Skills

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver initiatives or programmes providing skills development and employment support on a 'one-to-many' basis. It was aimed at improving employability, addressing skills gaps, and supporting greater inclusion across the County's workforce.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Providing intensive and wrap-around employment support for economically inactive people, helping them move closer to mainstream provision and employment, and supplementing this with additional life and basic skills support (including digital, English, maths, and ESOL) where local provision gaps exist.
- Increasing levels of digital inclusion through essential digital skills training, promoting the benefits of being safely online, and offering community-based support to help individuals gain confidence and trust to use digital tools effectively.
- Aligning with the objectives of the Shropshire Plan, the Marches Local Skills Report, and the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–2027, to build a more skilled, inclusive and resilient workforce that supports sustainable economic growth.

4. September 2023 Call

Communities and Place

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver support, services, amenities or facilities to local communities through community and place initiatives or grant programmes operating on a 'one-to-many' basis. It was aimed at strengthening community infrastructure, enhancing local pride, and fostering wellbeing across the County.

Funding for projects in this Call could be funded from the Main Programme and/or the Rural Fund.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Building on existing community assets, resources and infrastructure—particularly in market towns—to deliver a wide range of activities and services that bring people together and strengthen physical and digital connections across localities.
- Boosting cultural capacity and social cohesion to create a more diverse and inclusive cultural offer, benefiting all age groups and helping communities explore their aspirations and potential.
- Promoting awareness of climate change, environmental and air quality issues, and encouraging carbon reduction and active lifestyles to improve wellbeing and pride in place.
- Linking with the Supporting Local Business and People and Skills priorities by developing social and physical infrastructure that enhances employment, education and volunteering opportunities, and by creating high-quality, inclusive community and cultural spaces.

Supporting Local Business (capital)

The Call was designed to stimulate sustainable growth, innovation and collaboration across Shropshire's economy. Investment supported intermediary organisations delivering business support initiatives and grant programmes on a 'one-to-many' basis.

Funding for projects in this Call could be funded from the Main Programme and/or the Rural Fund.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:

- Provide support to facilitate businesses to expand and grow in their physical locations and workforce, particularly in relation to sustainability and green industry.
- Champion investment in wider infrastructure that underpins business investment, focused on town centres and high streets, business parks and growth corridors - recognising the potential

to establish hubs providing support to supply chains and individuals moving into the county to access and develop its strengths and opportunities, and exploring affordable, flexible co-working space in key location.
- Collaborative working with the relevant networks and partnerships including, business improvement districts, assisting businesses to gain support through other relevant funding.
- Linking with the other two investment priorities of Community & Place and People & Skills.

The Call sought to strengthen Shropshire's key economic sectors, including the visitor economy, creative industries and green technologies, by building on the county's strong natural, cultural and heritage assets. Collaboration with business networks, partnerships and improvement districts was encouraged to help organisations access further funding opportunities. Overall, the investment was intended to create a more resilient, diverse and sustainable local economy, supporting quality jobs and linking business development with the wider Communities and Place and People and Skills priorities.

5. December 2023 Call

Supporting People and Skills

The Call invited applications from intermediary organisations to deliver initiatives or grant programmes providing skills development and tailored employment support on a 'one-to-many' basis. It was aimed at improving access to training, addressing skills shortages, and supporting individuals to achieve better employment outcomes and quality of life.

Activities were expected to address one or more key opportunities, including:
- Providing tailored support to help people in employment who are not currently reached by mainstream provision, enabling them to overcome barriers to accessing education and training.
- Funding local skills initiatives focused on developing the workforce needed to meet net zero and wider environmental goals, while encouraging engagement in lifelong learning to enhance wellbeing and social inclusion.
- Aligning with the objectives of the Shropshire Plan, the Marches Local Skills Report, and the Economic Growth Strategy 2022–2027, to build a skilled, adaptable and sustainable workforce that underpins future economic growth.

APPENDIX 5

Expenditure Achieved by Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund (excluding Management and Administration)

Main UKSPF Programme - Communities and Place: Spend Performance

Communities and Place (Revenue and Capital)	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E1: Improvements to town centres & high streets	*£481,442.49*
E4: Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer	*£1,005,166.35*
E6: Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities	*£452,643.28*
E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups	*£999,402.05*
E14: Relevant feasibility studies	*£169,172.95*
Total Actual Performance	**£3,107,827,12**
Target Spend	**£3,316,929.96**

Main UKSPF Programme - Supporting Local Business: Spend Performance

Supporting Local Business (Revenue)	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E16: Open markets & town centre retail & service sector	£50,707.73
E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy	£567,718.46
E20: R&D grants supporting innovative product & service development	£1,245,011.97
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems	£668,363.92
E26: Growing the local social economy	0
E29: Supporting decarbonisation & improving the natural environment	£335,195.47
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth	£1,823,440.73
E31: Support relevant feasibility studies	£227,610.71
Total Actual Performance	**£4,918,048.99**
Target Spend	**£5,476,631.79**

Main UKSPF Programme - People and Skills: Spend Performance

People and Skills (Revenue)	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people	£695,364.16
E36: Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills	£315,000
E37: Tailored support for the employed to access courses	£192,000
E38: Local areas to fund local skills needs	£384,000
Total Actual Performance	**£1,586,364.16**
Target Spend	**£1,617,846.57**

Rural Fund: Spend Performance (Capital)

Investment Priority	Target Spend 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
Supporting Rural Communities	£1,732,677	£1,576,607.69
Supporting Rural Business	£856,826	£519,066.64
Total Allocation	**£2,589,503**	**£2,095,674.33**

APPENDIX 6

Outputs and Outcomes Achieved by Investment Priority within the Main UKSPF Programme and Rural Fund

Communities and Place Main UKSPF Programme	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E1: Improvements to town centres & high streets: Outputs		
Number of rehabilitated Premises	5	1
Amount of rehabilitated land	500m2	0
Amount of public realm created or improved	500m2	250m2
Number of low carbon energy infrastructure	4	3
E1: Outcomes		
Increased footfall	10%	40 – This was originally a % this was then change to a number
Reduced Vacancy rates (% decrease)	10%	1 - This was originally a % this was then change to a number of filled
Estimated carbon dioxide reduction as result of support	5%	0
E4: Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer: Outputs		
Number of amenities/facilities created or improved	8	3
Amount of green or blue space Created or improved	500 m2	940510.4m2
No of tourism, Culture and Heritage assets created or improved	5	3
Volunteering Opportunities	0	25
Number of events and Activities supported	0	29
E4: Outcomes		
No of community led arts. Cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of the support	0	8
Improved engagement Numbers	0	172
Increased footfall 9%)	10	280 - This was originally a % this was then change to a number
Improved perception of facilities and amenities	0	20
E6: Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities: Outputs		
Number of organisations receiving grants	40	30
Number of local events/activities supported	15	688
Number of volunteering Opportunities	10	386
E6: Outcomes		
Number of community led arts. Cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of the support	15	33
Improved Engagement Numbers	0	13334
E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups: Outputs		
Number of organisations receiving support other than grants	40	386
Number of facilities created /Improved	20	3

Number of organisations receiving grants	0	13
Volunteering Opportunities claimed	0	199
Number of events and Activities supported	0	18
E11: Outcomes		
Improved engagement Numbers	0	4458
Improved perceptions of facilities and amenities	15	10
E14: Relevant feasibility studies: Outputs		
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	5	9
E14: Outcomes		
Number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	2	4

Communities and Place Rural Fund	**Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025**	**Actual Performance 31 March 2025**
E3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces Outputs		
Number of facilities supported or created	9	4
Amount of green or blue space created or improved (m2)	6,020	9,900
E3: Outcomes		
Increased footfall	4,742	0
Increased users of facilities or amenities	275	0
E4: Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutionsOutputs		
Number of facilities supported or created	1	1
No of tourism, Culture and Heritage assets created or improved (no)	1	1
E4: Outcomes		
Increased footfall	87	0
E7: Support for active travel enhancements in the local area: Outputs		
Total length of new or improved cycle ways or paths (KM) Put as Mtrs	19,400	10,893
Number of new or improved cycleways or footpaths	18	23
E7: Outcomes		
Increased use of cycleways or paths.	8,281	0

Supporting Local Business Main UKSPF Fund	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E16: Open markets & town centre retail & service sector : Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	50	0
Number of enterprises receiving grants	30	0
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	30	0
E16: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	16	0
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of full time equivalent	16	0
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	16	0
Number of vacant units filled	5	0
E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy : Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	50	147
Number of enterprises receiving grants	30	0
Number of local events or activities supported	15	35
E17: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	16	0
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of full time equivalent	16	0
E20: R&D grants supporting innovative product & service development: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	100	248
Number of enterprises receiving grants	50	0
E20: Outcomes		
Number of organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	150	108
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	75	93
Number of new to market products	75	22
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	0	72
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystem: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	120	286
Number of enterprises receiving grants	70	47
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	50	40
E23: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	70	17
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	70	7
E26: Growing the local social economy: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	15	0
Number of enterprises receiving grants	10	0
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	5	0
E26: Outcomes		

Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	7	0
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	3	0
E29: Supporting decarbonisation & improving the natural environment: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	80	159
Number of enterprises receiving grants	50	0
Amount of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure completed	200m2	0
E29: Outcomes		
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	60	11
Estimated Carbon dioxide equivalent reductions as a result of support	5%	6631 (tonnes) – This was originally a % reduction
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth: Outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	200	551
Number of enterprises receiving grants	100	108
E30: Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	60	82.34
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	0	0
E31: Support relevant feasibility studies: Outputs		
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	5	9
E31: Outcomes		
Number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies	10	2

Supporting Local Business Rural Fund	**Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025**	**Actual Performance 31 March 2025**
Funding (capital grants) for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas outputs		
Number of enterprises receiving grants	66	63
Outcomes		
Jobs created as a result of support Number of Full time equivalent	29	21
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support Number of full time equivalent	22	0
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes	33	54

People and Skills Main UKSPF Programme	Target Outputs/outcomes 31 March 2025	Actual Performance 31 March 2025
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people: Outputs		
Number of socially excluded people accessing support	750	691
Number of people supported to access basic skills	750	217
Number of people receiving support to gain employment	360	575
Number of people receiving support to sustain employment	90	7
E33: Outcomes		
Number of people reporting increased employability through development of interpersonal skills funded by UKSPF	750	486
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	360	86
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	90	24
E36: Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills: Outputs		
Number of people supported to access basic skills	250	372
Number of people supported to engage in life skills	250	350
E36: Outcomes		
People gaining a qualification or completing a course following support	250	354
E37: Tailored support for the employed to access courses: Outputs		
Number of people supported to participate in education	200	280
Number of people retraining	125	147
E37: Outcomes		
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	160	278
E38: Local areas to fund local skills needs: Outputs		
Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence	400	412
E38: Outcomes		
Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education and training	400	409

APPENDIX C – Projects List and Funding Allocation

2022-2025 Shropshire UKSPF Main Programme and Rural Fund Projects Supported and Funding Allocated at Point of Approval[1]

Communities and Place: UKSPF Main Programme

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Access to the Countryside (Phase 1)	Shropshire Council	£57,400
2	Armed Forces Community Outreach Project	Shropshire Council	£38,000
3	Attingham Park	National Trust	£245,000
4	Cambrian Station Building	Shropshire Council	£365,798
5	Civic Crowd Funding	Shropshire Council	£172,950
6	Co Working Space	Good 2 Great	£94,900
7	Community Kitchen	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£71,522
8	Community Partnership	Qube	£26,375
9	Cultural Compact	Shropshire Council	£163,950
10	Cultural Hubs and Spokes	Arts Alive	£75,600
11	Cycle Network	Shropshire Council	£30,000
12	Ellesmere Yard	Canal and River Trust	£112,000
13	Festival Square	Oswestry BID	£10,000
14	Flaxmill Cycle Hub	Flaxmill	£102,052
15	Footprint Gallery	Footprint Gallery	£12,000
16	Green Spaces Support	Energize	£62,682
17	Hands Together Ludlow	Hands Together Ludlow	£68,321
18	Highley Health and Wellbeing Centre	Shropshire Council and Partners	£20,000
19	Highly Health and Wellbeing Centre	NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	£150,000
20	Historic Towns	Shropshire Council	£19,250
21	Love Oswestry and Culture Connections	Shropshire Council	£120,500
22	Market Offer Oswestry and Wem	Oswestry Town Council	£10,000
23	Meadowside	Shrewsbury Town Foundation	£61,376
24	Montgomery Canal	Canal and River Trust	£20,000
25	On Your Bike	Shrewsbury BID	£434,372
26	Oswestry and Wem Markets	Oswestry Town Council	£93,385
27	Shrewsbury Castle	Shropshire Council	£30,000
28	Shrewsbury Sculpture	Shropshire Council	£132,470

[1] The funding figures shown for each project represent the amounts **allocated** at the point of approval and do not necessarily reflect final **expenditure**

29	Shropshire Community Climate Connectors	Marches Energy Agency	£165,488
30	St Johns the Beacon on the Hill	St Johns Church	£137,150
31	Strategic Infrastructure Partnership	Community Resource	£371,585
32	Vital Hive	The Hive	£99,987
		Total Value	**£3,574,113**

Supporting Communities and Place: Rural Fund

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
33	Access to the Countryside) Phases 1 and 2)	Shropshire Council	£522,100
34	Cambrian Station Building	Shropshire Council	£399,452
35	Crowdfunding - Green Spaces Grant	Shropshire Council	£120,000
36	Making Ripples	Canal and River Trust	£177,625
37	Oswestry Greenways	Shropshire Council	£500,000
38	Oswestry Indoor Market	Shropshire Council	£13,500
		Total Value	**£1,732,677**

Supporting Local Business: Main UKSPF Programme

Projects		Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation – 3 (AGRI – 3)	Aston University	£274,972.87
2	BID	Bridgnorth Town Council	£30,000
3	Clean Growth Marches & Worcestershire	Worcestershire County Council	£209,933.00
4	Cool Shropshire Farm Focused	E4 Environment	£30,000
5	Digital Innovator	Remote Recordings Ltd	£29,978
6	Employer Disability Support Service	Enable	£114,892.96
7a	Intensive Specialist Business Support	Marches Growth Hub	£108,000
7b	Intensive Specialist Business Support	Shropshire Growth Hub	£231,791.78
8	Marches Forward Partnership	Shropshire Council	£100,000.00
9	Market Towns	Shropshire Council	£25,000
10	People Portal	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd	£20,000
11	Shrop APF	Aston University	£370,108.87
12	Shropshire Council Destination Development Programme	Shropshire Council	£270,695.60
13a	Shropshire Destination Programme Management	Shropshire Tourism (Uk) Ltd	£66,931.17
13b	Shropshire Destination Programme Management	Shropshire Tourism (Uk) Ltd	£263,137.29

14	Shropshire Leadership Programme	Aston University	£317,684
15	Shropshire Manufacturing Growth Programme	Oxford Innovation Services LTD	£392,712.00
16	Shropshire Net Zero Leaders	The Clean Tech Business Group LTD	£150,000
17	Shropshire Start Up	Good 2 Great LTD	£286,923
18	Silverpreneurs®	Marches Growth Hub	£100,058
19	Small Equipment Grant Scheme	Shropshire Council	£187,500.00
20	Sustaining Shropshire	Harper Adams University	£642,409.49
21	Taste Not Waste	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£15,840.00
22	Team Upskilling Programme	Shropshire Chamber of commerce and enterprise LTD	£373,000
23	Upskilling	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd	£11,000
24	Wem Business Network	Shropshire Council	£900
25	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£212,500
26	Work In Shrewsbury Programme	Shrewsbury BID	£447,772.60
		Total Value	**£5,283,740.63**

Supporting Local Business: Rural Fund

	Projects	**Delivery Organisation**	**Rural Fund Allocation £**
27	Shropshire Small Equipment Grant	Shropshire Council	£787,500
28	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£212,500
		Total Value	**£1,000,000**

People and Skills: Main UKSPF Programme

	Projects	**Delivery Organisation**	**UKSPF Allocation £**
1	Digital Shropshire	School of Coding Ltd	£240,000
2	Shropshire Skills Hub	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce	£384,000
3	Shropshire Sports Collective	Shrewsbury Town Football Club and Partners	£227,318
4	Step up (Ignite)	Enable	£442,682
5	Work and Learn	School of Coding Ltd	£192,000
		Total Value	**£1,486,000**

2025-2026 Shropshire UKSPF Main Programme and Rural Fund Projects Supported and Funding Allocated at Point of Approval

Communities and Place: UKSPF Main Programme

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Cultural Compact Grants	Shropshire Council	£121,905
2	Community Kitchen	Shrewsbury Food Hub	£40,011
3	Armed Forces	Shropshire Council	£47,990
4	Culture Hubs and Spokes	Arts Alive	£56,700
5	Hands Together Ludlow	Hands Together Ludlow	£51,631
6	Vital Hive	The Hive	£50,000
7	Crowdfund	Shropshire Council	£103,795
8	Community Connectors	Marches Energy Agency	£81,761
9	Greenspaces	Energize	£41,144
10	Community Infrastructure	Community Resource	£150,000
11	Shrewsbury Moves	Shrewsbury BID	£154,033
12	Access to the countryside	Shropshire Council	£207,809
		Total Value	**£1,106,779**

Supporting Communities and Place: Rural Fund

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
13	Crowdfund	Shropshire Council	£81,707
14	Ellesmere Yard	Canal and River Trust	£118,000
15	Montgomery Canal	Canal and River Trust	£112,000
16	Natural Forest Path	Derwen College	£107,211
17	Access to the countryside	Shropshire Council	£26,491
		Total Value	**£445,409**

Supporting Local Business: Main UKSPF Programme

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Sustaining Shropshire	Harper Adams University	£195,136
2	Shropshire Net Zero Leaders	The Clean Tech Business	£67,227
3	BB360	Shropshire Growth Hub	£181,352
4	Design Factory Shropshire	Aston University	£263,503
5	Shropshire Energy Programme	Worcestershire Conty Council	£132,049
6	Destination Management Programme	Shropshire Tourism	£143,929
7	Shropshire Leadership Programme	Aston University	£100,418

8	West Midland Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£222,373
9	Destination Management Programme	Shropshire Council	£140,000
10	Small Grants Programme	Shropshire Council	£80,628
		Total Value	**£1,526,613**

Supporting Local Business: Rural Fund

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	Rural Fund Allocation £
11	Shropshire Small Equipment Grant	Shropshire Council	£62,875
12	West Midlands Growth Programme	Birmingham City Council	£199,392
13	Shropshire Energy Programme	Worcestershire County Council	£70,000
		Total Value	**£332,267**

People and Skills: Main UKSPF Programme

	Projects	Delivery Organisation	UKSPF Allocation £
1	Digital Shropshire	School of Coding Ltd	£214,000
2	Shropshire Skills Hub	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce	£134,756
3	Shropshire Sports Collective	Shrewsbury Town Football Club and Partners	£171,797
4	Step up (Ignite)	Enable	£211,945
		Total Value	**£732,498**

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UKSPF News Items and Case Studies 2023 - 2026

News: Shropshire Council launches a £150,000 fund to support community projects

27th September 2023

Shropshire Council has today announced an £150,000 fund to make it easier for people in the county to improve their local area.

In partnership with Spacehive, the community fundraising platform, the Crowdfund Shropshire programme will enable local residents across the county to exclusively access funding for community improvement initiatives.

The crowdfunding nature of this programme, in collaboration with council funding, maximises the amount campaigners can raise in order to deliver transformational community projects that matter to them.

Shropshire's Shared Prosperity Community Fund has been made possible due to funding under the Communities and Place theme of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund managed by Shropshire Council.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the Government's levelling up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

Shropshire Council and Spacehive are keen to hear from Shropshire residents who have an innovative idea to improve their local area and encourage them to get involved. No fundraising experience is necessary; 65% of Spacehive creators are creating a community project for the first time. Spacehive assists project creators with online workshops, one-to-one support and resources, providing advice on everything from project costs to campaign promotion.

The Crowdfund Shropshire launch event is on Wednesday 11 October 2023 at Wem Town Hall, with tea and coffee on arrival for a 2pm start (online attendance is also offered on booking). Shropshire VCS Assembly, Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership and Shropshire Council are encouraging individuals and community groups to come along and find out more.

To register, people can visit this link : I'd like to book for the Crowdfund Launch Event

All project ideas should be launched on the Spacehive platform and pitched to the available funds by the end of December 2023 for year 1 funding. The programme will extend into 2024.

For the full story click HERE

News: UK Shared Prosperity Fund empowers Shropshire communities

4th October 2023

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is set to make a significant impact in Shropshire by providing crucial support for improving numeracy and digital skills, as well as supporting individuals back to employment or to start their employment journey.

Earlier this year, Shropshire Council called for applications for the Government-allocated fund under three priorities: People and Skills, Communities and Place, and Supporting Local Business.

Under the banner of People and Skills, £1.6m was allocated. Organisations were encouraged to apply to fund projects that would support economically inactive individuals, and/or provide access to essential digital skills.

Additionally, the 'Multiply' initiative aimed to enhance numeracy skills in the workplace, in daily life, and at home.

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said:-

"We were thrilled to receive 10 outstanding applications.

"These applications underwent a rigorous evaluation process, and we're delighted to announce that we have successfully allocated all the funding available in this first round, and have full confidence in the ability of our selected applicants to deliver the required outcomes. These projects hold immense promise and are poised to deliver sustainable benefits to individuals and communities across Shropshire."

Among the successful applicants was The School of Coding which will offer 'Digital Shropshire', a project that will deliver training in skill areas which there is currently a shortage in the county including skills for employability and digital marketing.

Manny Athwal, Project Leader, said:-

"We are planning delivery hubs and course centres in north, central and south Shropshire, where the learners will be able to attend classes. We plan to offer training in everything from basic IT skills to web development, and then will help and support individuals to find jobs."

Another noteworthy beneficiary is the Shropshire Sports Collective.

Calvin Lord-Latham, Education & Employability Manager, Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation, said:-

"We recognise that sports and physical activity have the potential to inspire, motivate, and empower individuals. It can cultivate essential skills, help them to unlock their potential, and pursue meaningful employment opportunities.

"By utilising sport and physical activity as a catalyst, we will create tailored programmes that address the specific needs of each community, fostering a supportive environment where individuals can improve their basic skills, enhance their employment prospects and achieve sustainable outcomes."

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund initiatives in Shropshire reflect the dynamic approach the council is taking to fostering skill enhancement and employment opportunities. One of the key focuses of these projects is working with local people to improve their employment chances.

There will be a further call for projects against People and Skills priority for delivery in 2024/25, but what these will be is still under development and will be announced later this year.

News: Have you got a community project which needs funding?

19th October 2023

Shropshire Council recently launched a £150,000 fund to make it easier for people in the county to improve their local area. This was made possible through the Community and Place strand of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Named Crowdfund Shropshire, the programme, which is being run in partnership with the community fundraising platform, Spacehive, enables local residents across the county to exclusively access funding for community improvement initiatives.

The crowdfunding nature of this programme, in collaboration with council funding, maximises the amount campaigners can raise in order to deliver transformational community projects that matter to them.

Those who have a project ready to go are encouraged to launch them on the Spacehive platform and pitch to the available funds, but the council, working with Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership and Spacehive, are offering further support to those who have an idea, but aren't sure how to proceed.

No fundraising experience is necessary: 65% of Spacehive creators are creating a community project for the first time. Spacehive assists project creators with online workshops, one-to-one support and resources, providing advice on everything from project costs to campaign promotion.

There will also be a number of face-to-face workshops next month led by Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership's voluntary and community sector support team, and everyone is welcome.

These include:

- Tuesday 7 November at 9.30am at The Roy Fletcher Centre in Shrewsbury.
- Monday 13 November at 9.30am at Ludlow Women's Centre.
- Tuesday 21 November at 9.30am at Ellesmere Town Hall.

This is the first funding round, and it will remain open until Wednesday 29 November 2023.

For more information, people can visit Crowdfund Shropshire here: Crowdfund Shropshire – About (spacehive.com)

Or contact:

partner@spacehive.com or crowdfund@shropshire.gov.uk

To read about how effectively business and the local community can work together read our latest blog: Why bringing together businesses and the local community is good news for everyone

To find out more about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund see: https://www.investinshropshire.co.uk/relocating-and-investing/uk-shared-prosperity-fund/

News: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund supports the Chamber's 'Business Growth Through Upskilling' programme

31st October 2023

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is supporting the Chamber's 'Business Growth Through Upskilling' programme, which will see new initiatives launched in various locations including Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Market Drayton, Bridgnorth, and Ludlow.

The aim of the project is to 'level up' the availability of upskilling and reskilling opportunities, making them convenient and accessible to businesses in all corners of the county.

Fully-funded leadership up to the value of £4,500 will be offered, alongside coaching and mentoring, with delegates entitled to three hours of one-to-one coaching. Shorter, separate upskilling courses will also be on offer as part of the programme.

A total of 100 places are being made available on a first come, first served basis – with a maximum of two per company.

Ruth Ross (*pictured right*), Shropshire Chamber chief executive, said: "This funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will help us expand the support we are able to offer to local businesses in Shropshire.

"It is a bold initiative which will take training opportunities to the wonderful market towns located across the county – we're really excited about it.

"The Chamber is actively working with partners and stakeholders to ensure that businesses can access as many opportunities as possible, and will be publishing more details of the programmes very soon."

She added: "These initiatives demonstrate our commitment to supporting economic growth and prosperity in Shropshire, and we not only look forward to commencing our project but also supporting businesses to engage with other programmes."

Shropshire Council secured a £12.4 million share of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund earlier this year – a Government-allocated fund to be managed by local authorities in partnership with local stakeholders and aimed at reducing inequalities between communities.

Ruth said: "Our programme will play a key role in upskilling and reskilling existing managers and employees across Shropshire, providing the knowledge and skills to improve productivity and create employment opportunities.

"Working alongside other programme delivery partners, the Chamber will play a key role in helping businesses to navigate the funding and programmes on offer through the UKSPF fund."

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025.

The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

- For more information about the Chamber's Business Growth through Upskilling Programme contact projects@shropshire-chamber.co.uk or call the Chamber's business support team on 01952 208200.
- For more information about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, visit https://www.investinshropshire.co.uk/relocating-and-investing/uk-shared-prosperity-fund/ ; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus or email:ukspf@shropshire.gov.uk

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News: School of Coding & AI Launches 'Digital Shropshire' with UK Shared Prosperity Funding

14th November 2023

School of Coding & AI, the UK's largest coding and computer science educator for children and adults, has been successful in a bid for funds from Shropshire Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund

It's Project 'Digital Shropshire' is looking to support over 500 Shropshire residents over the next two years in Digital and Communication Skills for Life.

Digital Shropshire is designed to provide every individual over16 living in Shropshire with the chance to enhance their digital skills. Whether this is to learn how to get safely online, get ready for employment, general upskilling, or needing help with digital inclusion and accessing healthcare and other essential services online.

The courses will cover a broad spectrum, including essential digital skills and communication skills for life.

The aim of the courses is to ensure Shropshire residents are well-equipped to tackle the demands of accessing the digital world we live in, but also today's job market.

Clare Norton, Operations Manager of SoC, said: "We will provide courses that upskill our Shropshire residents, whether this is in basic digital skills, or getting online safely, or more advanced techniques such as improving your CV and presenting skills to take your next step on your career path. Initially we will have two courses available: Essential Digital DSkills & Communication and Life Skills. The courses are available to anyone over 16 and living in the Shropshire Council area – it's rare to find a project such as this where funded courses are available to anyone, even if they are in education, employment or training.

Our courses will run on a weekly basis in market towns throughout the County and if you book both Digital Skills and Communication and Life Skills courses we will include a £25 gift voucher for each of our participants on completion of course 2!

We cannot wait to hear about the outcomes from our participants after joining us for these insightful and relevant full day courses."

We will deliver the courses starting with three key locations throughout Shropshire, beginning November 6th, 2023 and running through until Christmas in the towns of Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Market Drayton. Participants can look forward to engaging in our courses, with the flexibility for extended learning and the prestigious recognition of accredited certificates upon completion.

Councillor Mark Jones, Cabinet member for economic growth and regeneration, Shropshire Council adds: "We realise that many people feel excluded because of the increased digitisation of our daily lives. This project, made possible through our UK Shared Prosperity Fund, is a major response to this issue in Shropshire. It will provide much needed support and training in what have now become essential life – and work – skills for residents."

For more information on School of Coding & AI's Digital Shropshire project and courses or enrolment details and criteria, please visit https://schoolofcodinguk.com/digital-shropshire/ or contact 01902 509 209 | info@schoolofcoding.co.uk

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and places, supporting local business, and people and skills.

Further general information may be found on: https://www.investinshropshire.co.uk/relocating-and-investing/uk-shared-prosperity-fund/

To read or hear more about the current projects that have been supported see:

Unlocking Potential: Exploring the Latest Updates on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

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News: Nearly £15m will fund vital initiatives across Shropshire

17th January 2024

In 2023 the UK Shared Prosperity Team at Shropshire Council successfully secured nearly £15m to fund vital projects across Shropshire.

The money was provided as part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda, with three key investment priorities: Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. Its overall objective is to build 'pride in place' and increase life chances.

In Shropshire the funding is being used to kickstart and/or support a number of exciting initiatives across the county.

From nearly 200 applications to date, and following a rigorous assessment process, the team have identified 37 projects that already have received, or will receive, funding during early 2024.

Gary Spence, Shropshire Council's external funding and technical lead officer in the business growth and investment team, said:-

"We received a great number of excellent applications and some terrific project ideas. We have been able to work with existing partners, but also to develop new partnerships and work with some truly

inspiring and entrepreneurial organisations. We are very excited about the initiatives that are currently being rolled out."

The successful projects have proved diverse and varied. They range from the creation and improvement of community facilities in a number of Shropshire's towns, to wellbeing and development projects, the creation of a crowdfunding platform for community groups, programmes supporting individuals back into work, and a focus on upskilling Shropshire's workforce.

The funding will also support the launch of a new Capital Grant Scheme for small businesses.

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said:-

"The schemes we are funding will benefit communities, individuals and businesses across the county. We know this will make a real and long-lasting contribution both to the economy and the wellbeing of our residents."

Shrewsbury Food Hub's community kitchen is one of the successful projects currently being contracted.

Tammy Bloodworth, the Hub manager, said:-

"Our community kitchen project aims to minimise food wastage by making it into delicious meals, and to benefit and support marginalised groups and individuals in our community. Through the cookery activities people can learn new skills, gain confidence, and connect together over shared food and conversation. Funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has made this project possible. We are super happy and super grateful."

Nearly £8m from the total funds have been allocated, and the team is currently in the contracting phase for an additional £4.9m. Just over £2m of additional funding was also secured for specifically rural projects that promote green space, active travel and small business grants.

To read about some of the projects currently being supported see
: https://www.investinshropshire.co.uk/uk-shared-prosperity-projects/

News: Next round of UKSPF funded 'Crowdfund Shropshire' soon to open

2nd February 2024

Crowdfund Shropshire, the new civic fundraising platform where community groups can get their projects funded by public and grant funding, is opening in the next month (during February 2024).

Campaigners are encouraged to come along to an online workshop on Tuesday 20 February 2024 to find out about how their project could benefit, how it works and learn some top tips for their campaign.

For this next round of funding, projects can bid for up to £10,000 from the Shared Prosperity Community Fund (in partnership with Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership), and up to £20,000 from the Green Spaces and Active Travel Fund (in partnership with Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin).

Crowdfund Shropshire is being run in partnership with the community fundraising platform Spacehive, which enables local residents to exclusively access funding for community improvement initiatives.

The crowdfunding nature of this programme, in collaboration with council funding, maximises the amount campaigners can raise in order to deliver transformational community projects that matter to them.

Gwilym Butler, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for finance, corporate resources and communities, said:-

"We're delighted to be able to announce a second round of funding as part of Crowdfund Shropshire, offering community groups another chance to transform their local area.

"If you have an idea please come along to the workshop next month, where you can find out more and explore the abundance of support available to help you make it happen."

Crowdfund Shropshire launches at Wem Town Hall on Wednesday 11 October 2023

There are currently five projects crowdfunding. They are: Rural Art Hub, Walking in Wem, Multicultural Children's Day, Little Stars in the Community, and Get Crafty With Words. Both Rural Art Hub and Get Crafty With Words have almost reached their fundraising target. People can check out their projects here for inspiration, and donate or spread the word to help them reach their goal.

Gwilym added:-

"We already have five great projects on the platform which are bidding for your support as part of the first round of funding, which was made available in October 2023.

"Please support them as much as you can and help to make them happen."

Shropshire's Shared Prosperity Community Fund has been made possible due to funding under the Communities and Place theme of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, managed by Shropshire Council.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the Government's levelling up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

Contact: partner@spacehive.com or crowdfund@shropshire.gov.uk

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News: UK Shared Prosperity Fund helps individuals gain employment

26th February 2024

UK Shared Prosperity Fund money is making a definitive and positive impact on individuals across Shropshire.

For the last two years the funding has been used to fund "Multiply", a programme designed to improve numeracy skills for people in the workplace or those looking to find employment.

Multiply is funded by the Department for Education through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the team at Shropshire Council have been working with partners to deliver courses across the county.

On receiving the funding Shrewsbury Colleges Group engaged ANTA Education Ltd as a delivery partner. ANTA reported that, within eight weeks of promoting the programme, 40 people had signed up to courses.

Corinne Brown, Business Development Manager at Shrewsbury Colleges Group, said:-

"It seems many people have an aversion to maths, which can often date back to schooldays. So I was delighted to work with ANTA Education Ltd, who identified a key enabler for employment with their health and safety in construction courses, embedding numeracy that was relevant to real life work situations. It just seemed to make sense, and the participants have thrived as a result."

Jason is a student who has benefitted from the training. He studied for a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card after being out of work for over a year, and took the health and safety course as part of this qualification.

After qualifying Jason managed to gain employment almost immediately, so was able to put his new skills to good use right away.

Jason said:-

"My experience with ANTA was amazing. The level of support they offer cannot be matched, and they made the process feel effortless. Gaining a new job has helped me in so many ways, thank you."

Craig Howard, Managing Director of ANTA Education Ltd, commented:-

"Through participating in the course Jason gained confidence and overcame various personal barriers to achieve his goal. We are very proud of him. He's been in touch recently to let us know he's gone on to gain further qualifications ,and can now operate 10-tonne excavators on site."

Amy Farley, part of Shropshire Council's economic growth team dealing with UK Shared Prosperity Fund money, said:-

"This is a great example of UK Shared Prosperity Fund money in action. Partners and businesses working together with the funding we've provided. It's gratifying to know that the money is successfully filtering through, reaching the people who can benefit, and making a real difference to them."

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said:-

"Our economic growth team worked hard to secure this funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and it is now starting to yield results. We have funded a great many exciting projects, and look forward to more positive stories about how the funding has supported individuals and communities across the county."

To read about some of the projects currently being supported see
: https://www.investinshropshire.co.uk/uk-shared-prosperity-projects/

News : Could you benefit from Shropshire's UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects?

19th April 2024

On Friday 10 May 2024 businesses and individuals will have the chance to discover how they could benefit from Shropshire's UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies.

For the past year over £15m, secured by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund team at Shropshire Council, has been actively supporting and making a difference to the lives of people and businesses across Shropshire.

“Shropshire Expo: Business Support, Skills and Championing Your Community” is at Shrewsbury Town FC’s stadium on Friday 10 May 2024 from 11am-2pm. It includes an exhibition and presentations on the active projects across the county.

Gary Spence, Shropshire Council’s external funding and technical lead officer in the business growth and investment team, said:-

“The aim of the event is to get businesses, individuals, and community organisations together to network but also to find out what support is available to them from the numerous UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects we are currently funding.

“There is a raft of business support programmes, but businesses will also discover how they can get involved in their local communities and offer support for those seeking employment.

“For individuals, there is help around upskilling and how to find work. For community and voluntary organisations, the event offers a chance for promotion and engagement with local businesses.

“Representatives from all the projects will be on hand to talk in person to visitors about their projects and guide them through the process of accessing the support. “

The diverse range of programmes available under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund includes assistance for starting a business, business growth and expansion, innovation, prototyping, manufacturing, energy-saving initiatives, tourism development, leadership and management coaching, as well as improving digital and numeracy skills.

There are also initiatives to support businesses in generally upskilling their workforce through access to educational support, retraining and qualifications including vocational licences. However, and perhaps most importantly of all, the support on offer is free to anyone wanting to take advantage of it.

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council’s Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said:-

“ Our UK Shared Prosperity Fund team and the providers who have formulated these projects are to be applauded. The funding has facilitated a comprehensive programme of support for businesses and individuals, as well as highlighting the work of the voluntary sector across the county. From the projects on offer, it is clear the funding is already making a substantial contribution to the economy of Shropshire. I urge people to attend this event and take advantage of the free support available to them.”

To find out more, see who should attend and to book, please see The Shropshire Expo: Business Support, Skills & Championing your Community

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News: UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects are a success across Shropshire

9th September 2024

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has successfully supported local businesses, benefitted communities, and improved skills across Shropshire.

Shropshire was awarded approximately £15m from the fund and received over 200 applications from all over the county. Following a rigorous selection process 65 projects were eventually selected.

All the projects are due to finish in March 2025 when the funding ends. As these projects enter their final phase, the overall story is one of success. Individuals have been helped into work, people have been able to progress in their careers, local communities and physical assets have been improved, and businesses have been supported in numerous ways.

One of these projects is Digital Shropshire. Digital Shropshire is an initiative run in Shropshire by The School of Coding & AI, the UK's largest coding and computer science educator, which has a base in Shrewsbury.

Manny Athwal, founder of School of Coding & AI, said:

"Lots of people struggle with technology these days. We now live in a world where digital skills are essential for all aspects of daily life and our project has helped people of all ages.

"Many of our learners are anxious when they come to us but by the time they complete our courses, they report a marked increase in their confidence and have skills and knowledge that they can use both personally and in their working lives. Many are excited and motivated to explore what else is available to them.

"To date we have helped 155 individuals in Digital Skills, and a further 136 people in Communication and Life Skills which improves a person's employability.

"We've taught everything from the absolute basics of how to use a smartphone or write an email, to an introduction to coding, or AI (artificial intelligence)."

Aston University's Agri-tech Growth & Resources for Innovation project aims to help Shropshire's food and drink processing, and Agri-tech businesses – major sectors for the Shropshire economy.

The project is currently working with 30 businesses with a further 15 lined up to benefit soon.

Paul Gretton, Senior Project Manager at Aston University, said:

"The funding has given us the opportunity to work on some diverse and fascinating challenges for a range of Shropshire companies.

"For one company we are analysing their blends of spices from all over the world. Spices have many health benefits and by identifying the exact composition of these blends we can advise them on the best way to market the product.

"For another company we are helping to develop humane rodent traps using 'camera recognition', and for others we are offering advice on replacing single-use plastic packaging now that new and upcoming legislation will outlaw and restrict the use of them.

"This funding has made so many initiatives possible. We urge companies to get in touch before March if they think we can help."

The Montgomery Canal Restoration also received funding and is having a positive impact on both the local economy, and the local community.

Section of the Montgomery Canal made waterproof again by volunteers at Crickheath.

John Dodwell, Chair of the Montgomery Canal Partnership, said:

“This funding is not just helping to restore a wonderful part of our heritage – which is over 200 years old – but it will also impact positively on economic regeneration and tourism.

“The funding has allowed us to improve the towpath and the canal channel itself, plus the biodiversity of the area will also benefit greatly because of this work.

“It’s also generated interest and involvement from the local community. Almost all the improvements are being carried out by skilled and general volunteers, and because of the project, we have gained 12 new regular volunteers and attracted 44 people to our corporate volunteering days.”

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council’s Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said:

“As administrators of the fund it is reassuring to receive this feedback from the projects and hear about the positive and practical impacts the funding is having.

“This was our aim, and is a key part of our Shropshire Plan. From young people in deprived areas to older residents, communities, and businesses, we wanted the projects to address identified needs in the county and we’ve worked tirelessly with a range of partners to achieve this.

“It is proving to be such a great success that we hope that similar funding will be made available to us beyond 2025.”

Photos: copyright of Shropshire Union Canal Society

News: The UKSPF Small Business Grant Scheme re-opens for Applications

3rd September 2024

The UKSPF Small Business Grant Scheme will open again for applications on **Monday 9th September**.

This grant scheme offers grants of between £2,000 and £10,000 to purchase new equipment or make improvements to business premises.

One of the previous grant recipients is Beth Heath of Quarry Kitchen & Shropshire Ice Cream Ltd. The grant helped her to diversify into a new market,

"We had taken over the Quarry Café and wanted to transform it into a vibrant space that celebrated local food and drink. We've used the grant to renovate the café by recladding and replacing the walls. The result is a bright, clean, and attractive eating area that has achieved a 5-star food hygiene rating. We've also been able to employ a number of local people. None of this would have been possible without the grant."

Since March the team have received 218 EOIs with 39 projects from across Shropshire going forward to full application. To date £250,000 has been awarded to help small businesses grow and expand.

Gary Spence, Shropshire Council's external funding and technical lead officer in the business growth and investment team said,

"This grant continues to be popular. On each of the previous occasions we have invited applications we've been forced to close the process within a week because of the overwhelming response.

We ask businesses to note this date and complete their Expressions of Interest (EOI) right away to avoid disappointment. We'd also like to remind potential applicants to check the criteria both in terms of their eligibility, and what can – and cannot – be funded before applying."

Businesses from one to 49 employees can apply for a grant if their business is physically located in the Shropshire Council local authority area.

Applicants will need to demonstrate how the grant will help them create new employment opportunities, or develop new products, processes, or services within their business. They will also be expected to match-fund the amount of grant applied for by at least 50% of the total investment.

As in previous rounds all applicants will need to complete the initial online Expression of Interest (EOI) form. This will be assessed, and successful projects will then be invited to submit a full and more detailed application.

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said:

"It's gratifying to see the positive results of this grant. Its popularity proves that this is exactly the sort of support that our small businesses are seeking.

The funding we have been able to access on their behalf is truly helping us to deliver on our promise to create a healthy economy in Shropshire."

Details about how to apply and the EOI form can be found at: UKSPF Expression of interest form guidance | Shropshire Council

Anyone with any questions or queries about applying should email ukspfgrants@shropshire.gov.uk. Unfortunately, queries cannot be dealt with over the telephone.

News: Shropshire Businesses Urged to Apply for Funding before Scheme Ends

19th November 2024

The UKSPF Small Business Grant Scheme is still open and would like to encourage more businesses to apply before the scheme ends.

Grants of between £2,000 and £10,000 are available to purchase new equipment or make improvements to business premises.

The grant was made possible because of the £15m worth of funding awarded to Shropshire Council for a range of projects through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022. This funding round will end in March 2025.

Gary Spence, Shropshire Council's external funding and technical lead officer in the Business Growth and Investment team, said:

"The recent budget announced that there would be a continuation of the funding for another year, but we are not sure how much this will be or what it will fund. Consequently, we urge businesses to take advantage of the current pot by applying as soon as possible.

We would like as many applications before the Christmas break as possible to allow time for the awards to be made before March 2025."

Prospective applicants need to complete an online Expression of Interest (EOI) form and demonstrate how the grant will help create new employment opportunities, or develop new products, processes, or services within their business.

These EOIs are assessed, and any projects successfully passing this initial stage are invited to submit a full application.

Nick Davis, founder of award-winning Hobsons Brewery Ltd in South Shropshire, is a recent recipient of one of the grants and used it to purchase a training brew plant (pictured). This is a small-scale system that can be used to learn about a process or technology before it's used on a larger scale.

"Buying this equipment has enabled us to launch a series of training courses for publicans, home brewers and beer enthusiasts. We've offered courses before but having the training brew plant has introduced a practical 'hands-on' element to what our delegates can take away from the training. The courses are very popular, so now we are thinking about how we can develop these further.

We've created one additional job, and it's also had a tremendously positive impact on our inhouse R&D because our own brewers can use the equipment to experiment with different techniques and ingredients."

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said

‘This grant can help businesses realise development opportunities, generate jobs and create opportunities for growth. Applicants are urged to check the eligibility criteria but over 46 businesses across the county have already taking advantage of this funding and we urge anyone thinking about applying to do so as soon as possible.”

Details about how to apply and the EOI form can be found at: UKSPF Expression of interest form guidance | Shropshire Council

Anyone with any questions or queries about applying should email ukspfgrants@shropshire.gov.uk. Unfortunately, queries cannot be dealt with over the telephone.

News: UKSPF Investment Delivers Major Boost in Shropshire

28th May 2025

Shropshire Council has announced the significant impact the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has had on the county.

In the past 3 years, over £12million has been invested in projects that have transformed lives, revitalised communities, and supported local businesses.

Since 2022, various initiatives and projects funded by the UKSPF programme and administered by Shropshire Council have provided targeted support in three key areas: Supporting Local Business, Community & Place, and People & Skills.

Supporting Local Business Growth

£5 million has been invested in supporting Shropshire’s business community. From start-ups to established enterprises, over 1,400 businesses have received tailored support, including grants, innovation vouchers, and advice on energy efficiency, marketing, and leadership.

The programme has helped create 204 new jobs, supported 90 new business start-ups, and saved over 6,600 tonnes of CO_2 through sustainability initiatives.

Business Boost 360 was one of the business support initiatives funded through UKSPF. Signing up for this Shropshire Growth Hub programme meant that Rachael of Rachael Brown Equine Chiropractor was able to launch 2 new services, streamline her business operations and access further funding.

Rachael says,

“Signing up for Business Boost and working with the team at the Shropshire Growth Hub has had a real positive impact on my business.”

Revitalising Shropshire’s Communities and Places

The Community and Place priority received £3.5 million in capital and revenue funding, with an additional £1.7 million from the Rural Fund. Together, these investments have supported 28 projects across the county.

The funding has supported town centre improvements, restoration of heritage and cultural assets, and the creation of new green spaces and cycle routes. Community cinemas, arts events, and infrastructure support for grassroots organisations have also benefitted, boosting local engagement and volunteering.

Key achievements have included the support of 731 local events and activities, the creation of 610 volunteer opportunities, the improvement of 950,410 square metres of green/blue space, and the upgrade of 18 footpaths and cycleways.

The Montgomery Canal Restoration was one of the recipients of UKSPF funding and reported a positive impact on both the local economy, and the local community.

John Dodwell, Chair of the Montgomery Canal Partnership, said:

"The funding has allowed us to improve the towpath and the canal channel itself, plus the biodiversity of the area will also benefit greatly because of the work we've been able to do.

"This funding has not just helped to restore a wonderful part of our heritage – which is over 200 years old – but will also impact positively on economic regeneration and tourism in the area."

Empowering People and Skills Development

With £1.6 million allocated to the People and Skills strand, Shropshire has delivered five major projects focused on employability, digital inclusion, and workforce development. 98% of this funding has been utilised in life transforming projects.

Programmes have supported those individuals considered to be the furthest from the labour market by helping them to gain qualifications and the confidence to re-enter employment.

Community-based learning initiatives have tackled digital exclusion, while partnerships with local employers have been strengthened and ensured that training aligns with the needs of Shropshire's changing economy.

Cameron Atwal, Assistant Project Manager at the School of Coding & AI says,

"Thanks to UKSPF funding, we've equipped people across Shropshire with essential digital skills that change lives. From gaining confidence in using technology to applying new tools at work, the impact has been incredible. These courses unlock potential, create opportunities, and keep our communities ahead in the digital world. At School of Coding & AI, we're proud to bridge the digital divide across the county."

Creating A Foundation for the Future

Uk Shared Prosperity Funding has laid the groundwork for long-term prosperity in Shropshire. With strong outcomes already achieved, Shropshire Council is committed to building on this momentum and ensuring continued investment in people, places, and enterprise.

Cllr Rob Wilson, Shropshire Council Cabinet Member for Transport and Economic Growth said,

"The award of this funding for these specific priorities has enabled us to invest in the future of the county despite the financial challenges the Council has faced.

"It's been about giving people the tools they need to succeed, future-proof our economy, and revitalise our communities to build a more inclusive, connected, and resilient Shropshire for the future."

News: Funding helps people across Shropshire into new jobs and careers

6th June 2025

The funding allocated under the People & Skills priority of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has made a real and lasting impact on individuals in Shropshire.

An allocation of £1.6m awarded in 2022 aimed to improve employability, upskill the workforce, enhance digital skills and increase opportunities for individuals. The current programme of funding ended in March 2025 and was utilised to fund 5 projects that have successfully delivered its objectives.

A primary goal was to offer employment support through advice and guidance, and skills development for those farthest from the labour market, as well as support career advancement for those already employed.

Working with Key Stakeholders

The programme was delivered in collaboration with a number of key partners:

- The Shrewsbury Town Football Club Foundation involved participants in sport-based initiatives to help them build confidence and develop essential employability skills.
- Enable, a service provided by Shropshire Council, assisted individuals who encounter barriers to employment.
- The School of Coding & AI provided both foundational and advanced digital skills training.
- The Shropshire Skills Hub, operated by the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, offered in-work training and qualification support.

As a result of the initiatives offered by these partners, a total of 691 socially excluded individuals accessed vital support services, 589 people improved their basic skills and 575 received employment support. This enabled them to find employment or put them in a better position to find work.

Additionally, 280 people were supported to participate in education, and 486 reported increased employability thanks to improved interpersonal skills which resulted in greater confidence, more successful job interviews, and sustained employment outcomes

354 individuals gained a qualification, and 409 economically active people engaged in mainstream skills education and training which has enabled them to progress in the workplace.

A Real & Lasting Impact

Amy Farley**,** UKSPF Technical Officer within the Economy Skills and Funding team at Shropshire Council with responsibility for administering the funding for this priority, said,

“While focussing on the needs of individuals we were careful to ensure that the training aligned with the needs of local employers.

“We are proud of what we’ve achieved in partnership with our providers. Over the past three years, we’ve worked together as a team to deliver real value and to enhance the lives of the people of Shropshire whilst adding value to Shropshire as a county.”

Stephen Clegg was one of many people who received support from Enable through the funding,

“I wasn’t very confident in finding work and have suffered a lot of knockbacks. Enable helped with my CV, and I knew they would support me with job applications if I got stuck. It’s just given me more confidence in seeking employment.”

Cllr Rob Wilson, Shropshire Council Cabinet Member for Transport and Economic Growth said,

“This funding was deployed with the goal of reaching those who needed it most, and the results speak for themselves. Everyone involved should be proud of the positive impact made across the county.

“An extension to the funding has also meant that majority of these projects can continue for another year.”

News: UKSPF Investment Breathes New Life into Shropshire’s Communities

3rd July 2025

Communities across Shropshire are seeing the benefits of major investment that has brought new life to town centres, revitalised cultural landmarks, and strengthened grassroots organisations.

Through the UKSPF Community and Place Priority initiative, Shropshire Council has invested £3.4 million between 2022 and 2025. This funding has supported 28 diverse projects that have made a visible and lasting difference in both town and rural areas.

The initiative, supported by £1.8 million for building and improvement projects (capital funding) and £1.7 million for everyday running costs (revenue funding), was designed to support a wide range of community priorities. These included improvements to public spaces, restoration of heritage sites, support for local arts and culture, and the development of infrastructure for grassroots organisations.

An additional £1.7 million in Rural Funds was also allocated, with 91% of that funding already invested in building projects.

Beth McGowan from Shrewsbury Colleges Group, and organiser of Shrewsbury International Comedy Festival explores the streets of Shrewsbury.

Town centres have been enhanced with new bike access schemes and building improvements designed to boost footfall and local pride. These improvements have enhanced the look and feel of town centres, increased visitors and supported local businesses.

In Shrewsbury a range of projects have been launched to support the Shrewsbury Moves strategy, a 10-year vision to transform movement and public space across the town.

The funding facilitated the development of an eBike subscription service, eCargo bikes for businesses, and a new river shuttle service, all designed to enable residents and businesses to use active modes of transport more often.

Seb Slater of the Shrewsbury BID said,

“The funding has helped us hugely in making active travel more accessible and appealing for everyone in Shrewsbury. In its first few months over 14,000km have already been cycled using

the Shrewsbury Moves ebike scheme and is a very encouraging start to realising our 10-year vision to make Shrewsbury one of the most inclusive, accessible, and economically thriving towns in the UK."

Grassroots organisations have benefited from vital infrastructure support, enabling them to expand their services and reach more people. From community kitchens to voluntary sector groups, these organisations are now better equipped to support those in need and foster stronger community ties.

Hands Together Ludlow, a local charity, has used the funding to hire a full-time community and project coordinator to manage and support over 100 volunteers.

Susie O'Hagan, Chief Operating Officer, Hands Together Ludlow said,

"Thanks to UKSPF funding, we've not only strengthened our volunteer base with better training and support, but the addition of this vital resource has freed us up to do so much more. We've also been able to bring together a powerful network of community organisations across Ludlow and improved our outreach and marketing. This investment has helped us reach more people, deliver more services, and lay the foundation for a more connected and resilient town."

The restored Cambrian Station Building in Oswestry

Cultural and heritage assets across the county have also received a new lease on life. Several historic buildings have been restored such as Ellesmere Yard, the Cambrian Station Building (left) in Oswestry, and St Johns Church, Doddington. This work is preserving Shropshire's rich history while creating new spaces for events and gatherings. These efforts have improved local perceptions and increased visitor numbers, reinforcing the county's cultural identity.

The programme has also placed a strong emphasis on creativity and inclusion, supporting over 700 community-led arts and cultural events, including community cinemas and activities aimed at engaging hard-to-reach groups.

This support has meant that more than 600 new volunteer opportunities have been created, and community engagement has been increased through projects like Flicks in the Sticks (Arts Alive), Civic Crowdfund and the Cultural Compact Grants.

Nature and wellbeing have also been central to the programme's success. Over 950,000 square metres of green and blue space have been improved, and nearly 11,000 kilometres of cycleways and footpaths have been enhanced or newly created. These improvements have made it easier for residents to enjoy the outdoors, promoting healthier lifestyles and greater environmental awareness.

Rob Wilson, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for Transport & Economic Growth said,

"This programme has delivered so many real, tangible benefits to our communities, there are almost too many to mention. But it's about more than just numbers— it's been about providing support,

making improvements and having a positive and lasting impact on the lives of Shropshire residents. From the feedback we've received, it's been a true success story. I want to thank all of our partners who have delivered the projects using UKSPF funding."

News: UKSPF-Funded Initiatives Earn National Recognition

28th July 2025

UKSPF funding supported two Shrewsbury projects that recently led to the town receiving two nominations for a national award.

Shrewsbury was shortlisted twice in this year's prestigious Visa Let's Celebrate Towns Awards. Two projects: 'Work in Shrewsbury' and 'Shrewsbury Moves' were entered by Shrewsbury's Business Improvement District (BID) and Shropshire Council on behalf of the Big Town Plan Partnership (BTPP), in 2 categories and made the shortlist in both.

'Work in Shrewsbury' received nearly £450,000 of UKSPF funding. This enabled a variety of support to be offered to businesses in Shrewsbury including training, business growth grants and expert masterclasses in Shrewsbury.

E-bikes supplied by the Shrewsbury Moves project

UKSPF Funding for the 'Shrewsbury Moves' project, received over £300,000 of capital funding. Among other initiatives, it supported the development of an eBike subscription service, eCargo bikes for businesses, and a new river shuttle service, all designed to enable residents and businesses to use active modes of transport more often.

Matt Potts, Service Manager for Economy, Funding and Skills at Shropshire Council and a Board Director of Shrewsbury BID, said,

"It is extremely satisfying to see the success of these projects and have them recognised at national level. Without UKSPF, funding initiatives like this in the county would simply not be possible.

"The Economy, Funding and Skills team at the Council is dedicated to securing funding and collaborating with partners like the Shrewsbury BID and the BTPP to support innovative projects that generate substantial and sustainable economic benefits. "

Seb Slater, Executive Director of Shrewsbury BID, said:

"We have an ambitious ten-year strategy for Shrewsbury, and UKSPF funding has proved essential in both implementing and advancing our vision for the town."

Councillor Rob Wilson, Shrewsbury Town Council leader and representative on the Big Town Plan Partnership Board, said,

"These projects in Shrewsbury have been recognised nationally but UKSPF funding has benefitted numerous towns, organisations, businesses and individuals across the county.

"Accessing funding like this and proactively seeking to work collaboratively with key organisations means that we can still achieve positive change despite the current financial challenges."

News: Phase 2 of UKSPF Shropshire Skills Hub launched to boost careers across Shropshire

20th August 2025

News about one of our UKSPF-funded projects:

Following the success of Phase 1 of the project, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has launched Phase 2 of the UKSPF Shropshire Skills Hub, a dynamic initiative aimed at supporting individuals across the county to take the next step in their career journey.

The project is being delivered by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Inspired Mindset and SBC Training, funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Continuing as delivery partners, Shropshire training experts Inspired Mindset and SBC Training ensure that learning is practical, professional, and local, however qualifications from any provider can be utilised.

This next phase is still exclusively for individuals who live in the Shropshire Council Local Authority area. Whether employed, self-employed or actively looking for work, eligible individuals can apply for one grant of up to £1,500 to fund or part fund a vocational qualification, certificate or licence achieved before 30 November 2025. The purpose of the funding is to support individuals gain specific skills and knowledge to support upwards career progression or a change of career.

Amanda Gosling, UKSPF Project Manager, explains

"Phase 1 of the UKSPF Shropshire Skills Hub was received exceptionally well, resulting in us exceeding our target of supporting 400 individuals. The project financially supported 411 Shropshire Council residents in achieving a vocational qualification and now aim to support another 160 through Phase 2.

This really is a fantastic opportunity for eligible individuals to gain a vocational qualification that provides them with specific skills and knowledge to progress in their career or change profession. Qualifications funded through Phase 1 of the project included PRINCE2® Project Management, ILM Level 3 and Level 5 in Leadership and Management, Level 3 BPEC Award in Solar Photovoltaic Installation, a Medical Terminology certificate, and a huge range of other topics".

One of the many success stories from the Upskilling Project is Jasmine, who completed a Level 2 Certificate in Team Leading in September 2024. At the time, Jasmine was not yet in a leadership role but the course gave her the skills and confidence to step up when a new opportunity arose within her organisation.

Jasmine explained,

"Throughout the course I learned lots of valuable skills about leading a team, such as different leadership styles, conflict management and time management.

"A few months after completing the course, I applied for a promotion and used the terminology and knowledge I'd gained to help me through the interview process. I got the role and seven months later, I was promoted again to Lead Practitioner. The course gave me the confidence, skills and vocabulary to grow professionally, and I still refer back to the resources regularly. I'm now working towards a Level 5 NVQ in Health and Social Care and Leadership. I would highly recommend this course to anyone just starting out in a leadership role."

From welding skills, CAD, Education and training, and an Introduction to Robotics course, through to Burnout Coaching, Leadership, Sales Success, Account Management, and AI for Professionals qualifications, there's something for everyone in this next phase. Amanda adds, "with the project coming to an end in November it's vital that anyone interested gets in touch to apply as soon as possible."

To find out more about what is on offer and to confirm if you're eligible, contact: a.gosling@shropshire-chamber.co.uk

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News: New Video Shows How UKSPF Funding Has Transformed Lives Across Shropshire

27th August 2025

A newly released video highlights the transformative impact of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) across Shropshire since 2022. It showcases how strategic investment in people and skills has helped hundreds of residents overcome barriers and move closer to employment.

Replacing previous ERDF funding, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was designed to build pride in place and increase life chances. With three core investment priorities — Supporting Local Business, Community and Place, and People and Skills — the video focuses on the latter, capturing the stories, partnerships, and outcomes that have shaped the programme's success.

Over 65 programmes have been funded across all 3 priorities by UK Shared Prosperity funding. Of the 5 programmes supported under the People and Skills priority, all were tailored to meet local employer needs and support individuals in gaining confidence, skills, and access to work.

Among the initiatives featured are:

- **Brightstar Boxing**, in collaboration with Energize, Shrewsbury Town in the Community, Shropshire Cricket Board, and Embrace PE, used physical activity and classroom learning to build workplace confidence, promote wellbeing, and develop basic skills.
- The **Skills Hub**, run by the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, offered a wide range of courses and qualifications to help people upskill or change careers.
- The **School of Coding** addressed an identified digital skills gap, financial literacy, and introduced learners to AI.
- **Multiply**, led by Shrewsbury College, supported individuals lacking confidence in numeracy, attracting participants from diverse age groups and backgrounds.
- **Enable**, a Shropshire-based supported employment service, helped over **410 people** since 2023 to find and maintain meaningful employment through job coaching, interview preparation, and employer engagement.

The video also features heartfelt interviews with beneficiaries, one of whom described their experience as “one of the most beneficial things I have done.”

Amy Farley, UKSPF Technical Officer for People and Skills at Shropshire Council, praised the collaborative effort saying that the funding has “delivered something for Shropshire people to enhance their life.”

Cllr Rob Wilson, Shropshire Council Cabinet Member for Transport and Economic Growth said,

“This video showcases the genuine difference the People and Skills allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has made throughout Shropshire. It truly demonstrates how partnership, community spirit, and focused investment can come together to drive lasting positive change.”

Watch the video

News: Grants available to fund a vocational qualification to further your career.

3rd November 2025

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is running a government-funded project offering grant funding of up to £1,500 per person for people looking to progress their careers.

It is open to anyone living in the Shropshire Council local authority area and in employment – and candidates do not need to be a member of the Chamber.

Applicants can apply for a grant to fund or part fund a course with any provider, with many fully funded places also available through our two local delivery partners, from leadership excellence and digital marketing to medical terminology and computer aided design (CAD).

Funding for the grant is provided through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which seeks to address local skills gaps and improve people’s job prospects.

Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross said the scheme is open to anyone aged 16 or over, in employment, and aiming for a qualification, certificate, or licence to support the next phase of their career.

“This project aims to support people to obtain professional knowledge, technical skills, and/or work experience relevant to a particular career and occupation. By addressing local skills needs we hope to create high skill, high wage job opportunities for Shropshire people.

“It helps to boost the Shropshire economy, supports companies to retain talent, equips the workforce with new skills, and supports career progression by retraining and upskilling local people.”

Inspired Mindset based in Whitchurch, and SBC Training in Shrewsbury are offering fully funded places on certain courses including the NQual endorsed certificates in Leadership Excellence, Digital Marketing, and Gel Polish & BIAB Application with Marketing and Business Skills.

There are also fully funded places available on a Computer Aided Design course and understanding medical terminology.

Full details can be found at UKSPF Shropshire Skills Hub

For more information and to explore dates, check eligibility and register, contact UKSPF@shropshire-chamber.co.uk

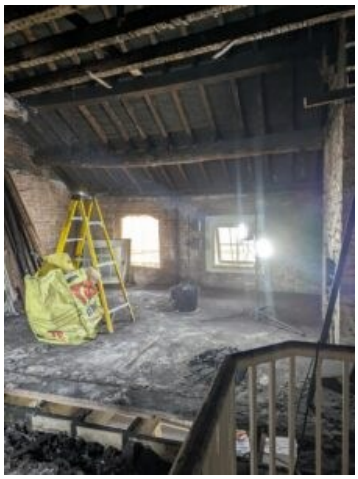
News: Property Improvement Grant helps bring long vacant Oswestry building back into use

23rd April 2026

The long-vacant property in Oswestry

A long-vacant property in Oswestry town centre is being brought back into commercial use thanks to support from Invest in Shropshire through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Property Improvement Grant.

The grant has supported essential structural repairs at 3 Willow Street, a commercial property that had remained vacant and on the market for a considerable time before being purchased in February 2025. When the new owners acquired the building, it was uninhabitable, with electrics and plumbing removed and extensive structural issues revealed once internal plaster was stripped back.



Cracking and movement throughout the building raised serious concerns, requiring a structural engineer to produce a detailed stabilisation plan. Without early intervention, the issues risked escalating into major structural failure, significantly increasing repair costs and threatening the future viability of the building.

Funding awarded through the Property Improvement Grant helped ensure urgent works could be carried out at an early stage. These included the installation of seven steel beams to stabilise the structure, replacement of rotten roof components, and repairs to the front elevation and roof. Together, the works have secured the building and prevented further movement.

Jodie Lamont, the grant recipient, said:

“When we first took on the building, the scale of the structural issues was a real concern. The grant funding has been crucial in making the property safe and preventing further deterioration. It has stopped costs spiralling and has allowed us to move forward with confidence. We hope to pursue further development funding options to complete the remainder of the refurbishment.

Cllr Rob Wilson, Shropshire Council’s Cabinet Member for Transport and Economic Growth, said:

“The purpose of this grant is to restore empty buildings so they become safe, usable commercial spaces again. Initiatives like these are precisely what the Property Improvement Grant aims to encourage, alongside the broader benefits such as boosting the local economy and revitalising our market towns and High Streets.”

The Property Improvement Grant programme offered grants of between £2,000 and £10,000, covering up to 50 per cent of eligible improvement costs. It formed part of a wider package of UKSPF investment supporting town centre regeneration and economic growth across Shropshire and was made possible through external funding provided by government.

(Photos by kind permission of Jodie Lamont)

News: UKSPF Grant Enables 24/7 Prescription Collection at Lunts Pharmacy in Ludlow

15th June 2026

A new 24/7 medication collection point will be launched this week in Ludlow, improving access to healthcare services for residents while demonstrating how targeted funding can help drive innovation in Shropshire.

The new facility, installed by Lunts Pharmacy, allows patients to securely collect their prescriptions at any time of the day or night.

It was made possible through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund’s Small Equipment Grant scheme for businesses, which has helped numerous businesses across Shropshire to innovate and grow. The grant enabled MSN Pharmacy Group to invest in the specialist equipment needed to introduce the new service.

The collection point is expected to benefit a wide range of residents, including those working irregular hours, people with caring responsibilities, and individuals living in rural areas where accessing services during standard opening times can be challenging.

This installation marks the first of its kind for MSN Pharmacy Group and is believed to be among the first 24/7 prescription collection points introduced within a community pharmacy setting in Shropshire.

Ravi Nagra, Founder and Co-CEO of MSN Pharmacy Group, said:

“We are continually looking for ways to improve access to healthcare services for our patients. The introduction of this 24/7 collection point gives patients greater flexibility and convenience, allowing them to collect their medication when it suits them rather than being restricted by traditional opening hours. We are extremely grateful for the support provided through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Shropshire Council, which helped make this project possible.”

The Ludlow installation is being delivered as a pilot, with the potential for a wider rollout across the pharmacy group's network if successful.

Councillor Alex Wagner, Deputy Leader of Shropshire Council and Cabinet Member for Transformation and Economic Growth, said:

"This is an excellent example of how targeted investment through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has supported local businesses to innovate while delivering tangible benefits for our communities.

"By helping businesses like Lunts Pharmacy adopt new technology, we are not only strengthening local services but also improving accessibility for residents, particularly in our rural areas. It reflects our commitment to supporting economic growth that makes a real difference to people's everyday lives."

Innovating Access to Community Healthcare in Ludlow

MSN Pharmacy Group

MSN Pharmacy Group is Shropshire's largest independent community pharmacy provider, operating 18 branches across the Midlands, including 14 within the county. Serving both urban and rural communities, the group combines personalised, relationship-based care with the scale to invest in innovation that improves patient access to services.

At its Ludlow branch, the business identified a growing challenge. Many patients, particularly those in rural areas, with work commitments or caring responsibilities, struggle to collect prescriptions during standard opening hours. This has contributed to missed collections, medication non-adherence and increasing competition from online pharmacies offering more flexible access.

To address this, MSM Pharmacy Group secured £10,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in June 2026, alongside £20,000 of its own investment. The funding enabled the installation of a RoboWall automated prescription collection system, introducing secure, round-the-clock access to medication for patients at the Ludlow site.

The RoboWall system provides 150 secure collection compartments within a compact unit installed facing an exterior wall, allowing prescriptions to be collected 24 hours a day using a secure PIN verification process. Integrated with the pharmacy's existing workflow, the system enables patients to receive notifications when prescriptions are ready, while freeing up staff time to focus on clinical services and direct patient care.

As a first-of-its-kind installation for MSN Pharmacy Group, the project was delivered as a pilot, with learning from the Ludlow site informing potential rollout across its wider Shropshire network. Delivery required careful coordination, including international manufacture and shipping from the Netherlands, but proactive planning ensured installation and integration were completed smoothly.

The impact has been immediate. Patients can now collect prescriptions at times that suit them, including evenings and weekends, reducing barriers to access and improving convenience across a largely rural catchment. Early feedback from both patients and staff has been overwhelmingly positive, with strong interest generated from the point of launch.

Importantly, the project supports wider health outcomes by improving medication adherence and reducing wasted prescriptions, while strengthening the role of community pharmacy on the high street. It also demonstrates how targeted investment can help independent providers compete with digital alternatives without losing the personal service that defines them.

Without UKSPF support, MSN Pharmacy Group would have been unable to pilot this level of innovation at pace. The funding has enabled the business to modernise access to healthcare, improve patient experience and establish a scalable model for wider rollout across Shropshire.

Looking ahead, the MSN Pharmacy Group will evaluate the Ludlow pilot, tracking patient uptake, out-of-hours usage and reductions in uncollected prescriptions. Subject to positive results, the RoboWall technology could be introduced across additional sites, significantly expanding access to convenient, community-based healthcare services across the county.

Committee	Cabinet
Date and Time	8th July 2026, 10.30 am
	Public

Bridgnorth Youth Centre, Innage Lane (Formerly know as - Bridgnorth Youth Club – Asset Decision)

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Roger Evans – Portfolio Holder for Finance
Lead Director:	Kassandra Polyzoides, Service Director
Service Area:	Place Shaping – Property and Development
Report Author	Victoria Woodford – Asset Manager
Officer contact details	01743 253847 victoria.woodford@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	Bridgnorth Castle, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth South & Alveley, and Bridgnorth West and Tasley
Key Decision?	Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	16/04/26
Report considered by	

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. This report seeks approval to declare the former Bridgnorth, Youth Centre site at Innage Lane surplus to requirements and to dispose of it on the open market. The property has been vacant for 18 months, is in poor condition and is no longer required for operational use. Having considered the alternative options, disposal is recommended as the preferred outcome, enabling the Council to realise a capital receipt, remove ongoing holding and maintenance liabilities, and support its wider programme of financial sustainability by contributing towards the reduction of reliance on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

2.1 Declares the former Bridgnorth Youth Centre, Innage Lane (in accordance with the red line plan detailed in Appendix A) surplus to requirements and approves its disposal as a non-core asset.

2.2 Delegates authority to the Head of Property and Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, to take all necessary steps to progress disposal, including determination of the appropriate disposal strategy and completion of the sale in accordance with the Council's constitutional and legal requirements.

3. Background

3.1 The former Bridgnorth Youth Centre, Innage Lane site has been subject to review for a number of years as part of the Council's ongoing assessment of its operational property portfolio. The facility was formally mothballed during the Covid-19 pandemic and, following its reopening, utilisation remained limited.

3.2 The site closed in November 2024 following the implementation of savings proposals approved through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The property has remained vacant since closure and is no longer required for operational purposes. Prior to closure, two services were delivered at Bridgnorth Youth Centre, Innage Lane. Shropshire Youth Association (SYA) using the building one evening per week. Following relocation, youth services continued successfully elsewhere in Bridgnorth. Youth provision is also supported by a locally run charity group. Early Help used the building a couple of days a week before relocating to Bridgnorth Library in November 2024 as part of Community and Family Hub model.

3.3 Condition survey information indicates that the building is in poor condition and would require substantial remedial works before it could be safely and sustainably brought back into use, particularly in relation to mechanical services, including the replacement of the heating system and associated plant. Given the uncertainty surrounding the future use of the building and wider financial pressures facing the Council, only essential maintenance has been undertaken in recent years.

3.4 Previous expressions of interest have been received from a range of prospective occupiers, including community organisations, nursery providers and commercial operators. However, the level of investment required to address the building's condition and bring it to an appropriate standard for occupation has significantly constrained the viability of alternative re-use opportunities.

3.5 A refurbishment and reoccupation option has not been progressed as there is currently no identified operational requirement for the property. Since closure, no Council service has expressed a need to reoccupy the building and the cost of bringing the asset back into use would be disproportionate in the absence of a defined service demand.

3.6 Stakeholder and options appraisal: The options considered focused on achieving a sustainable outcome for the Council and community whilst reducing risk and future financial liabilities:

- Disposal on the open market
- Redevelopment for housing with STAR Housing; and
- Transfer to Bridgnorth Town Council

3.7 Options were analysed by officers and have informed the recommendations made within this report.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

4.1. The former Bridgnorth Youth Centre, Innage Lane site is currently vacant, is no longer required for operational purposes and would require significant capital investment before it could be safely and sustainably brought back into use. A range of potential future uses have been considered, including community, commercial and residential options, together with the retention of the asset.

4.2. Disposal of the site has been identified as the option that provides the greatest overall benefit to the Council. It would:

- Generate an additional capital receipt;
- Remove ongoing holding, maintenance and security costs;
- Eliminate future investment liabilities associated with the building; and
- Support the continued rationalisation of the Council's operational estate.

4.3. Having considered the condition of the building, the absence of an identified operational requirement, the substantial investment required to facilitate reoccupation and the Council's wider financial objectives, disposal is recommended as the preferred option.

4.4. The proposed disposal supports the Council's Corporate Plan priority of delivering a financially sustainable council. It would generate a capital receipt, reduce ongoing revenue pressures and future liabilities, and contribute to the Council's broader programme of financial sustainability, including reducing reliance on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

5. Alternative Options

5.1 Housing Redevelopment - The potential redevelopment of the site for housing purposes, including consideration of a delivery model involving STAR Housing, was explored. However, the option was not considered viable when assessed against the Council's current financial and investment criteria. Key considerations included the risks associated with the proposed acquisition and buy-back model, uncertainty regarding the level and availability of external investment required, an extended estimated payback period of approximately 38 years, and the more limited short-term financial benefit when compared with disposal of the asset.

5.2 Town and Parish Council Asset Transfer - A transfer of the asset to Bridgnorth Town Council was explored; however, the Town Council did not wish to progress the opportunity. Concerns were raised regarding the condition of the building, the scale of investment required to address known defects and ongoing maintenance liabilities, together with an absence of clearly evidenced demand for future occupation and use.

5.3 Having considered the alternative options; disposal is recommended as the preferred option. This reflects the condition of the building, the absence of an operational requirement and the significant investment that would be required to bring the property back into use.

6. Key risks and Opportunities

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Vacant building continues to deteriorate If left unused, the building will worsen in condition, increasing repair costs, security risks, and reducing future usability	Time-limited decision pathway; maintain appropriate security and minimal maintenance while decision is implemented	Asset sustainability and financial resilience
Delays in decision making Slow progress could lead to more costs, uncertainty for stakeholders, and reduced momentum for future use.	Proactively engage and brief key stakeholders in advance of formal decision-making.	Delivery, governance and decision-making
Health and safety risks The building is not currently fit for occupation and could pose risks if used without major investment.	Prevent occupation until safety standards are met	Health, safety and statutory compliance
Reputational risk There may be concern that the Council is removing a community facility	Communicate clearly with stakeholders about reasons for the decision	Reputation, community confidence and stakeholder trust
Reduced disposal value The site may achieve a lower sale value due to its condition and need for remedial works.	Use professional advice and strong marketing to maximise disposal value	Asset value and financial return

7. Council Priorities

7.1 The proposed disposal supports the Council's Corporate Plan priority to deliver a financially sustainable council by rationalising the operational estate, reducing ongoing liabilities and generating a capital receipt from an asset that is no longer required for service delivery.

7.2 The proposal also supports the effective stewardship of Council assets by enabling resources to be focused on properties that are needed to deliver priority services, while avoiding further deterioration, maintenance costs and risk associated with retaining a vacant building in poor condition.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 For 2026/27, the Government has agreed Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) for Shropshire Council to help manage its financial pressures. As part of that support, the Council is expected to deliver robust improvement and transformation plans to restore financial stability, including accelerating asset disposals and identifying opportunities to generate capital. Capital receipts from the disposal of surplus assets will help fund the EFS requirement while continuing the rationalisation of the estate. This will also reduce future repairs and maintenance liabilities, along with associated revenue and capital funding pressures.

8.2 The proposed disposal forms part of the Council's ongoing programme of asset rationalisation and financial recovery. As the asset is not currently assumed within the capital receipt estimates supporting the existing capital programme, its disposal would generate an additional capital receipt while removing future liabilities associated with a vacant building. This would support the Council's wider financial sustainability objectives and contribute towards reducing reliance on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

8.3 Capital Receipt: Disposal is expected to generate the highest capital return. Market appraisals indicate a range of values, supporting consideration of disposal as a viable option.

8.4 Revenue savings: Disposal removes ongoing costs including maintenance, utilities and asset management.

8.5 Avoided Costs: The building is in poor condition, and significant work would be required before it could be brought back into use. Major mechanical services issues have been identified, including replacement of the heating boiler and associated plant and controls, together with works required to address hot water provision and broader mechanical condition.

8.6 Opportunity Cost: Retaining the asset while vacant presents ongoing risks and potential costs (including security, reactive maintenance, and further deterioration) with no operational benefit. A community transfer may reduce future Council liabilities but would only be appropriate if the receiving organisation can demonstrate a sustainable plan to meet repair, compliance, and operational costs. Disposal would remove the ongoing maintenance liability and could deliver a capital receipt, subject to market conditions and site constraints.

9. Legal and HR implications

9.1 The Council has power to dispose of land held by it in accordance with section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, subject to compliance with the Council's Constitution, its property governance arrangements and any other statutory requirements. If approved, the recommendation would enable the asset to be declared surplus to operational requirements and for disposal to be progressed in accordance with those requirements and with the benefit of appropriate professional and legal advice.

9.2 Delegated authority should only be exercised in accordance with the Council's constitutional framework and following completion of the necessary title, valuation, planning and legal due diligence. The decision proposed in this report does not in itself give rise to direct workforce implications, as the building is already vacant and no staff are based at the site.

10. Electoral Division Implications

10.1 The site is located in Bridgnorth and the proposal is therefore of direct relevance to the Bridgnorth Castle, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth South and Alveley, and Bridgnorth West and Tasley electoral divisions. Local members have been engaged and informed of the recommendations.

11. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

11.1 The proposal does not remove an operational service currently delivered from the site. Youth and family support services previously based at Innage Lane have already been relocated and continue to be delivered from alternative venues in Bridgnorth. The disposal of a vacant building in poor condition is therefore not expected to give rise to direct adverse health impacts arising from loss of current service provision.

11.2 From a social and economic perspective, disposal would remove an underused and deteriorating asset from the Council's estate, reduce ongoing revenue and maintenance pressures, and create the opportunity for the site to be brought back into productive use through redevelopment or alternative occupation. While there may be community interest in the future of the site, this is balanced by the fact that the current building is no longer fit for purpose and is not supporting Child Friendly Shropshire outcomes in its present condition.

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 The proposal does not in itself remove a current operational service from the site, as services previously delivered from the building have already been relocated. On that basis, no direct adverse equality impacts have been identified from the decision to declare the asset surplus and progress disposal.

12.2 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment should be completed or updated, if required, as part of implementation and any material issues identified should be reflected in the final disposal approach. No specific implications for the Armed Forces community have been identified at this stage, but due regard should continue to be given to the Armed Forces Covenant alongside the Council's wider equality duties.

13. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1 The recommended approach is expected to have a neutral to positive climate change impact. Continuing to hold a vacant, inefficient building is likely to result in avoidable energy and maintenance-related carbon impacts over time. Enabling a disposal that facilitates retrofit and occupation provides the opportunity to reduce operational energy use and associated emissions, consistent with the Council's climate strategy and net-zero ambition.

14. Background Papers

14.1 There are no background papers

15. Appendices

Appendix A - Location Plan – Bridgnorth Innage Lane – June 2026

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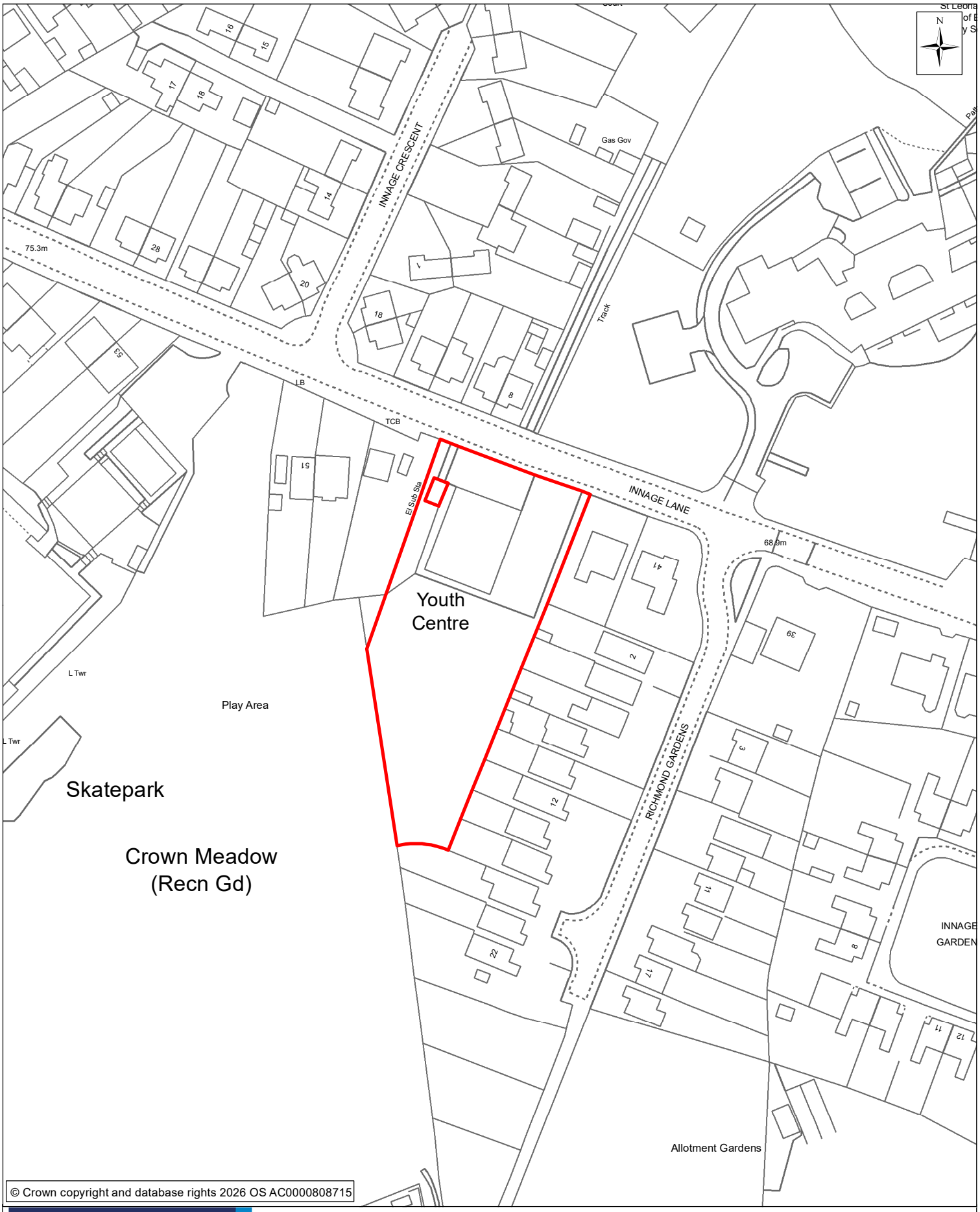

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Shropshire Council

Property and Development
Guildhall, Frankwell Quay,
SHREWSBURY
SY3 8HQ

Location Plan - Bridgnorth Innage Lane WV16 4HS

Drawing No:	294-001-504
Scale:	1:1,250
Date:	June 2026
Drawn by:	ACR - Asset Management

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Committee	Cabinet
Date and Time	8th July 2026 10.30am
	Public

Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy 2026 – 2029 (Previously referred to as the Education Excellence Strategy)

Cabinet Member:	Andy Hall
Lead Director:	David Shaw
Service Area:	Children and Young People
Report Author	John Rowe, Head of Education, Quality and Safeguarding
Officer contact details	01743 254515 john.rowe@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	All
Key Decision?	Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	Yes 18th May 2026
Report considered by	*People Overview and Scrutiny Committee 14th January 2026 and 22nd April 2026*

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. This report sets out the ambitious strategy to ensure children and young people achieve and thrive in education in Shropshire. It clarifies Shropshire Council's approach to education quality and safeguarding standards and seeks Cabinet endorsement of the strategy and the recommendation of adoption by Council.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

2.1 Consider and endorse the final draft Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy 2026-29 attached as appendix A and recommend its adoption to Council in September.

2.2 Refer the impact of the strategy for regular review by the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and for this committee to receive regular reports on its implementation.

3. Background

3.1. Reflecting the national context, the local education system is increasingly diverse and autonomous, with most education settings in Shropshire, including schools, now operating outside direct Council control. Children attend a range of settings including non-school alternative provision where it is in their best interests to do so. The Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy 2026 – 29 ("the Strategy") sets out how Shropshire Council will exercise its system leadership role as a champion for children, young people and families whilst ensuring robust assurance and accountability across all settings, in line with the legal duties on the Council.

3.2. The Strategy brings together the Council's duties to promote high standards of education (under the Education Act 1996) and to safeguard and promote welfare for all children in the area (under the Children Acts 1989/2004), alongside the Council's responsibilities to challenge and intervene in maintained schools and to escalate concerns about academies, independent schools, early years providers and non-school alternative provision to the appropriate regulator and inspection bodies.

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3.3. The Strategy seeks to develop a consistent countywide 'line of sight' through agreed monitoring areas and data sources. It sets out clearer thresholds for support, challenge and intervention; and transparent expectations for leaders about how concerns will be raised, how improvement support will be brokered, and how progress and impact will be reported through governance and scrutiny. This all aligns with the

key national safeguarding framework, Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2026.

3.4. The Strategy sets expectations and monitoring arrangements for achievement, attendance, behaviour, inclusion and SEND, and safeguarding. It introduces a countywide framework using regular data analysis, targeted visits and structured strategic conversations with leaders (including academy trusts) to identify risk early, provide challenge and broker support.

3.5. The Strategy defines and enhances the support available to maintained schools. It sets out the support provided to new headteachers and the support afforded to maintained schools at the point of Ofsted inspection.

3.6. Recognising that most of Shropshire's children and young people are educated in academies, where multi-academy trusts are the responsible body, the Strategy makes provision to ensure the routine monitoring of multi-academy trusts to ensure the quality and safety of the education provision they receive. This supports the legal duties on specific areas of performance across individual academy sites. Principally this is determined by the Children and Families Act 2014 (with respect to the monitoring of SEND provision) and the Children Act 2004 (with respect to safeguarding responsibilities) and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (with respect to the Admissions Code). Additionally, the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Support for Intervention in Schools' makes clear that, 'should a local authority have any concerns about an academy's standards, leadership or governance, they should raise these directly with Regions Group [of the Department for Education].'

3.7. The Strategy seeks to outline the support and challenge provided to schools and settings to support the most vulnerable children and young people, including those who have SEND or are looked-after by the Council.

3.8. The Strategy ensures a consistent expectation across all phases and education types, including early years, post-16, alternative provision, educational visits, out-of-school settings and complaints, ensuring consistent oversight across the full range of provision.

3.9. The Strategy builds on the Shropshire SEND and AP Strategy by strengthening inclusive practice, early identification and joined-up support across schools and settings.

3.10. Details are provided about how the Education Quality and Safeguarding team works with the Virtual School and other Children's Services teams to support vulnerable children with coordinated oversight.

3.11. It includes clear governance and reporting arrangements, with progress and impact overseen through partnership boards, scrutiny and senior leadership structures.

3.12. The Strategy supports the new mechanisms for school improvement instigated by the Department for Education including the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) programme. It complements the well-developed relationships between the Department and other agencies, including Ofsted.

3.13. Consultation on this Strategy took place through updates at Headteacher Briefings (from Summer 2025), individual meetings with CEOs (throughout 2025-26 academic year) and the Education Partnership Board meeting (Autumn 2025). The Strategy has been subject to an Ongoing consultation exercise on SLG Shropshire Education Excellence Strategy 2025-29 | Shropshire Learning Gateway. A meeting with regional representatives of trade unions also took place in Spring 2026. Changes implemented as a result of this consultation are outlined on page 30 of the strategy

4. Summary of Main Proposals

4.1. Cabinet is asked to adopt the Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy 2026-2029 to set a clear, consistent Local Authority framework for promoting high education standards and safeguarding for all children and young people, regardless of education provider.

4.2. The role of educators is critically important, there are many settings, schools and colleges delivering excellent work across our county and the Council has a role to support them to deliver this. This is a statutory requirement, but this strategy is seeking to ensure that there is clarity about how we do this working with them through a clearly defined offer.

4.3. The Strategy clarifies the accountability which is critically important across a system which is diverse within a mixed economy of private childcare, schools and colleges which are both academies, maintained and other settings, including those that are unregistered.

4.4. It seeks to strengthen early identification of risk through agreed monitoring and escalation routes, and describes how the Council will support, challenge and where necessary intervene (including raising concerns with the Department for Education (DfE) and/or Ofsted where required).

4.5. By strengthening and formalising the process of school and setting challenge and support we are seeking to be open and transparent so that an environment can be fostered that supports all children and young people to flourish in Shropshire, regardless of the provision that they attend.

5. Alternative Options

5.1 Lack of clarity with respect to education monitoring risks impoverishing schools and pupils through a system that would ultimately lack cohesion. Consideration could be given to a wholly sector led monitoring solution whereby schools provide challenge and support to schools within minimal oversight by the Council. This is challenging and would not sufficiently discharge the duties of the Council. It risks developing a system whereby support is variable and the lack of connectivity to Council systems means that opportunities to intervene early are missed.

6. Key risks and Opportunities

6.1. Strategic Risk:

Risk	*Response*
Lack of safeguarding oversight of education settings.	Failure to meet statutory duties. Children and young people being at risk of significant harm due to inadequate procedures and practice.
Lack of challenge and support for education settings	Failure to meet statutory duties. Weak pupil outcomes. Limited evidence of improvement activity.
Increase proportion of schools and academies with weak Ofsted outcomes	Increase the risk of reputational damage to the council, and the county as a whole.

7. Council Priorities

7.1. The strategy strongly supports the council priorities set out in the Corporate plan.

7.2. The strategy is referenced, albeit under its working title of the Education Excellence Strategy, under the ambition for ‘Everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and thrive at every stage of life’ but also aligns with the ‘Safe inclusive places with homes that meet their needs’.

7.3. The policy supports the articulation of the Council’s statutory education responsibilities and work with schools and partners to support improved outcomes, including enabling children and young people with SEND (EHCP) to be supported in mainstream education.

8. Financial Implications

8.1. The cost of educational failure is significant for individual children, for schools, for the community and for the county in economic terms. It is therefore evident that the role of the Council in enabling raising standards in all schools and settings will result in economic benefits for the county.

8.2. Since the removal of the School Monitoring and Brokering Grant, there has been no specific resource to support specific school improvement work in schools. Whilst the Dedicated School Grant can be used to support elements of school monitoring and support work, the regulations provide limitations.

8.3. The development of this Strategy has limited financial impact beyond the current budgets within Learning and Skills and specific grants received. This Strategy, for the first time, determines and clarifies ways of working as the previous 'Education Improvement Service' changes to the 'Education Quality and Safeguarding Service'.

8.4. Strengthening support for children and young people with SEND will lead to more effective provision and promote early intervention which will support the ambitions of the

SEND and AP Strategy. Through strengthening inclusive mainstream practice in line with ambitions of the National reforms in SEND and the implementation of the Local Area SEND Reform Plan.

8.5. Any costs of implementing the Strategy will be contained within current budgets, whether Council or Grant funded, such as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) or through the top-slice to maintained schools. As an example, this resulted in maintained schools de-delegating a proportion of their delegated funding (to a total of £112,480 across the county) to support specific activities with respect to maintained schools.

9. Legal and HR implications

9.1. There are no Human Resource implications beyond the existing arrangements.

9.2. The legal basis supporting the accountability for schools are noted in the draft Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy at Appendix A.

10. Electoral Division Implications

10.1 There are no implications for specific electoral divisions, however this Strategy applies to all electoral divisions across Shropshire.

11. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

11.1. The Strategy contributes strongly to all of the ambitions of 'Child Friendly Shropshire' and the 4 key rights. It places as a priority the aspiration for all children in Shropshire to be educated in effective and safe provision where decisions are taken in children's best interests. It also enables delivery of non-discrimination, the inherent right to life, survival and development along with respecting the views of children and young people.

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1. Some children and young people, schools and settings face greater challenges in achieving educational success; there are therefore equalities implications to the Council and to schools in ensuring that every child and young person achieves their full potential and every school and setting secures good educational outcomes.

12.2. Analysis of performance data, as part of Education Quality Advisers' allocation of time for schools, enables a thorough review of outcomes for pupils across the range of vulnerable groups including gender, disadvantage, ethnicity and prior attainment. This also informs the bespoke and targeted offer of support and development to schools. It is referenced in the document in the Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR).

12.3. The work of Education Quality Advisers and safeguarding includes providing support and challenge with respect to the legal responsibilities on school with respect to duties under the Equality Act 2010.

12.4. Work is developed digitally to promote the opportunity to use assistive technology.

12.5. Schools and settings have been consulted as part of the development of this strategy. Feedback has been incorporated into the revisions of this document.

13. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1. Where we are able to use Microsoft Teams for meetings to reduce climate impact, this takes place.

13.2. The nature of work by the Education Quality and Safeguarding team does require face to face visits to schools and settings. This does necessitate travel where remote visits are not possible. Consideration has been given to the deployment of staff to, where possible minimise travel distances.

14. Background Papers

14.1 The policy was referenced in the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 22nd October 2025 plus in the meeting on the 14th January 2026 along with sharing an early working draft for comment by the committee. The comments received directly informed the development of the final version.

15. Appendices

Appendix A – Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy – 2026-29

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Shropshire Achieving and Thriving in Education Strategy - 2026-2029

Contents

Foreword	3
Statutory Responsibilities	4
Strategic Role in Education Improvement	4
Responding to Concerns and Powers of Intervention in Local Authority Maintained Schools	5
Use of Intervention Powers	5
Role of the Director of Children's Services	6
Core Principles	7
Key Monitoring Areas and Data Sources	9
Challenge and Accountability – Academy Trusts	9
Monitoring visits to academies	10
Maintained Schools	11
Small schools	16
Supporting inclusive practice in schools and effective practice for pupils with Special Educational Needs/and or Disabilities (SEND)	17
Safeguarding & Links to other teams within	18
Support with respect to Educational Trips and Visits	19
Early Years	21
Post 16	25
Education Settings Outside the Local Area and Independent Special Schools	25
Monitoring and Safeguarding in Out-of-School Settings (OOSS)	26
Alternative Provision	27
Complaints about schools and settings	28
Education Providers causing concern	29
Oversight and Governance	29
Appendix 1—School Closure Policy	30
Appendix 2—Use of images	34

Foreword

Shropshire Council is passionate about making sure every child in our county gets the best possible education—no matter which school, setting, or type of provision they attend. Every child deserves to learn in an environment that meets their needs and keeps them safe.

Children in Shropshire attend a range of education provision: maintained schools, academies, independent school, early years settings, alternative provision, post-16 providers, and out-of-school settings. Our ambition is to all ensure that settings are safe and are of a high quality.

Over the past few years, the role of local authorities in England has changed considerably. Instead of running schools directly, we now focus more on supporting and guiding the whole education system. This shift has happened mainly because there are now many more academies, which run independently from the council. Even with these changes, councils like still have important legal responsibilities and remain key champions for high standards in education for all children and young people in our area.

This new strategy sets out how we'll meet those responsibilities and make sure we're always working towards the best outcomes for Shropshire's children and young people.

Statutory Responsibilities for Education

Section 13a of the Education Act 1996 outlines the current statutory obligations of local authorities regarding education standards.

Local authorities must carry out their education functions with the aim of promoting high standards. This duty exists within a landscape where schools and education settings have increasing autonomy and where there is a shifting model of accountability. Crucially, there is an expectation that schools themselves lead their own improvement.

"Local authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area, regardless of the types of educational settings they attend. There are a number of statutory duties under the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts which make this clear. In order to fulfil these duties effectively, local authorities need to work in partnership with all schools (including independent schools), appropriate religious bodies and further education and sixth form colleges in their area" (Support and intervention in schools - GOV.UK:p40).

Strategic Role in Education Improvement

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 further defines the strategic role of the local authority in supporting improvement across schools and education settings.

The Act establishes the local authority as:

- A 'champion' for the needs of children, young people, and their families.
- Responsible for planning, commissioning, and assuring the quality of educational services.
- Tasked with challenging schools and educational settings, commissioning support when necessary, and intervening in management and governance where appropriate.
- Required to raise concerns about the performance of academies/free/independent schools directly with the Department for Education.
- Obliged to refer concerns about Early Years settings to the childminder agency and/or Ofsted.

Responding to Concerns and Powers of Intervention in Local Authority Maintained Schools

The 2006 Act also gives local authorities a duty to respond to parental concerns about the quality of local schools. It grants new powers to intervene earlier in maintained schools that are underperforming. Specifically, Part 4 of the Act enables:

- Early action to address school underperformance before it becomes entrenched and leads to formal failure.
- Immediate provision of effective support and challenge when standards are found to be unacceptable, ensuring rapid improvement.
- Decisive intervention if a school in 'special measures' fails to make sufficient progress, in order to protect the education and life chances of pupils.

Use of Intervention Powers

With respect to maintained schools, the Act provides a clear responsibility on local authorities to intervene where schools are causing concern. These expanded statutory powers are designed to ensure every child receives the quality of education and opportunities they deserve. Shropshire Council will employ these intervention powers as appropriate. The Education Quality and Safeguarding Team will work collaboratively with other teams across the local authority to gather evidence and information about maintained schools' vulnerabilities, ensuring timely and effective support or intervention when required.

This is part of an ongoing process *built on strong relationships, respect and effective communication*. Where schools are deemed to require additional support, this will be determined, when necessary, in order to ensure that swift action is taken to address concerns.

Role of the Director of Children's Services

Section 18 of the Children Act 2004 requires every top tier local authority to appoint a Director of Children's Services. The DCS has professional responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services. The DCS is responsible for the performance of local authority functions relating to the education and social care of children and young people. The DCS is responsible for ensuring that effective systems are in place for discharging these functions, including where a local authority has commissioned any services from another provider rather than delivering them itself.

The *Education Quality and Safeguarding team* plays a pivotal role in supporting the Director of Children's Services to discharge their statutory responsibilities effectively. *This team works closely with schools, providing expert guidance, challenge, and practical assistance to ensure that educational standards and safeguarding practices are consistently robust.* Through regular monitoring, sharing of best practice, and targeted support, the team helps to address areas of concern swiftly, foster school improvement, and ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet the highest standards across all settings.

Core Principles

Building positive relationships

We recognise that educational leadership is a complex and often demanding. In all our interactions, we are committed to treating educational providers with professionalism, courtesy, empathy, and respect, and we expect the same standards in return.

By promoting this mutual expectation, *we foster an environment built on trust, understanding, and constructive partnership*, ensuring that all support and challenge is delivered in a manner that values expertise and dedication on all sides—ultimately focussed on achieving the very best outcomes for children and young people.

Effective communication

Shropshire Council is committed to ensuring that school leaders receive timely and relevant information, with as much advance notice as possible, to enable effective planning and decision-making. Open communication will be supported through

- The weekly education update
- Termly headteacher briefings
- The publication of the directory of LA services
- Shropshire Learning Gateway.
- Maintained Headteachers' Forum
- Schools Forum
- Various partnership boards and sub-groups with education representation
- Half Termly Early Years Network Meetings
- Monthly Early Years updates

We will aim to ensure that all schools and settings are kept informed of developments and opportunities. The LA will continue to seek new opportunities to support communication.

In return, Shropshire Council expects all schools and trusts to keep the local authority informed of key events in accordance with the Notifiable Incidents Protocol and to share examination data promptly to facilitate robust cross-county analysis and collaborative improvement.

This two-way approach to communication enhances transparency, accountability, and shared understanding across the education community.

Early identification of needs

Shropshire Council's approach is built upon principles designed to ensure proactive engagement, be informed by data, and aimed to foster collaborative relationships with all setting and schools.

The primary aim is to identify potential issues at an early stage, enabling the provision of constructive challenge and support before concerns escalate.

This approach seeks to cultivate a culture of continuous self-evaluation and improvement within schools.

This allows for timely, supportive interventions to be deployed before issues reach a crisis level. As a result, this intervention minimises disruption to pupils' education and maximises the potential for school-led improvement.

The framework will facilitate a continuous process of reflection, leadership development, and collaborative practice, *aiming to ensure that every pupil thrives.*

Recognition of context

Shropshire is a diverse county. When school performance is examined, including the analysis of data, it is essential to recognise the unique context in which each school and setting operates. Factors such as demographic profile, community circumstances, local challenges, and resource availability can significantly affect outcomes and progress. For example, where schools are working hard to provide inclusive environments for pupils with the most significant needs, it is recognised that this might not be reflected in 'headline' data.

A nuanced understanding of context allows for a fair and balanced interpretation of data and actions, ensuring that the strengths and barriers faced by each school and setting are acknowledged and inform both evaluation and support strategies.

Professional challenge

Through our work in supporting the best possible outcomes for children and pupils, we seek to fostering a culture of constructive dialogue and accountability among education professionals. By encouraging open discussions about practice, performance, and outcomes, the framework enables both recognition of achievements and identification of areas for development. This atmosphere of professional challenge is not adversarial, but is designed to support growth, reflective practice, and the sharing of expertise, ensuring that all schools and settings strive for continuous improvement while feeling supported and respected in their efforts.

Key Monitoring Areas and Data Sources

The Education Quality and Safeguarding Team will co-ordinate the gathering and analysis of data across several key areas to gain a comprehensive understanding of school performance and identify areas requiring support.

This will include analysis of -

- Educational Performance
- Published and internal data with respect to pupil achievement
- Outcomes of Ofsted inspections
- Attendance data
- Suspension and Exclusion data
- Outcomes from safeguarding assurance activities or other information from other Local Authority teams relating to the safeguarding arrangements in education settings.
- Practice with respect to the management of off-site visits
- Financial health
- Provision for pupils who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Information provided by Shropshire HR
- Information provided by Children's Services
- Use of non-school (unregistered) Alternative Provision
- Use and impact of non-statutory additional funding and support e.g. EYIAF, GSP, Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Grants, Outreach.

Challenge and Accountability – Academy Trusts

Shropshire Council is committed to fostering a collaborative partnership with academy CEOs and their schools, with the collective goal of ensuring high-quality educational provision for every child and young person in Shropshire. *Academies nurture their pupils; the Local Authority has a duty to all children.*

The Annual Conversation

As part of the Council's commitment to robust accountability and support, all academy CEOs are invited annually to engage in a strategic dialogue with Education Quality Advisers.

These conversations are designed to offer both support and constructive challenge to academy trusts, providing a forum to address areas of concern, promote open communication, and strengthen the relationship between the local authority and the trust. Key focus areas for these discussions include:

- Academy trust successes
- Ofsted inspection outcomes
- Pupil outcomes and achievements
- Attendance, suspensions and exclusions
- The quality of safeguarding arrangements across schools in the Trust, including engagement with local arrangements
- Support offered to pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- The Trust's capacity to support other schools
- Use and impact of non-statutory additional funding and support e.g. EYIAF, GSP, Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Grants, Outreach.

Monitoring visits to academies

The annual meeting will be used to determine the schools to be visited by Education Quality Advisers during the year. This will be informed by specific needs and risks in discussion with the CEO.

These meetings will provide an opportunity to share and celebrate effective practice, validate the judgements of leaders, and provide an opportunity to highlight areas of need through professional challenge.

An academy meeting typically involves open dialogue between Education Quality Advisers and school leaders, where key successes are recognised, areas for growth are constructively discussed, and practical solutions are collaboratively explored with the aim of fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

EQAs will aim to visit all academies in a two-year rolling cycle.

Where schools are receiving support through RISE advisers, the progress of this improvement work will be examined. EQAs will not seek to provide additional input where schools have been identified as needing support through RISE.

To support academies further, additional services from the Education Quality and Safeguarding team may be procured, subject to negotiation, availability and team capacity.

Maintained Schools

To provide effective support and challenge, all schools maintained by the local authority *will aim to receive at least three visits per year from one of our Education Quality Advisers*. This will be supplemented by an additional visit from an Associate Headteacher. Where schools need additional support, this will be provided by either colleagues from the Education Quality and Safeguarding team and/or additional Associate Headteacher time.

These visits will support leaders with respect to school condition and standards. In all visits, the headteacher's own agenda will be prioritised.

Records of visits will be maintained through the annual visit record. This will record areas of discussion relating to

- Safeguarding
- Inclusion
- Curriculum and Teaching
- Achievements
- Attendance and behaviour
- Personal development and wellbeing
- Leadership and Governance

And where appropriate

- Early years
- Post-16 provision

Where other Local Authority Education Quality and Safeguarding staff are involved in visits to the school, these notes will be appended to this record.

Where schools are deemed to require a higher level of support this will be identified through discussion with the headteacher.

Higher support may be deemed appropriate in response to

- Factors that affect the leadership and management of the school
- Concerns with respect to safeguarding
- Concerns with respect to inclusion and attendance
- Concerns with respect to pupil outcomes

To address the concern, the Lead EQA in consultation the headteacher will consider

- A local authority review (a 1 day on-site visit by EQAs)
- A School Performance meeting involving the school and diocesan representatives to support

Programme of activities

The visit record can be used to structure conversations between EQAs/ Associate Headteachers and Headteachers during the visits.

Visit may also include, but not limited to, the following programme of activities:

- Review of SEF
- Review of SDP
- Learning walks
- Workbook scrutiny
- Moderation
- Data analysis
- Ofsted support
- Website checks
- Governance support
- Safeguarding support
- Premises and condition checks
- Health and safety checks
- Finances
- Policy review
- Complaints support
- Training

Associate Headteachers

The Local Authority maintains a pool of highly experienced headteachers from maintained schools.

Their work supplements the work of Education Quality Advisers and will provide a valuable link to support sector led school improvement work.

All schools will have an attached link associate headteacher to complement the work of the EQA team.

These leaders are called upon to offer specialist advice, peer challenge, and direct support to schools identified as needing a higher level of intervention.

The involvement of these associate headteachers is formally commissioned by the Local Authority, and where a higher level of support is needed the funding arrangements negotiated between the schools requiring support and the LA.

This ensures that all schools benefit from relevant expertise while fostering a culture of professional collaboration and continuous improvement.

Associate headteachers will meet regularly with the EQA for school standards to receive training and support to fulfil their responsibilities and to build a strong link between their work and the Local Authority.

Local Authority Reviews

To support the school in addressing areas of concern within maintained schools, the LA may seek to determine an LA review. This will have a specific area of focus and work with the school in analysing more closely areas of need. This may include work scrutiny, lesson visits, viewing documentary evidence. School leaders will be involved in this process and the outcomes communicated through updating the annual visit record.

Maintained School Performance meetings / monitoring

Both Local Authority Reviews and School Performance meetings are structured to provide schools with targeted guidance, rigorous evaluation, and actionable recommendations.

School Performance meetings, on the other hand, bring together school leaders, governors. relevant local authority representatives, and, where appropriate, diocesan representatives. *These meetings enable a holistic exploration of pupil outcomes, trends in attendance and inclusion, and the overall quality of educational provision.*

Monitoring will take place at a LA, trust and school level. Local authority education quality advisors will meet regularly to discuss schools and performance alongside associate headteachers and other LA officers. as previously mentioned, the LA will also hold annual conversations with Trusts regarding the performance of their schools as well as agreeing a timetable for individual school visits. Individual schools will receive at least 2 monitoring visits a year. These will examine areas linked to the new Ofsted framework as well as looking at areas such as finance, health and safety and school condition. At least one of these visits will be conducted by a Senior Education Quality Advisor. Written records will be made of all visits and shared accordingly.

Discussion is both reflective and forward-looking, enabling stakeholders to jointly celebrate progress, address emerging challenges, and agree on support strategies. Action points from these meetings are tracked and followed up to ensure sustained improvement.

The school would work with EQAs to develop the plan of support. Where it is deemed that a school will require an additional level of support, consideration will be given to brokering additional support from associate headteachers.

Acting Headteachers

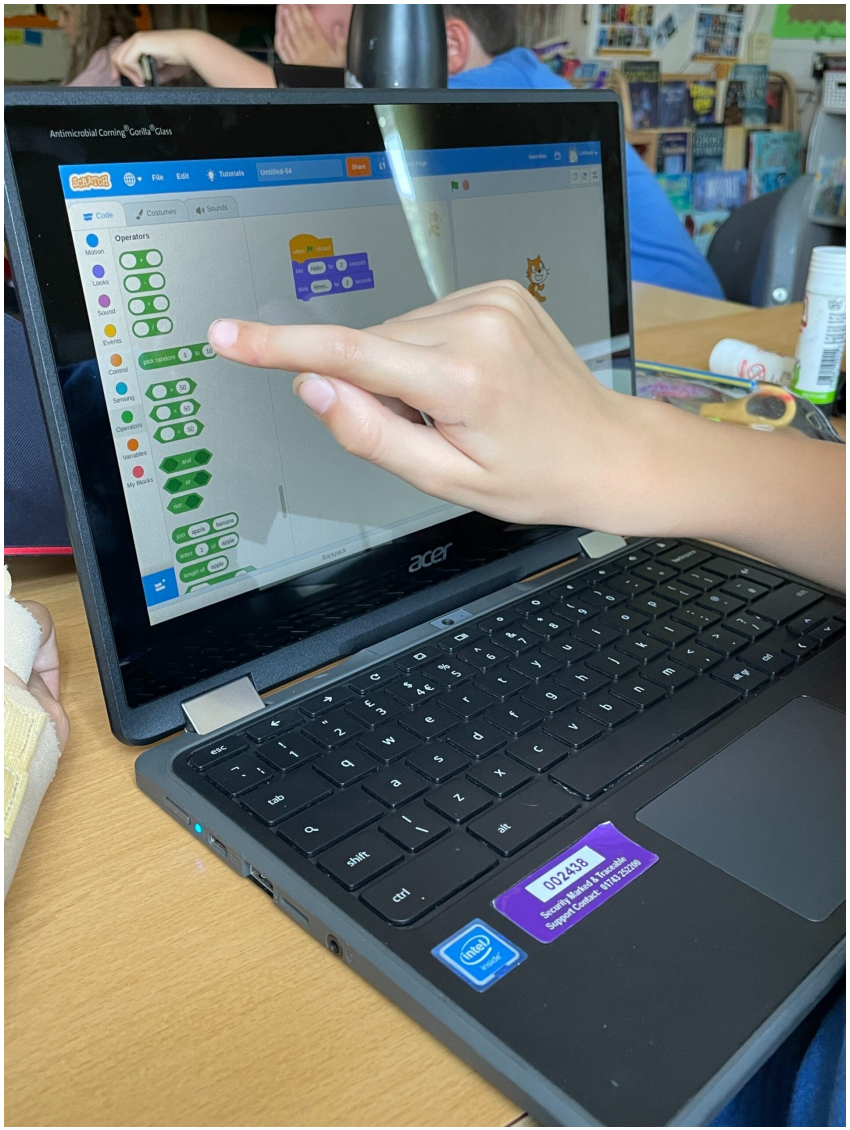
The Education Quality and Safeguarding Team will maintain and train a pool of acting headteachers drawn from aspiring headteachers from across the county. This pool will support, in conjunction with School Human Resources, the arrangements to support maintained schools at those times where an acting headteacher is required.

When a maintained school faces the long-term absence of its substantive headteacher, governors are advised to follow established protocols to ensure continuity and stability.

Initially, the governing body should consider whether cover can be provided using existing staff within a federation, if applicable. The substantive headteacher, during their absence, should not be expected to undertake leadership or management tasks, though limited contact with the school may be agreed upon following advice from medical professionals and with the support of Human Resources. The level of such engagement must be regularly reviewed.

An extraordinary meeting of governors should be convened to discuss the expected duration of absence, any ongoing or new initiatives, impending inspections, and to collate relevant policies and Human Resources casework for the acting headteacher. The governors should also address next steps for arranging cover, with three main options typically considered: having a current staff member step up (usually the deputy headteacher), contracting a leader from another school or academy, or appointing an executive headteacher on a temporary basis. If a deputy headteacher becomes acting headteacher, arrangements must be made to cover their previous role, and adjustments to contracts and pay should be handled in liaison with Human Resources.

Brokering arrangements between schools and trusts with respect to acting headships would be supported by the Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding.



Support for new headteachers

In recognition of the particular challenges faced by those stepping into headship for the first time, a structured support package is in place for all new headteachers. Central to this is the provision of three Education Quality Advisors (School Standards) visits during the first year, designed to offer guidance, assure quality, and reinforce positive leadership practices. Alongside this, each new headteacher is paired with a dedicated link associate headteacher, who serves as a mentor and sounding board.

In addition, where schools are identified as requiring further support beyond the core offer, additional capacity and expertise will be deployed as appropriate from the wider Education Quality and Safeguarding team. This flexible approach ensures that schools have access to a breadth of specialist knowledge and resources tailored to their unique contexts and improvement priorities.

Through the Senior Education Quality Advisors for school standards, the Local Authority will facilitate an ongoing network for new headteachers during their first year.

Support for maintained schools during an Ofsted inspection

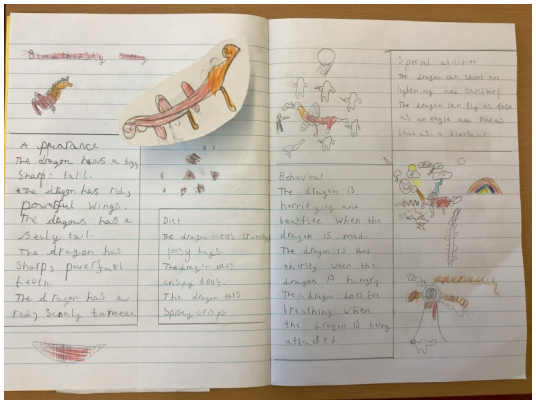
An Education Quality Adviser of the Local Authority is in a position to be the named responsible person for headteachers wellbeing at the point of school inspection. During the planning call by Ofsted, this will be established by the lead inspector.

Advisers will contact schools at the point of notification and work to provide support to school and discuss queries. Education Quality Advisers will contribute to the inspection in line with the requirements of the inspection handbook. This will usually be through an in-person meeting with the lead inspector.

Headteachers will have mobile phone access to the nominated EQA for use during the inspection process.

Where it is felt by the headteacher and/or Local Authority that additional time on site is appropriate in order to provide support, this will be provided through an Education Quality Advisor or an associate headteacher.

The Local Authority, through representation by EQA or associate headteachers, will always seek to attend the outcome meetings of Ofsted inspections in person.



Small schools

It is recognised that Shropshire faces a particular challenge with respect to the proportion of small (under 150 pupils) primary schools. Whilst there are myriad benefits to small schools, this also poses a challenge. This can impact on curriculum design, capacity for leadership, and recruitment and retention of staff. Small schools are also more affected by specific challenges and events that present (e.g. complaints, critical incidents, and falling rolls)

To support this, the EQS team will be sensitive to these challenges.

As a rural Local Authority, Shropshire Council follows the presumption against the closure of rural schools. This requires officers to work closely to support schools and governing bodies in developing alternative strategies to support positive outcomes for pupils and communities. In addition, a small school closure policy has been developed in line with Department for Education guidelines. This is included as an appendix to this policy.

Supporting inclusive practice in schools and effective practice for pupils with Special Educational Needs/and or Disabilities (SEND)

Shropshire Council will co-produce a robust and sustainable Local Inclusion Specialist Support Offer that will build the capacity of all schools and settings to meet the needs of their pupils.

Shropshire Council is committed to ensuring children can be educated successfully and fully included within their local mainstream schools when appropriate to do so.

Through Education Quality Advisers for SEND and AP, the Council offers a range of support, guidance and challenge to schools and settings to foster inclusion, including:

- A range of Continuing Professional Development and training courses
- Investigation of SEND related complaints on behalf of the Department for Education and Ofsted
- SEND Reviews to support practice
- Specialist Outreach
- Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce
- Traded support packages from specialist SEND professionals
- Access to Early Years SEND Support Officers (EYSSOs) to support the transition of pre-school children to mainstream schools.
- Access to high needs top up funding without an EHCP, to support early intervention and a graduated response (EYIAF and GSP)
- Access to capital and revenue funding through the Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Grants, to support schools to develop their own setting-based approaches to SEND and inclusion to meet identified needs.

Early Years SEND Support Officers (EySSOs) support early years providers, including childminders and schools through to the end of Reception, in meeting the needs of children with SEND. They are able to provide weekly visits for monitoring and coaching, quality assure EYIF usage and work closely with agencies like Portage and the Child Development Centre to ensure access for all children, including those with complex needs. EySSOs also help children with Step into School funding transition smoothly to schools.

The Council endeavours to co-produce and co-deliver support by working with a wide range of local providers, including schools, Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), Health colleagues and SEND specialists, to ensure the support on offer remains current, good value for money and of a high quality.

In addition, Shropshire Council is committed to further growing its network of SEN Units and Resource Provisions (SURPs) across the county, to extend the range of provision on offer within our mainstream schools, avoid unnecessary travel and promote belonging and inclusion within the local community. The work of EQAs for SEND and AP seeks to support this development, providing access to ongoing training and networking opportunities.

Safeguarding

The Education Quality and Safeguarding Team have staff within it who take the lead role in offering training, advice, support and challenge with respect to the management of safeguarding to all educational settings.

The work of the lead officers within this team includes

- The provision of safeguarding Continuing Professional Development (including training and networking) opportunities for education providers in line with local safeguarding arrangements
- Support for the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership to facilitate the quality assurance of 'training pool' activity

  The provision of safeguarding consultancies to support identification of strong practice worthy of dissemination and identification of practice that needs to be strengthened
- Providing advice to providers to support a strong culture of safeguarding (including template policies/guidance)
- Management and oversight of statutory safeguarding audits (in line with duties outlined in Section 11 Children's Act 2004)
- Completing quality assurance checks on safeguarding arrangements in education provision. This will typically be following discussion with school leaders but can include exceptional short notice visits to ensure the safety of children where serious and urgent concerns are raised that indicate safeguarding arrangements are ineffective. Where such visits are organised, the purpose and rationale will be clearly explained to the provider on arrival
- Investigation of safeguarding complaints on behalf of the Department for Education and Ofsted
- Facilitating and supporting the involvement of education providers as 'relevant agencies' in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (including maintaining the link between the Education Safeguarding Sub-group, Education Partnership Board and Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership)
- Working with other teams in the local authority to share information about safeguarding arrangements to support best practice and address the need for any improvements
- Facilitating the representation of education on strategic, working and operational groups/ processes

Links to other teams within Children's Services

Education Quality and Safeguarding team activities complements the work of other areas within Children's Services, particularly the Education Access Service, the Virtual School and the EHCP team. Information is routinely shared to support early intervention, appropriate escalation and coordinated planning, to support work in schools and settings. This integrated approach strengthens safeguarding, promotes inclusion, and ensures that pathways for reintegration or alternative provision are considered within a clear policy framework.
Joint working between the Education Quality and Safeguarding Team and the Shropshire Virtual School is well established. The Education Quality and Safeguarding team supports and challenges schools with respect to provision for children and young people in care, or who have been in care and enjoys good links with the Virtual School. The EQS itself supports independent scrutiny of the Virtual School's work through established governance routes, including reporting and oversight via senior leadership and partnership boards. This ensures that the Virtual School's priorities, use of pupil premium funding, and impact on outcomes are subject to appropriate challenge, while also identifying opportunities for system-wide improvement.

Support with respect to Educational Trips and Visits

The Outdoor Education Adviser provides comprehensive support to schools and settings, *ensuring that educational trips and visits are both enriching and safe.*

Drawing on the principles and best practices of OEAP (The Association of Advisers for Outdoor Learning and Educational Visits) this includes an annual review of Local Authority Policies and procedures guidance which links to an online visits form called 'eVisits'. This supports the submission by schools and settings of all offsite visits (this incorporates an approval system for Quality Assurance purposes).

The eVisits software enables trip leaders to link in with OEAP National Guidance website for additional information when organising an offsite trip. The Outdoor Education Advisor also has a management responsibility for Schools Forest School programmes and approval of Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions.

To support schools effectively, the Outdoor Education Adviser's activities encompass the following:

Training and Capacity Building

- *Delivering a structured programme of training for Educational Visit Coordinators (EVCs), group leaders, and accompanying staff.* This training is regularly updated to reflect current national standards and includes modules on risk management, emergency protocols, effective supervision, legal responsibilities, and specific topics such as inclusion, medical needs, and adventurous activities.
- Facilitating induction sessions for new staff involved in visits, as well as refresher training to ensure ongoing competence and confidence.
- *Providing specialist workshops on topics such as overseas visits, residentials, and high-risk environments*, tailored to the needs of individual schools or groups of settings.
- Supporting whole-staff briefings to promote a culture of safety and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities during off-site activities.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

- Regularly reviewing schools' visit policies and procedures to ensure alignment with OEAP National Guidance and statutory requirements.
- Auditing a sample of educational visit records, including risk assessments, consent forms, and post-visit evaluations. This helps to identify areas of good practice and opportunities for development.
- Conducting monitoring visits, which may include observing pre-visit briefings, accompanying visits to evaluate practice in real-time, and providing detailed feedback.
- Offering constructive recommendations following audits or monitoring, supporting continuous improvement in the planning and delivery of visits.

Advisory and Emergency Support

- Serving as a key point of contact for schools, offering advice on risk management, trip planning, and the use of external providers, including vetting of providers and venues.
- Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of sector developments, disseminating updates, and sharing case studies or learning from incidents to promote best practice.
- *Providing real-time support in the event of an incident or emergency during a visit*, assisting with incident management, communication, and post-incident review.

Development of Resources

- Creating and updating guidance documents, checklists, exemplar risk assessments, and templates to assist schools in their planning and record-keeping.
- Facilitating access to OEAP National Guidance resources and supporting schools in interpreting and implementing this guidance in their local context.

Through these activities, the Outdoor Education Adviser ensures that all aspects of educational trips and visits—from initial planning and risk assessment to delivery and evaluation—are robustly supported.

This approach helps schools provide safe, inclusive, and high-quality outdoor learning experiences for all pupils, in line with the expectations set out by OEAP National Guidance.

Early Years

The Early Years Education Quality Adviser and the Early Years Quality Improvement and Learning Co-ordinator, in collaboration with other colleagues in the EQS service provide a comprehensive programme of support and challenge to group and school-based providers and childminders, designed to raise standards and ensure the best possible outcomes for children aged 0-5.

Their support role includes:

- Visiting group and school-based providers and childminders to offer hands-on guidance and personalised feedback tailored to the individual context and needs of each provider.
- Modelling high-quality practice across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), demonstrating effective strategies for teaching, learning, assessment, inclusive provision, and positive interactions with children and families.
- Facilitating access to targeted professional development, including training workshops, coaching, and peer networks, to build practitioner confidence and expertise.
- Advising on the effective use of assessment and observation to inform planning and meet the learning and development needs of all children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being
- Providing or signposting to resources, toolkits, self-evaluation frameworks, and practical materials to assist settings in quality improvement and reflective practice.

- Providing advice, guidance and challenge to group and school-based providers and childminders drawing upon the Ofsted framework for the inspection of the Early Years, and schools. This includes supporting group and school-based providers and childminders with inspection preparation, supporting action planning in response to feedback, and embedding a culture of continuous improvement.

In addition, the Early Years team (Senior Education Quality Adviser Early Years and Safeguarding, Early Years Quality Improvement and Learning Co-ordinator, Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Offer, Early Years Safeguarding Officer and Education Quality Adviser SEND)

- Monitor and evaluating the quality of provision through a range of mechanisms, including learning walks, scrutiny of documentation, and analysis of data such as Ofsted outcomes, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) results, and attendance patterns.
- Identify underperformance, gaps in provision, or safeguarding concerns, and address these promptly through clear, evidence-based recommendations and agreed action plans.
- Support settings with respect to ambitious but achievable improvement targets and providing robust follow-up to ensure progress and impact are sustained over time.
- Encourage a culture of high aspiration, reflective practice, and accountability, supporting leaders and practitioners to embrace challenge as a catalyst for positive change.
- Escalate persistent concerns or significant safeguarding issues to the local authority and other relevant agencies to ensure swift and appropriate intervention.

Collaboration is central to the Early Years Team approach: they work closely with group and school-based providers, childminders, local authority teams, and other partners to foster networks of support, share best practice, and ensure that early years provision is inclusive, safe, and responsive to the needs of every child and family. Where issues are identified, they keep clear records of visits, actions agreed, and progress made, ensuring transparency and accountability throughout the process.

Work is focused on empowering early years providers to deliver consistently high standards, nurture children's development, and build a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

Category	Support Status	Ofsted Reference	Local Authority Reference	Leadership and Management	Business	Allocated days of Support
Green providing a Expected standard or better education	LOW SUPPORT	Judged Exceptional, Strong or expected in all areas; or 'met' at the last Ofsted inspection.	Work with the Early Years team; attends CPD and network meetings. In contact with members of EY team as necessary	All key documentation is in place and safeguarding practices are robust. Partnership working is effective. Equality of opportunity is evident. SEND provision and polices meet individual needs and highly effective working relationships with outside agencies and parents secures positive outcomes	Well established business, sustainability and sufficiency plans are in place; clear understanding of funding; local authority terms and conditions adhered to; Occupancy levels are above 80%	0 days
Amber level of education provided judged Needs attention	MEDIUM SUPPORT	Setting shows vulnerability of not attaining an Expected standard at the next inspection. Or has been judged as Needs Attention or not met by Ofsted. The setting or childminder is struggling to demonstrate the capacity to make the necessary changes. This is evidenced through the work of the Early Years team as well as information from outside services	Key roles in place such as SENCo and room leads but possibly support needed in embedding roles and responsibilities. Welfare requirements are being met consistently but safeguarding audit might highlight some areas for improvement. Settings who have previously been judged as Outstanding or Good at the previous inspection but are now considered by the local authority to be vulnerable at the next inspection.	Leaders are committed to improving practitioners' knowledge to enhance and improve provision. Leaders engage effectively with children, their parents and others in their community, including schools and other local services. Leaders engage with their staff and are aware of the main pressures on them. They are realistic and constructive in the way they manage staff, including their workload. Provision to support children's personal development is not good. Any breaches of the statutory requirements for safeguarding and welfare and/or learning and development do not have a significant impact on children's safety, well-being and personal development. Provision for all children is not consistently good. Quality of education is not good and does not meet the needs of all children. Leaders and managers have a clear vision for their setting but are unable to demonstrate how to bring about change and drive the improvements needed.	Funding support needed; sufficiency and sustainability plans in place; possible concerns over occupancy; some concerns over terms and conditions being consistently met and / or concerns raised re staff turnover. Supervisions not driving change Lack of impact from CPD Concerns around the premises Policies not up to date Ofsted not informed of changes	2 visits + 2 online teams meeting/ phone call
Red – level of education provided has serious weaknesses or is in special measures	INTENSIVE / HIGH SUPPORT	Safeguarding is ineffective. Breaches of EYFS requirements have a significant impact on the safety and well-being and/or the learning and development of children. The setting has received two previous 'Requires Improvement' judgements and it is still not at Expected standard. This is evidenced through the work of the Early Years team as well as information from outside services	A poorly designed and implemented curriculum does not meet children's needs. The needs of babies and young children are not met. Children are not well prepared for school or the next stage of their learning, particularly those who are in receipt of additional funding.	Leaders require support, guidance and intervention to be able to improve the quality of education and care. Actions taken to tackle areas of identified weakness have been insufficient or ineffective. Practitioners have a poor understanding of the areas of learning they teach and the way in which young children learn. Strategies for engaging parents are weak and parents do not know what their child is learning or how they can help them improve. Mandatory training is not undertaken. Breaches of the statutory requirements have a significant impact on children's learning and development.	Premises unsecured and unsuitable, including the learning environment and equipment available; terms and conditions not returned; occupancy levels below 50% ; sufficiency and sustainability plans not in place; records and documentations not in place.	3 visits + 3 online teams meeting/ phone call

Category	Support Status	Ofsted Reference	Local Authority Reference	Leadership and Management	Business	Allocated days of Support
Blue- not in contact with EY team so not known	Contact with signposting and offer of support	Could be any Ofsted grade	Setting unknown as doesn't attend CPD or contact the wider team. Offer of visits from LJ have been declined or not acknowledged			Contact made - email or phone call
New setting / New Manager	Bespoke support	After registration / after taking post	A standard email to be sent to all new settings, childminders and new managers outlining the support offered by the EY team to newly registered settings. Face-to-face visits by the EY team .	Term 1 - Childcare and sufficiency visit from DS following support if they receive capital grant funding as well as a Learning and Development visit. Term 1 or 2 – Safeguarding visit. Term 3 - EQA SEND visit The outcome will be a setting in the green category. All key documentation is in place and safeguarding practices are robust. Partnership working is effective. Equality of opportunity is evident. SEND provision and polices meet individual needs and highly effective working relationships with outside agencies and parents secures positive outcomes	Term 1 - Childcare and sufficiency visit from DS following support if they receive capital grant funding as well as a Learning and Development visit. Term 2 – Safeguarding visit. Term 3 - EQA SEND visit Well established business, sustainability and sufficiency plans are in place; clear understanding of funding; local authority terms conditions adhered to; Occupancy levels are above 80%	Up to 4 days face to face during the first year. 0 days during the second year

Post 16

The Post 16 team plays a crucial role in supporting young people as they transition from secondary education into further education, employment, or training. Central to their work is the tracking of pupils who are at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), as well as those whose post-16 destinations are not known. This involves systematic monitoring of attendance, engagement, and progression data, enabling early identification of students who may require additional support. There is a strong communication network between schools, colleges and the Local Authority via a SharePoint site that collects and shares data safely and efficiently.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) professionals within the team provide tailored support to students and their families, helping them to explore post-16 options and make informed choices about their future pathways. Transition Support Workers collaborate closely with schools, colleges, and external agencies to facilitate smooth transitions, ensuring that vulnerable students are connected with appropriate resources and support networks.

In Year 11, the team works proactively with school careers and safeguarding staff to identify vulnerable students who may be at risk of disengagement or who face barriers to successful transition. This is achieved through effective data sharing and analysis of risk factors, and individual casework. We also share the pen portrait of their transition support needs to the confirmed provider in early September to ensure that places are successfully maintained by enabling early interventions to occur.

Education Settings Outside the Local Area and Independent Special Schools

To ensure the highest standards of provision and safeguarding across all education settings, EQAs will coordinate periodic visits to Independent Special Schools within the local area and to education settings situated outside the immediate local area when commissioned for Shropshire CYP. These visits are designed to provide an objective evaluation of the quality of education, the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, and the overall well-being of pupils.

During these visits, EQAs will undertake a range of monitoring activities. This may include reviewing safeguarding protocols, examining documentation, meeting with school leaders, and conducting learning walks to observe classroom practice. Particular attention will be paid to how well the school responds to the needs of its pupils, inclusivity, and attendance patterns. Findings and recommendations from these visits will be communicated promptly to SEN commissioners and be used to inform decision around future placements Before and after visits to education settings outside of the local area, EQAs will communicate with the Local Authority within which the setting is located. Visits may be dictated by commissioners in response to concerns or complaints.

Monitoring and Safeguarding in Out-of-School Settings (OOSS)

Shropshire Council's commitment is to ensure that all children and young people in the area, regardless of the setting they attend, are safe and supported.

Shropshire Council acknowledges that OOSS—such as tuition centres, supplementary schools, sports clubs, dance classes, religious education, and youth organisations—play a significant part in the lives of children and young people in the county. While many of these settings provide enriching educational and social experiences, they are not regulated under the same statutory safeguarding frameworks as registered education settings.

The Council will work closely with the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted, statutory safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies to ensure that children attending OOSS are as safe as possible and receive a suitable education. The Council's approach will include the following key actions:

- Mapping and Understanding Local Provision: Shropshire Council will take steps to identify and understand the range of out-of-school settings operating in the area. This will involve gathering basic information, engaging with local communities, and establishing or strengthening processes for reporting concerns about specific settings.
- Promoting Good Safeguarding Practice: The Council will encourage OOSS providers to implement and maintain robust safeguarding policies and procedures. Where possible, the Council will condition any lease, hire, or funding agreements for local authority premises or financial support on compliance with minimum safeguarding standards, as outlined in DfE guidance.

Out-of-school settings: safeguarding guidance for providers - GOV.UK

- Support and Training: The Council will consider offering guidance, training opportunities, and information on voluntary accreditation schemes (such as Ofsted's voluntary childcare register) to OOSS providers. The Education Quality and Safeguarding team may provide advice, share best practice, and facilitate access to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as appropriate.
- Engagement with Families: The Council has a duty to provide parents with information about available services and facilities, including guidance on what safeguarding measures to expect from OOSS providers. The Council will promote awareness among families so they can make informed decisions about their children's participation in these settings.

- Support and Training: The Council will consider offering guidance, training opportunities, and information on voluntary accreditation schemes (such as Ofsted's voluntary childcare register) to OOSS providers. The Education Quality and Safeguarding team may provide advice, share best practice, and facilitate access to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as appropriate.
- Engagement with Families: The Council has a duty to provide parents with information about available services and facilities, including guidance on what safeguarding measures to expect from OOSS providers. The Council will promote awareness among families so they can make informed decisions about their children's participation in these settings.

Alternative Provision

The local authority (LA) maintains close communication with LA commissioners to ensure robust quality assurance of non-school (unregistered) alternative provision (AP). Regular updates and collaborative reviews are held to monitor the effectiveness, safety, and suitability of such placements, with feedback from EQAs informing these discussions. Commissioners are kept informed of any concerns or areas for improvement identified during monitoring visits, and joint action plans may be agreed where necessary to address specific issues.

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Responsibility for the oversight of the alternative provision used always rests with the local authority or school that commissioned the placement.

Schools should always inform the local authority when they commission a placement in alternative provision for a child to ensure the local authority maintains oversight of sufficiency and safeguarding. This is an expectation of the Department for Education. The Education Access Service will maintain a register of all AP placements of which they have been notified.

Guidance for schools commissioning AP emphasises the importance of thorough due diligence before making any placement. Schools are advised to seek assurances regarding safeguarding, health and safety, curriculum quality, and staff qualifications, and to maintain ongoing oversight throughout the child's time in AP. The LA provides schools with practical checklists and support materials to guide their selection and monitoring of AP providers, ensuring that placements meet both statutory requirements and the individual needs of pupils.

The Local Authority will publish and maintain an up to date AP. Directory which will guide schools in their choice of AP placements, while making it clear that the school retain responsibility for undertaking their own QA prior to commissioning.

The Council will continually review and strengthen its processes for monitoring, supporting, and, where necessary, intervening in out-of-school settings, working collaboratively with partners, families, and communities to uphold the highest standards of safeguarding and educational quality.

Complaints about schools and settings

Most complaints about schools are managed directly by the schools themselves, following clear procedures set out in statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted.

All schools and trusts must publish accessible complaints policies, enabling parents, carers, and stakeholders to raise concerns. The process usually starts with informal resolution, progressing to formal complaints if needed, and may culminate in a hearing by the school's governing body. *The local authority (LA) does not arbitrate or mediate individual complaints, nor does it overturn school decisions. Instead, the LA monitors the frequency and nature of complaints to assess risks relating to safeguarding and school, trust and setting processes.* Where concerning patterns or significant issues emerge, this intelligence informs decisions about further support, scrutiny, or escalation and where necessary information is shared with partners such as the DfE and Ofsted.

As the regulator, the Department for Education will occasionally seek assurances from the LA on the receipt of complaints about schools, academies and settings directly received by the Department. The LA will therefore, from time to time, conduct enquiries in order to provide this information on behalf of the Department for Education. However, this function is again not to act as an arbitrator on behalf of the complainant.

When Ofsted or other bodies refer qualifying complaints to the LA, the information is considered as part of broader risk assessment and oversight. The LA reviews these referrals for evidence of ongoing issues or safeguarding risks.

.At all times, the LA maintains oversight of quality and safety, while ensuring the primary responsibility for resolving complaints remains with the individual schools, trusts and settings.

In cases where concerns are identified, the local authority's contact will be limited to the school itself, ensuring communication remains direct and appropriate. For academies, the local authority will request that the academy makes the relevant trust aware of the issue. This approach respects the governance structures of academies, where trusts hold oversight responsibilities, and ensures that concerns are managed by those with the requisite authority and accountability to take effective action.

This may trigger further information being sought from the complainant/provider to assess whether there is an indication of wider concerns. However, the LA will not intervene in any existing complaints processes. Such intelligence is used to guide ongoing monitoring, support (in the case of maintained schools), or potential escalation in line with statutory and local safeguarding requirements.

Schools, academies and settings will be provided of information shared by the LA with Ofsted and/or the Department for Education.

Education Providers causing concern

In circumstances where Shropshire Council identifies serious concerns regarding the performance or operation of a provider, the Council will initially contact the individual provider to raise these issues. Quality assurance activities may also be arranged; including exceptional short notice visits to ensure the safety of children where serious and urgent concerns are raised that indicate safeguarding arrangements are ineffective. Only in exceptional circumstance will information not be shared, such as where doing so would place a person at increased risk of significant harm or injury and/or obstruct or interfere with any potential regulatory body or enforcement agency investigation.

Serious concerns might include, but are not limited to -

- Serious circumstances that compromise the safety of children, young people and staff.
- Persistent failure to comply with legal duties after this has been identified.
- Continued underperformance
- Concerns that necessitate action in line with whistleblowing and audit procedures.

This correspondence is shared with leaders of this provision, and, where relevant, the governing board of this organisation.

If, after raising concerns, the Council concludes that sufficient progress has not been made to address them, this will escalate the matter to the relevant department within the DfE and/or Ofsted or the relevant regulatory authority.

Oversight and Governance

The Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding will periodically accompany staff to visits to support the quality assurance of support and challenge provided to schools and settings through visits and training.

The impact of this plan will be systematically monitored and reported through several key governance forums. Specifically, progress and outcomes will be shared with the quarterly People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, ensuring thorough oversight and accountability. Additionally, updates will be provided to the SEND and AP Partnership Board, the Children's Safeguarding Board of the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership, and the Shropshire Education Partnership Board along with its sub-groups. This multi-layered approach guarantees that all relevant stakeholders are kept informed and involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the plan and driving continuous improvement.

Development of this Strategy

You said	We did
Change the order so that the 'schools causing concern' is seen as exceptional action rather than following on from the day to day	Moved this section towards the end of the document
Reference more clearly 'challenge' as a principle and to describe	The notion of professional challenge, although referenced
Recognise more strongly the role of sector led improvement as being of benefit for all schools, not just those judged to be in need	More detail provided about the role of associate headteachers confirming blend for all schools of LA QA visits and associate HT
Need to more clearer detail the support offered to maintained schools at the point of Ofsted inspection	Added additional detail to section on support with respect to Of-sted inspections. This significantly enhances the 'remote' support
Provide greater clarity with respect to the format of the annual conversation with CEOs	Planned development of model agenda developed through CEO representatives from Education Partnership Board
Clarify process of how complaints are managed	New section added.
Concern that this is interpreted as the LA operates as a 'maintained era' QA model	With respect to academies, this strategy is focused on developing a culture of information sharing between academies and the LA. This is not about LA delivered consultancy with respect to school improvement rather about building relationships between the LA and academies (particularly where there has been variability in
There is little around structure with respect to small schools and federation, academisation and closure	Added section to include the Small School Closure policy.

Appendix 1

I) School Closure Policy

Introduction

This policy is in relation to the closure of maintained schools within Shropshire Council's geographic area.

Decision maker: For the purposes of this document the decision maker will normally mean the local authority e.g. Shropshire Council who have overall responsibility for the school closure process of maintained schools.

2. School closures

2.1 Stages of the proposed school closure

Under section 15 of Education and Inspections Act 2006, a local authority can propose the closure of a community, foundation, voluntary, community special, foundation special or maintained nursery school; and the governing body of a voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, foundation or foundation special school may publish proposals to close its own school.

The statutory process is set out in the DfE guidance Opening and closing maintained schools

Alternatively, the governing body of a foundation or voluntary school may give at least 2 years' notice of its intention to close the school to the Secretary of State and the local authority.

2.2 Reasons for considering closing a school

The DfE's guidance: Opening and closing maintained schools states that the reasons for closing a maintained school include, but are not limited to, where:

- there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;
- it is to be amalgamated with another school;
- it has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and the Secretary of State has revoked the academy order;
- it is no longer considered viable;
- it is being replaced by a new school.

2.3. Avoiding school closures

Closing a school is a difficult decision which impacts on the whole school community including the children, parents and school staff and would normally only be taken when all other options to keep the school open have been exhausted.

As a rural local authority, the DfE guidance Opening and closing maintained schools holds the position that…

"Proposers should be aware that the department expects all decision makers to adopt a ***presumption against the closure*** of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. ***Shropshire Council follows this presumption***.

The presumption does not apply where a rural infant and junior school on the same site are being closed to establish a new primary school.

Proposers should set out whether the school is referred to in the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order or, where the school is a secondary school, whether the school is identified as rural on the Get Information about Schools (using the Office for National Statistics' Rural Urban Classification In formulating any closure proposals under this section in relation to a rural primary school, proposers must have regard to:

- the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;
- the availability, and likely cost to the local authority, of transport to other schools;
- any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; and
- any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.

Proposers, for all rural closures, in addition to the above, should also provide evidence to show they have carefully considered:

- alternatives to closure including:
- conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust
- federation with another local school;
- the scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities (e.g. childcare facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access);
- the availability, and likely cost to parents, of transport to other schools;
- whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times – as well as the cost to transport arrangements following the school transport policy – which provides transport to the nearest or catchment school where the distance criteria is met i.e. 2 miles for primary, 3 miles for secondary.

• whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term);

• wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils" (DfE Opening and Closing Maintained Schools pg24)

When a school is being considered for closure which may result in the displacement of staff, the Local Authority will explore all possible alternatives to the potential school closure.

3. School amalgamations

According to the DfE's guidance: Opening and closing maintained schools, there are 2 ways to amalgamate 2 (or more) existing maintained schools.

• The local authority and/or governing body (depending on school category) can publish proposals to close 2, or more, schools and the local authority (or a proposer other than the local authority depending on category) can publish a proposal to open a new school. Where this is a *presumption school, this will be subject to publication of a section 6A notice . This will result in the creation of a new school.

• The local authority and/or governing body (depending on school category) can publish a proposal to close one school (or more) and enlarge/change the age range/transfer site of an existing school (following the Statutory Prescribed Alterations Process as necessary), to accommodate the displaced pupils. The remaining school would retain its original school number, as it is not a new school, even if its phase has changed. This is sometimes referred to as a 'merger'.

**Where a local authority identifies the need for a new school, section 6A of EIA 2006 places the local authority under a duty to seek proposals to establish an academy (free school) via the 'free school presumption'.*

4. Pre-statutory procedure actions

In order for Shropshire Council to follow the local authority statutory procedure (Section 5), the Director of Children's Services would take a 'Working Paper' to cabinet for discussion and exploration. This paper would highlight reasons for closure as well as alternative possible solution – including any financial implications. If agreed at cabinet then the statutory procedure outlined in Section 5 would be followed.

5. Local authority statutory procedure

The DfE's guidance: Opening and closing maintained schools outlines the steps the local authority for maintained schools needs to take when making a decision on the permanent closure of a school;

Stage 1: Consultation
It is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer (e.g. the local authority) thinks appropriate before publishing proposals to open or close a maintained school.

Stage 2: Publication
A statutory proposal should be published within 12 months of the initial consultation period being completed. It marks the start of the representation period or formal consultation.

Stage 3: Representation
This is the formal consultation period. The proposer should consult organisations, groups and individuals they feel to be appropriate during the representation period though any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority (LA), to be taken into account by the decision maker. The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory proposal and MUST last for 4 weeks.

Stage 4: Decision
All of the responses received during Stage 3 must be considered by the decision maker. Related prescribed alterations proposals should also be considered and, where possible, determined at the same time. The LA will be the decision maker on a school closure proposal, unless the closure proposal is 'related' to another proposal that is to be decided by the Schools Adjudicator. The decision would be made by Full Cabinet.

Stage 5: Implementation
The decision made in stage four is implemented. There is no maximum limit on the time between the publication of a proposal and its proposed date of implementation. However, decision makers should be confident the proposers have good justification (for example an authority-wide reorganisation) if they propose a timescale longer than 3 years. The proposer must implement a proposal in the form approved, including any modifications made by the decision maker.

Appendix 2

Use of images for this document

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Cabinet

July 8th 2026

Public

Cyber Strategy Report

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Wagner
Lead Director:	Sam Williams – Service Director
Service Area:	Enabling Services
Report Author	David Baker – Head of Service for Automation & Technology
Officer contact details	01743 254 118 – David.Baker@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	N/A
Key Decision?	Non-Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	May 21st 2026
Report considered by	

1. Purpose of Report

Shropshire Council is operating in an increasingly complex and high-risk digital environment. As reliance on digital systems, data and cloud-based services grows, so too does the scale and sophistication of cyber threats facing the organisation. The United Kingdom is currently in a heightened state of cyber threat, reinforcing the need for strong, resilient and well-governed cyber capabilities across the public sector. Cyber security is no longer a technical concern, it is a fundamental enabler of safe, reliable and sustainable public services.

The Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 sets out a clear, outcomes-focused approach to strengthening the Council's cyber resilience. It establishes cyber security as a

corporate risk, embedding security by design, improving governance and assurance, and building a confident workforce capable of operating securely in a modern, digital environment.

Through a structured, risk-led and evidence-based approach aligned to national frameworks including the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), the strategy defines how the Council will protect critical services, safeguard sensitive data and ensure it can anticipate, withstand and recover from cyber incidents with minimal disruption.

2. Recommendations

1. Cabinet is asked to Approves the Cyber Strategy 2026-2030 in appendix 1, and the Plan on a Page Cyber Strategy 2026-2030 in appendix 2.

2. Delegate authority to the Service Director Enabling and Head of Automation and Technology in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Transformation and Economic Growth to update the strategy annually aligned with any legislation change and best practice.

3. Background

1. Shropshire Council is operating in a context of increasing demand for services, sustained financial pressure and rising expectations from residents for accessible, reliable and modern public services. At the same time, the Council is becoming increasingly dependent on digital systems, data and technology to deliver critical services, including care, safeguarding, finance and customer operations

2. The cyber threat landscape facing local government has intensified significantly in both scale and sophistication, with the United Kingdom in a heightened state of security against cyber threat. Local authorities are a recognised target for cyber-attacks due to the critical nature of the services they provide and the volume of sensitive data they hold. As digital transformation accelerates and reliance on cloud platforms, automation and integrated systems increases, the potential impact of cyber incidents on service delivery, financial stability and public trust continues to grow.

3. The Council's Digital Strategy 2026–2030 establishes a clear direction for transforming services through digital, data and automation. Cyber security is a fundamental enabler of this transformation. Without strong, resilient and well-governed cyber capabilities, the Council cannot modernise services safely, share data effectively with partners or adopt new technologies with confidence. The Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 has therefore been developed to ensure that digital transformation is delivered securely, resiliently and in a way that protects critical services and data.

4. The Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 sets out a structured and risk-led approach to strengthening the Council's cyber resilience. It is not a technical strategy or a compliance exercise, but a corporate, leadership-led framework that positions cyber

security as a core organisational risk and capability. The strategy aligns with national policy and best practice, including the UK Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022–2030 and the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), ensuring the Council meets increasing expectations for assurance, governance and transparency.

5. At its core, the strategy focuses on protecting what matters most, ensuring that critical public services remain available, reliable and safe, and that sensitive data is protected as a public trust. It recognises that cyber security is not solely a technical issue but a shared responsibility across the organisation, requiring strong leadership, clear accountability and a workforce that is confident and capable of operating securely in a modern, digital environment.

6. The strategy is underpinned by a clear vision of “trust-driven, resilience-built”, supported by guiding principles including secure-by-design technology, people-powered security, risk-led decision making and collective defence. These principles ensure that cyber security is embedded into everyday operations, decision-making and service delivery, rather than applied as a separate or reactive control.

7. Delivery of the strategy is organised around six strategic priorities: secure-by-design foundations, governance and assurance, protection of data and critical services, workforce capability, strengthened detection and recovery, and national collaboration. Together, these priorities establish a coherent and structured approach to improving cyber resilience over time, balancing prevention, protection, detection and response in line with the Council’s risk profile.

8. Governance and delivery will be embedded within the Council’s existing digital and technology operating model, ensuring cyber security is integrated into all major programmes, projects and service change. Cyber risk will be managed as a corporate risk within established governance structures, with clear oversight, accountability and assurance at all levels of the organisation.

9. A strong emphasis is placed on evidence-based assurance and continuous improvement. Progress will be measured through Cyber Assessment Framework maturity, independent assurance activity and risk trend analysis, ensuring that leadership has a clear and defensible understanding of cyber risk and resilience over time.

10. Overall, the Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 provides a clear, disciplined and forward-looking framework for how Shropshire Council will strengthen cyber resilience as a core enabler of safe, sustainable and modern public services. It ensures that the Council can operate with confidence in an increasingly complex threat environment, protect its communities and maintain the trust placed in it by residents, partners and regulators.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

1. Shropshire Council is operating in an environment of increasing digital dependency, heightened cyber threat and sustained financial pressure.

Strengthening cyber resilience is therefore essential to ensuring the safe, reliable and sustainable delivery of critical public services, and to maintaining the trust and confidence of residents, partners and regulators.

2. The Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 provides a clear, structured and risk-led approach to managing cyber security as a corporate capability. It establishes strong governance, accountability and assurance, ensuring that cyber risk is understood, prioritised and managed effectively across the organisation. The strategy positions cyber security as a key enabler of the Council's digital transformation and long-term financial sustainability.

3. Approval of the strategy will establish a clear and consistent approach to protecting critical services, safeguarding sensitive data and strengthening organisational resilience. It ensures that cyber security is embedded by design into all digital and service change, enabling the Council to operate confidently in an increasingly complex threat environment.

4. The strategy will operate on a four-year cycle, with regular review to reflect changes in threat, regulation, technology and organisational priorities. Cabinet is therefore recommended to approve the Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 and endorse its implementation as a key component of the Council's overall improvement, risk management and financial resilience programme.

5. Key risks and Opportunities

1. Protection of critical public services.

2. Strengthening cyber resilience ensures that essential services, including care, safeguarding and finance, remain available, reliable and safe, even in the face of cyber incidents

3. Reduced financial exposure and unplanned cost.

4. A proactive, risk-led approach reduces the likelihood and impact of cyber incidents, avoiding significant unplanned expenditure associated with service disruption, recovery and regulatory response.

5. Enabling safe digital transformation.

6. Embedding secure-by-design principles enables the Council to modernise services, adopt cloud platforms and scale automation confidently, ensuring transformation reduces rather than increases organisational risk.

7. Strengthened governance, assurance and audit position.

8. Adoption of the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) and clear governance arrangements provides structured assurance, transparency and defensibility in managing cyber risk at a corporate level.

9. Improved workforce capability and culture.

10. Investment in cyber awareness and secure ways of working reduces reliance on individual vigilance alone and embeds secure behaviour as standard practice across the organisation.

11. Enhanced protection of sensitive data and public trust.
12. A consistent, organisation-wide approach to cyber security strengthens the protection of personal and sensitive data, maintaining trust and confidence from residents, partners and regulators.

13. Stronger sector collaboration and collective defence.

14. Active participation in national initiatives, including “Defend as One”, enables shared learning, improved threat intelligence and a stronger collective defence across local government.

15. The risks associated with delivery of the Cyber Strategy are cross-cutting and align to multiple risks within the Council’s Strategic Risk Register. They contribute to:

16. The risk of failure to protect systems, services and data from cyber-attack, given increasing dependency on digital systems

17. The risk of service disruption impacting vulnerable residents and critical public services

18. The risk of financial instability arising from unplanned cyber incidents and recovery costs

19. The risk of failure to meet national expectations, regulatory requirements and audit standards for cyber resilience

20. The risk of insufficient organisational capability, including workforce behaviour and leadership accountability

21. The risk of ineffective governance, assurance and oversight of cyber risk at a corporate level

22. Delivery of this strategy therefore represents a key mitigating response to these corporate risks, ensuring cyber security is managed as an organisational capability rather than a technical function.

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Cyber security incident resulting in service disruption or data loss	Secure-by-design approach, CAF-aligned controls, strengthened detection, response an d recovery capabilities	Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems

Failure to embed cyber security across services and workforce	Organisation-wide training, leadership accountability and integration into service delivery	Critical skills shortage impacting capability, behaviour and organisational resilience Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Inadequate governance, assurance or risk visibility	Adoption of CAF, clear governance structures, reporting and escalation routes	Failure to adhere to governance arrangements and risk management controls Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Increasing reliance on legacy systems and technical debt	Modernisation of platforms and embedding security into all technology design and change	Failure to protect systems and deliver sustainable service outcomes Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Insufficient detection, response and recovery capability	Strengthened monitoring, incident response planning, testing and recovery arrangements	Service disruption impacting delivery of organisational objectives Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Dependence on third parties and supply chain risk	Strengthened assurance, monitoring and security requirements for suppliers and partners	Failure to protect systems and data and manage third-party risk Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Significant financial impact arising from cyber incident, including fines, regulatory action and recovery costs	Risk-led cyber investment, strong governance and assurance, alignment to national frameworks (CAF), and strengthened prevention, detection and recovery capabilities	Inability to contain overall committed expenditure within available resources Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems

6. Financial Implications

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 and/or Portfolio Holders 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.

2. The Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 is a critical enabler of financial resilience. While it does not in itself commit the Council to new expenditure, it establishes a structured, risk-led framework through which cyber security investment will be prioritised, governed and delivered. This ensures that limited resources are focused on protecting critical services, data and organisational continuity in line with corporate risk priorities.

3. Investment in cyber security primarily delivers value through risk reduction, resilience and avoidance of significant unplanned costs rather than direct cashable savings. Major cyber incidents in the public sector have demonstrated the potential for substantial financial impact, including service disruption, emergency response costs, recovery expenditure, regulatory fines and long-term reputational damage.

4. All investment arising from this strategy will be subject to separate business cases and approval through the Council's financial regulations and scheme of delegation. These will define expected outcomes, including risk reduction, improved resilience and protection of critical services, with benefits validated through governance and assurance processes.

5. Delivery of the strategy is expected to reduce financial volatility by minimising the likelihood and impact of cyber incidents, protecting the Council's ability to deliver services within available resources and supporting long-term financial sustainability.

7. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

1. The Cyber Strategy 2026–2030 supports the Council's environmental sustainability objectives through more efficient and resilient digital operations. This includes reducing reliance on inefficient or duplicated systems, improving infrastructure efficiency and supporting more sustainable, digitally enabled ways of working.

2. The strategy promotes the modernisation of technology platforms, including increased use of scalable, cloud-based services and secure infrastructure. These

approaches have the potential to improve energy efficiency compared to traditional on-premises systems, supported by technology providers who operate large-scale, optimised data centres with established sustainability commitments.

3. A key focus of the strategy is embedding security and resilience into digital services by design. This supports long-term sustainability by reducing the risk of disruption, avoiding inefficient recovery activity and ensuring systems operate effectively throughout their lifecycle.

4. As the primary focus of the strategy is cyber resilience rather than environmental change, direct climate impacts are expected to be indirect. Individual initiatives delivered through the strategy will be subject to appropriate appraisal, including environmental considerations where relevant, to ensure alignment with the Council's wider climate change objectives.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Cyber Strategy 2026
Appendix B – 1 Page Cyber Strategy 2026

Cyber Strategy

2026 – 2030

A people-centred approach to cyber resilience

Foreword

Shropshire Council's ability to deliver safe, reliable and modern public services depends on a strong and resilient cyber security foundation. As threats grow in scale and sophistication, and as the council accelerates digital transformation, cyber security must sit at the heart of how we work.

This strategy outlines how we will protect our systems, our data, our people and our communities. It aligns tightly with:

- The UK Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022–2030
- The Government Cyber Action Plan
- DLUHC/MHCLG's leadership role in local government cyber assurance
- The Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) for local government
- National initiatives including Local Digital Cyber, the Cyber Support Programme, and Defend as One
- Our own Digital Strategy 2026–2030

This is a practical and strategic roadmap. It strengthens security "by design", builds a confident workforce, modernises our technology, and ensures Shropshire Council plays a full, active role in the national effort to defend local government as one community.

Introduction

Shropshire Council stands at a critical juncture, where the demands on public services are greater than ever and the responsibility to safeguard our data has never been more pressing. The landscape in which we operate is rapidly changing, driven by advances in technology, evolving public expectations and the increasing sophistication of cyber threats. As we embrace digital transformation, our commitment to cyber security forms the backbone of this journey, ensuring that every technological advancement is matched by robust protection and resilience. This commitment extends to every corner of our organisation, from the systems that power our daily operations, to the frontline staff and communities we serve.

This strategy is not simply about technology, it is about people, trust, and the council's promise to deliver safe, reliable, and modern services for all. Our approach places as much importance on building a culture of security awareness as it does on deploying the latest technical safeguards. We recognise that cyber security is a shared responsibility, involving everyone from senior leaders to every member of staff, as well as our partners and suppliers. By fostering an environment where best practice is standard and vigilance is second nature, we aim to create a council that can anticipate, withstand, and recover from cyber incidents with minimal disruption.

By aligning with national strategy, frameworks and initiatives such as the UK Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022–2030, the Cyber Assessment Framework, Defend as One, and by forging strong partnerships with national and local bodies, we are building a future where security is embedded into every aspect of our operations. These partnerships enable us to share knowledge, access the latest support and resources, and ensure that Shropshire Council remains at the forefront of local government cyber resilience. Our goal is to protect not only our own systems and data, but also the trust and confidence of our residents, ensuring Shropshire remains a safe, secure, and thriving community in the digital age.

Sam Williams
Service Director Enabling

David Baker
Head of Service – Automation and Technology

Our Vision:

Trust-driven, Resilience-built

Our vision is simple:

"Shropshire Council will be a resilient, trusted and secure organisation, protecting residents' data, ensuring uninterrupted public services, and embedding security into every part of our digital future."

What makes this strategy different is its deliberate focus on outcomes, accountability and collective improvement rather than compliance for its own sake.

This is not a technology strategy, and it is not a checklist exercise. It is a leadership-led cyber resilience strategy that explicitly prioritises the protection of critical public services, accepts and manages residual risk transparently, and recognises that cyber security is fundamentally about people, behaviours and organisational choices.

Shropshire Council's ambition is not only to strengthen its own cyber resilience, but to act as a responsible sector partner, sharing learning, contributing to national initiatives and helping to raise cyber maturity across local government as a whole.

Our vision for cyber security is ambitious and forward-thinking, reflecting the council's unwavering dedication to safeguarding the interests of our residents, staff, and partners. We are committed to developing an organisation where resilience is built into every process, trust is continually earned through responsible stewardship of information, and robust security underpins every aspect of the council's digital transformation. By setting the highest standards for data protection and operational continuity, we aim to preserve the confidence of the communities we serve, ensuring that essential public services remain available without disruption regardless of the evolving threat landscape.

This vision is underpinned by four key pillars:

People-Powered Security

People-powered security means more than awareness, it means designing ways of working that support people to make safe decisions, especially under pressure.

Shropshire Council will focus on reducing reliance on individual vigilance alone by:

- removing unnecessary complexity and insecure workarounds
- embedding secure defaults into systems and processes
- clearly defining leadership accountability for cyber-related behaviours
- supporting staff to escalate risks early without fear of blame

Cyber security expectations will be proportionate to role, recognising the different risks faced by frontline staff, Members, managers and privileged users. Secure behaviours will be reinforced through leadership practice, operational controls and everyday processes not solely through training.

Secure-by-Design Technology

Our approach is to embed security into the very fabric of our digital infrastructure. All new systems, processes, and services are designed with security as a core component, ensuring they are modern, interoperable, and resilient to current and emerging threats. We continually assess and upgrade our technology, prioritising solutions that offer both robust protection and seamless integration into our existing operations. By adopting a secure-by-design philosophy, we strengthen our defences while enabling innovation and efficiency across the council.

Risk-Led Decisions

We make informed choices based on a thorough understanding of the risks we face, drawing on the latest threat intelligence, internal assessments, and national frameworks such as the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF). Our decisions are guided by evidence, ensuring that our investments in cyber security deliver maximum impact and value. By proactively identifying vulnerabilities and addressing them in a structured manner, we reduce exposure and enhance our ability to withstand and recover from cyber incidents.

Collective Defence

Recognising that cyber threats do not respect organisational boundaries, we adopt a collaborative approach to defence. We work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), and other local authorities to share knowledge, intelligence, and resources. Through joint initiatives such as "Defend as One," we contribute to a resilient sector-wide posture, ensuring that Shropshire Council benefits from the latest support, guidance, and innovations in cyber security.

By embedding these principles into the heart of our strategy, Shropshire Council is committed to delivering safe, reliable, and modern digital services. Our vision is not just about technology, it is about building trust, empowering people, and establishing a culture of security that enables our community to thrive securely in the digital age.

Why We Must Change

Shropshire Council is operating in an environment of increasing demand, constrained finances, heightened public scrutiny and accelerating digital change. At the same time, the cyber threat landscape facing local government has intensified significantly, both in scale and sophistication. Against this backdrop, cyber security can no longer be treated as a technical concern or an ICT issue alone. It is now a fundamental enabler of safe, resilient and sustainable public services.

The council is undergoing significant digital transformation to modernise services, improve outcomes for residents, and achieve long-term financial sustainability. This transformation increases our reliance on digital systems, data, automation, cloud platforms and external partners. Without a corresponding step-change in cyber resilience, this reliance materially increases organisational risk. In short, we cannot deliver digital transformation safely at pace using our current cyber operating model.

Cyber security is therefore not about preventing change; it is about enabling the council to change with confidence.

Financial and Operational Pressures

Like all councils, Shropshire faces sustained financial pressure, rising demand for services and limited capacity to absorb disruption. Major cyber incidents across the public sector have demonstrated that the financial impact of cyber failure extends far beyond recovery costs. Disruption to services, loss of data, emergency procurement, reputational damage and regulatory intervention can result in multi-million-pound impacts and long-term operational harm.

In an environment where unplanned spend undermines financial recovery, preventing avoidable cyber incidents is a financial imperative, not an optional enhancement.

Rising Digital Dependency

The council increasingly relies on digital platforms to deliver critical services, including health and social care, safeguarding, democratic services, finance, and workforce operations. These systems underpin day-to-day service delivery and the safety of some of the most vulnerable people in Shropshire.

As the council modernises legacy systems, migrates services to the cloud, expands automation and explores the responsible use of AI, the attack surface continues to grow. Without stronger, more consistent cyber controls embedded by design, this creates unacceptable exposure to service disruption and data compromise.

Changing Threat Landscape

Local government is now a recognised target for organised crime groups, opportunistic attackers and, increasingly, state-linked threat actors. The sector holds large volumes of sensitive personal data, relies on complex supply chains, and delivers services where disruption has immediate real-world consequences.

National evidence shows a clear rise in the frequency and impact of cyber incidents affecting councils. The UK Government has responded by strengthening expectations around cyber assurance, including the adoption of the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) for local government. The direction of travel is clear: higher assurance, greater transparency, and stronger accountability.

Workforce Capability and Behaviour

Technology alone will not deliver cyber resilience. Human behaviour remains one of the most significant risk factors in cyber incidents, whether through phishing, weak practices, or insecure workarounds driven by operational pressure.

As the council adopts new tools, platforms and ways of working, staff and Members must be supported to work securely and confidently. Cyber security must become part of everyday practice across the organisation, not a specialist activity carried out in isolation. This requires a sustained focus on skills, culture and leadership, not just controls and policies.

Governance, Assurance and Accountability

Cyber security is now a corporate risk, not an ICT sub-risk. National bodies, auditors and regulators increasingly expect councils to demonstrate clear ownership, structured assurance and evidence-based decision-making in relation to cyber resilience.

Continuing with fragmented or implicit approaches to governance increases exposure to audit challenge and regulatory intervention. Adopting the Cyber Assessment Framework as our primary assurance model, strengthening oversight, and embedding cyber risk into organisational governance are essential to meeting these expectations and maintaining trust.

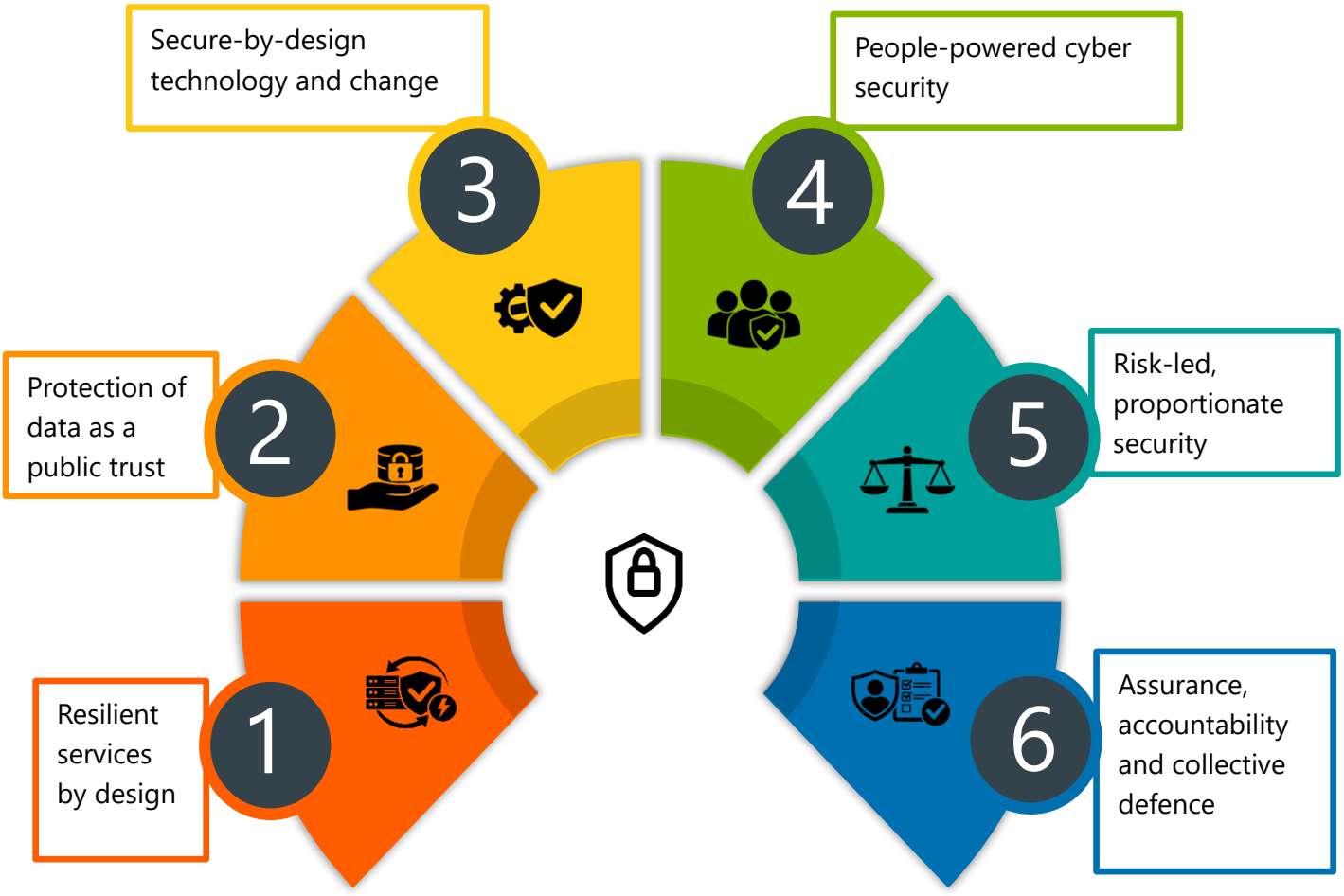
Enabling Safe and Sustainable Transformation

Ultimately, cyber security is not a barrier to innovation, it is what makes innovation possible. Without secure, resilient foundations, the council cannot move faster, automate services, share data safely with partners or adopt new technologies responsibly.

This strategy responds to that reality. It sets out how Shropshire Council will strengthen cyber resilience as a core enabler of digital transformation, protect critical services and data, and ensure the organisation can modernise with confidence in a rapidly evolving threat environment.

Guiding Principles

Our cyber approach follows six guiding principles, aligned directly to the council's Digital Strategy and national cyber expectations. These principles focus on outcomes, resilient services, protected data, and confident people, ensuring cyber security enables rather than constrains effective local government.



1) Resilient services by design

Plain message: "We build cyber resilience into services, so they keep running, even when things go wrong".

Why it matters: Residents rely on council services at moments of vulnerability, including safeguarding, care, housing and democratic processes. Cyber incidents increasingly lead to service disruption rather than just technical inconvenience. Designing resilience into services, systems and recovery arrangements is essential to protect continuity, safety and public confidence.

Link to policy: Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) for local government Objective D (Minimising the impact of cyber security incidents), including Principle D1 (Response and recovery planning) and Principle D2 (Lessons learned), alongside Principle B5 (Resilient networks and systems). UK Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022–2030 and the Government Cyber Action Plan (public sector cyber resilience). LGA Security & Resilience guidance (including "Building a cyber resilient service" resources for directors).

2) Protection of data as a public trust

Plain message: "We protect personal and sensitive data because people trust us to do so."

Why it matters: Councils hold large volumes of personal, sensitive and legally protected information. A loss of confidentiality or integrity can cause direct harm to individuals and long-term damage to trust in public institutions. Strong cyber security underpins effective information governance, lawful data sharing and ethical service delivery.

Link to policy: UK GDPR and the council's Information Governance Framework (lawful, fair and secure handling of personal and sensitive information). CAF for local government Objective A (Managing security risk) including Principle A1 (Governance), plus Principle B3 (Data security) and Principle A3 (Asset management) for understanding what data we hold and how it is protected. LGA Security & Resilience guidance emphasising public confidence and trust. The LGA frames this agenda explicitly around "instilling public confidence and trust" through security and resilience

3) Secure-by-design technology and change

Plain message: "Security is built in from the start not bolted on afterwards."

Why it matters: Retrofitting security is costly, disruptive and often ineffective. As the council modernises legacy systems, migrates to cloud platforms, and increases automation and integration, security must be a design requirement for all change. This reduces long-term risk, avoids rework and enables faster, safer transformation

Link to policy: NCSC Secure design principles (designing and operating services with security as a core consideration). CAF for local government Principle B1 (Service protection policies and processes), Principle B4 (System security), and Principle B5 (Resilient networks and systems), supported by Objective A governance and risk management. UK Government Security "Secure by Design" principles for embedding cyber security practices in digital delivery.

NCSC notes that "the very worst outcomes can be avoided if services are designed and operated with security as a core consideration.

4) People-powered cyber security

Plain message: "Cyber security is everyone's responsibility, not just ICT's."

Why it matters: Human behaviour remains one of the most significant contributors to cyber incidents. Staff and Members must be supported to work securely, confidently and pragmatically, without creating unsafe workarounds. A strong cyber culture, supported by training and leadership, is as important as technical controls.

Link to policy: CAF for local government Principle B6 (Staff awareness and training) and Principle A1 (Governance), reinforcing leadership accountability and role-based expectations. NCSC public sector guidance (pragmatic behaviours and reducing common attack paths). LGA Security & Resilience resources, including councillor-focused "questions to ask" materials that strengthen scrutiny and organisational ownership

5) Risk-led, proportionate security

Plain message: "We apply the right level of security to the right level of risk."

Why it matters: Over-engineered security can reduce usability, accessibility and staff productivity, while under-investment leaves the organisation exposed. In a financially constrained environment, cyber controls and investment must be proportionate, evidence-based and focused on the areas of greatest risk and impact.

Being risk-led also means making explicit and defensible choices. In a financially constrained environment, the council will not seek to apply the same level of control to every system or dataset.

Lower-risk systems may carry acceptable residual risk where the cost or operational impact of further controls would outweigh the benefit. These decisions will be made transparently, recorded through governance and kept under review as risk, threat and service dependency change.

Link to policy: CAF for local government Objective A (Managing security risk) including Principle A2 (Risk management) and A1 (Governance), supported by CAF's outcome-based approach (focused on what needs to be achieved rather than a checklist of controls). MHCLG/Local Digital CAF programme guidance emphasising consistent understanding of cyber risks to essential services and prioritisation of activity and investment.

6) Assurance, accountability and collective defence

Plain message: "We are open about cyber risk and stronger when we work together."

Why it matters: Cyber security is a corporate and sector-wide concern. Councils are expected to demonstrate clear ownership, transparent assurance and continuous improvement. By adopting recognised frameworks, strengthening governance and participating in national collaboration, the council improves its own resilience and contributes to a stronger local government sector overall.

Link to policy: MHCLG/Local Digital "Defend as One" programme (collective defence through collaboration and knowledge sharing) and the Government Cyber Security Strategy commitment to "defend as one". CAF for local government Objective A (Governance and risk management) and Objective D (Response, recovery and lessons learned), supported by independent assurance expectations built into the CAF for local government approach. LGA Cyber 360 Framework (sector-led, collaborative improvement model aligned to NCSC guidance) and wider LGA Security & Resilience resources for councils.

Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Secure-by-design foundations

A modern, resilient and secure technology foundation that enables digital transformation while protecting critical services, data and public trust.

Shropshire Council's ability to deliver safe, reliable and efficient public services increasingly depends on digital systems and data. Many of these systems underpin critical activities including health and social care, safeguarding, democratic processes, finance and workforce operations.

Legacy technology, inconsistent security controls and accumulated technical debt increase the council's exposure to cyber risk and service disruption. As the organisation modernises systems, adopts cloud platforms, expands automation and increases integration between services, the impact of any weakness in underlying foundations becomes more significant.

Secure-by-design foundations are essential to ensuring that digital transformation reduces risk rather than amplifying it. This priority ensures that security, resilience and recoverability are treated as core design requirements, not after-thoughts or compensating controls.

What we will do

- Modernise legacy systems to reduce security risk, complexity and support dependency
- Embed security requirements into all technology design, procurement and change activity
- Standardise identity, access, network and endpoint security across the organisation
- Adopt Zero Trust principles to reduce implicit trust and limit the impact of compromise
- Strengthen backup, recovery and disaster recovery capabilities, with regular testing
- Ensure all major digital change is subject to appropriate technical and security assurance through established governance routes

Priority 2: Governance, Assurance and Accountability

Cyber security is owned, governed and assured as a corporate risk, with clear accountability, transparent decision-making and evidence-based improvement.

Cyber security is no longer a niche technical risk; it is a strategic organisational risk with the potential to disrupt critical services, harm residents, undermine financial recovery and damage public trust. Nationally, councils are increasingly expected to demonstrate clear ownership, structured assurance and continuous improvement in cyber resilience.

Historically, cyber risk across local government has often relied on informal controls, technical expertise and fragmented governance. This approach is no longer sufficient in an environment of increased threat, regulatory scrutiny and dependency on digital services.

Without clear governance and assurance, cyber investment becomes reactive, risks are poorly understood, and accountability is diluted. This priority ensures the council has a disciplined, transparent and defendable approach to managing cyber risk, aligned to national expectations and corporate governance standards.

What we will do

- Treat cyber security explicitly as a corporate risk, owned at senior leadership level
- Adopt the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) as the primary assurance and maturity model
- Establish clear oversight arrangements, reporting and escalation routes for cyber risk
- Maintain a transparent cyber risk register aligned to the council's wider risk framework
- Use independent assurance, including IT Health Checks, to validate controls and maturity
- Ensure significant cyber risks, incidents and non-compliance are reported and addressed consistently
- Align cyber governance with audit, information governance, business continuity and digital oversight structures

These actions create clarity over who is responsible, how risk is understood, and how decisions are made.

Priority 3: Protecting Data and Critical Public Services

Sensitive data is protected and critical public services remain available, reliable and safe, even in the face of cyber incidents.

Shropshire Council delivers services that directly affect people's safety, dignity and wellbeing. This includes safeguarding children and adults, supporting people with complex needs, administering democratic processes and managing public finances. These services depend on the confidentiality, integrity and availability of digital systems and information.

Cyber incidents increasingly affect service availability and trust, not just data loss. Disruption to care systems, corruption of records, or loss of access to critical applications can have immediate and serious consequences for residents, staff and partners.

In addition, the council must share information securely with health, care, voluntary and community partners. This increases dependency on interconnected systems and supply chains, making the protection of data and service continuity a collective responsibility rather than an isolated technical concern.

This priority ensures that cyber security efforts focus on protecting what matters most.

What we will do

- Apply strong access controls, encryption and monitoring to sensitive and high-risk data
- Prioritise cyber protection for systems supporting:
- health and social care
- safeguarding and vulnerable cohorts
- democratic and electoral services
- finance, payroll and core corporate functions
- Strengthen vulnerability and patch management to reduce exposure to known threats
- Expand monitoring, logging and detection to identify suspicious activity early
- Improve cyber resilience within the council's supply chain and partner-hosted systems
- Ensure data protection, cyber security and business continuity considerations are aligned and mutually reinforcing

Priority 4: Building a Digitally and Cyber-Confident Workforce

Staff and Members are confident, capable and supported to work securely, reducing cyber risk through everyday behaviour and decision-making.

Technology alone does not deliver cyber resilience. Across local government, human behaviour remains one of the most significant contributors to cyber incidents, whether through phishing, insecure practices, poor password hygiene or informal workarounds created under operational pressure.

Shropshire Council's workforce operates in complex, high-demand environments, often dealing with sensitive information and time-critical decisions. As the council increases its reliance on digital tools, mobile working, automation and shared systems, staff confidence and understanding become critical to maintaining security without undermining service delivery.

A lack of confidence or clarity can lead to increased risk, not through negligence, but through uncertainty. This priority recognises that supporting people to work securely is as important as implementing technical controls.

What we will do

Under this priority, the council will:

- Ensure all staff and Members receive appropriate, proportionate cyber awareness training
- Provide targeted cyber skills development for ICT, digital and technical roles
- Embed clear, practical guidance on secure working into everyday processes and tools
- Use regular, realistic exercises and simulations to reinforce good cyber behaviours
- Support managers and leaders to understand their role in managing cyber risk
- Promote a positive cyber culture that encourages reporting, learning and improvement rather than blame

Priority 5: Accelerate Detection, Response & Recovery

Rapid detection, effective response and safe recovery are the hallmarks of a mature cyber-resilient organisation. For Shropshire Council, the ability to restore critical services quickly and safely is as important as preventing incidents occurring in the first place. This priority shifts the council's cyber posture from one that is predominantly preventative to one that is operationally resilient, tested and continuously improved.

It is no longer realistic to assume that cyber incidents can always be prevented. Across local government, resilience increasingly depends on how quickly an organisation can detect, contain and recover from an incident, rather than whether an attack attempt occurs.

Delayed detection, unclear response arrangements or untested recovery processes significantly increase impact. This can lead to prolonged service outages, data loss, reputational harm and loss of confidence from residents, partners and regulators.

Given the council's growing digital dependency, it is essential that cyber incidents are treated as a manageable operational risk, with well-understood roles, reliable processes and confidence that services can be restored safely. This priority ensures the council is prepared not just to defend, but to respond effectively when incidents occur.

What we will do

- Strengthen monitoring and detection capabilities to identify suspicious activity early
- Integrate automated alerting and logging across critical systems and environments
- Maintain a clear, tested Cyber Incident Response Plan aligned to business continuity arrangements
- Ensure roles, responsibilities and escalation routes are understood across ICT, services and leadership
- Conduct regular exercises and simulations involving technical teams, services and communications
- Improve backup, recovery and restoration arrangements, including offline and immutable backups
- Ensure learning from incidents and exercises is captured and used to drive continuous improvement
- Ensure Service Directors and Heads of Service understand and exercise their role in service-level cyber readiness, recovery priorities and decision-making during incidents

Priority 6: National Collaboration and Collective Defence

Shropshire Council will actively contribute insight, learning and practical experience to national and regional cyber initiatives, recognising that improving sector resilience is both a responsibility and a force multiplier for our own security.

Shropshire Council strengthens its own cyber resilience while contributing to a safer, more resilient local government sector through collaboration, shared learning and collective defence.

Cyber threats do not respect organisational boundaries. Local authorities face many of the same risks, exploit techniques and threat actors, often operating against shared technologies, suppliers and service models. No council can defend itself effectively in isolation.

National experience has shown that councils which collaborate, share intelligence and improve collectively are better prepared, recover more quickly from incidents and use scarce resources more effectively. This has driven a clear national policy direction towards collective defence, with an increasing expectation that councils will actively participate in shared cyber efforts.

For Shropshire Council, collaboration is not only about receiving support; it is about contributing insight, lessons learned and capability to strengthen the resilience of the whole sector.

What we will do

- Participate actively in national and regional cyber resilience initiatives for local government
- Align cyber assurance and reporting with nationally recognised frameworks and benchmarks
- Share anonymised insights from incidents, assessments and exercises to support sector learning
- Engage with MHCLG, the Local Digital Cyber programme and CAF development activity
- Explore shared tools, services and capabilities where this provides better value or resilience
- Strengthen collaboration across place, including with health, education, emergency services and voluntary partners

Delivery Plan, Governance, and Benefits Realisation

How we will deliver

Cyber security delivery at Shropshire Council will be embedded into the council-wide digital and technology portfolio, ensuring that security is designed into services, systems and ways of working rather than delivered as a standalone technical function.

This strategy will be delivered through a combination of targeted cyber initiatives, continuous improvement activity and the integration of cyber controls into all major digital change. Delivery will be prioritised using risk-based decision-making, aligned to the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), and shaped by national expectations for local government cyber resilience.

Cyber security activity will focus on protecting critical services, safeguarding sensitive data and enabling safe digital transformation at pace, while remaining proportionate to the council's risk exposure and financial context.

Operating model

Cyber security is governed as a corporate risk, with clear ownership, oversight and escalation routes integrated into the council's wider governance framework.

Oversight and accountability will be provided through:

Head of Service – Automation & Technology – provides senior strategic leadership across digital, cyber and information security, ensuring alignment between cyber resilience, digital transformation, information governance and organisational risk management. The Head of Service – Automation & Technology is responsible for setting direction, assuring coherence across strategies and providing senior ownership for cyber security as an enabler of safe and sustainable digital change.

Information Governance Leadership and Organisational Oversight (IGLOO) – a governance group responsible for overseeing information governance, data protection, cyber security, and associated compliance activities across the organisation.

Leadership Board - The Leadership Board is the senior-most officer leadership group in Shropshire Council. It sets the organisation's direction, makes or shapes key decisions, oversees major risks and programmes, and ensures all services are aligned to the Council's long-term plan. It owns cyber security as an organisational risk, providing senior oversight and direction.

Support and Enabled Workforce Portfolio Board – Govern's the execution, risk and dependencies of all programmes and projects within its specific portfolio, ensuring effective governance, risk resolution, and benefit realisation at the executive level. The board will meet every 4 weeks.

Digital Transformation Board (DTB) – The DTB provides strategic oversight, governance, and assurance for all digital transformation activities within the council. The DTB will meet monthly, with additional meetings as required.

Digital Design Authority (DDA) - The DDA is responsible for the technical and architectural oversight of all digital programmes and projects. Its purpose is to own and maintain the overarching programme design and design principles. Evaluate and make decisions on technical and digital design matters. Ensure all design activities align with strategic objectives, comply with standards, security-by-design is embedded into all technology and digital change, and deliver quality and consistency. Provide assurance that design decisions support operational service delivery and council priorities. The DDA will meet weekly, or as required based on the volume and urgency of design decisions.

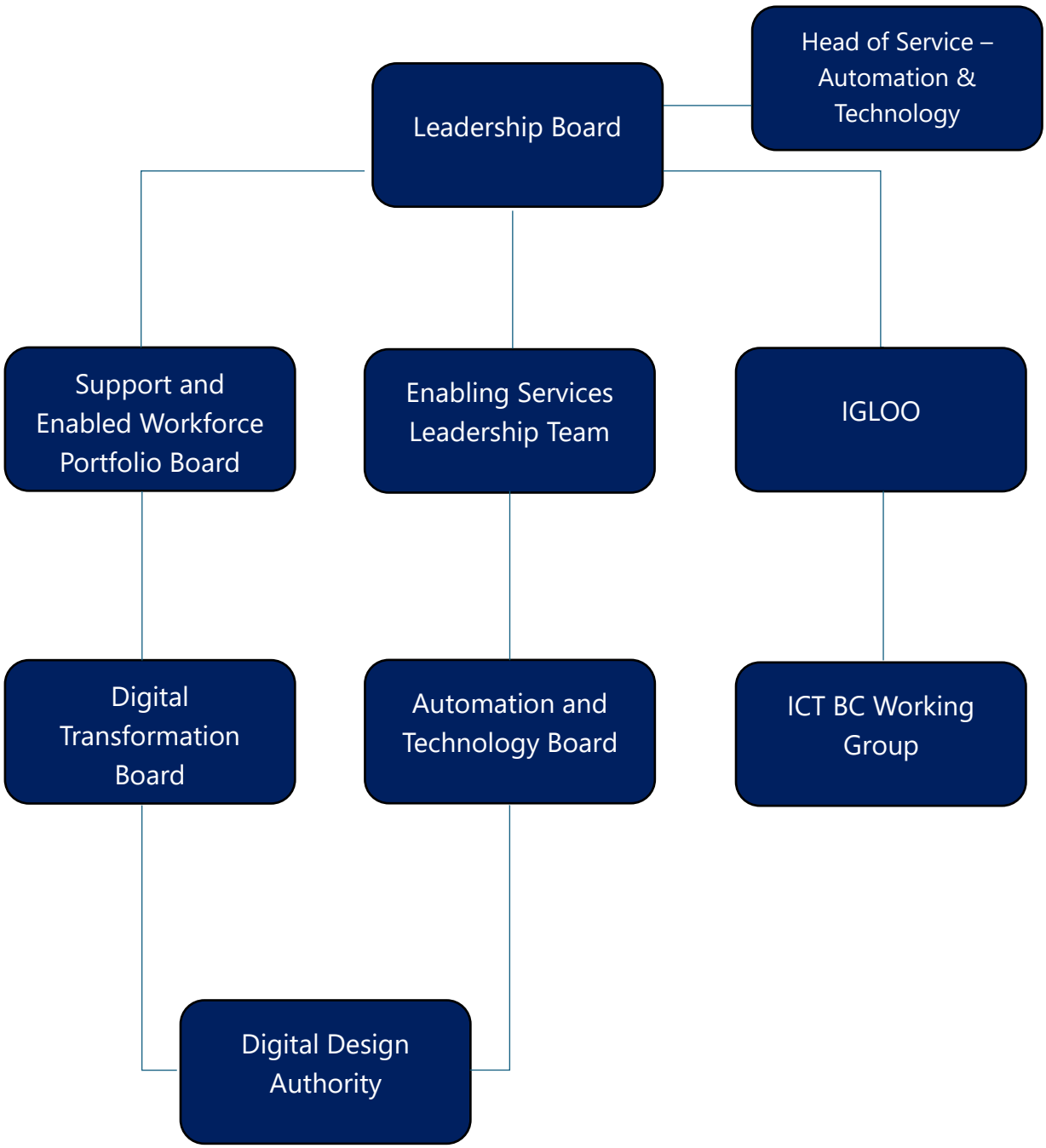
ICT Business Continuity Working Group –focuses on ICT business continuity, disaster recovery (BC/DR), cyber preparedness, and organisational resilience.

Enabling Services Leadership Team (ESLT) – The Enabling Services Leadership Team (ESLT) is the senior leadership group for Enabling Services within Shropshire Council. It is chaired by the Service Director – Enabling Services and brings together the Heads of Service and senior managers from all Enabling Services functions to coordinate delivery, provide updates, share risks and issues, and align activity with the Council's strategic direction.

Automation and Technology Board - The Automation and Technology Board is the central leadership and governance forum for all ICT functions within Shropshire Council. It coordinates service performance, programmes, digital transformation, risks, staffing, and technology decisions across the whole Automation and Technology service. It oversees cyber delivery, risk, investment and performance within the wider technology portfolio.

Heads of Service and service managers remain accountable for local compliance, risk awareness and secure operation within their services, supported by the Automation & Technology service.

This governance model ensures cyber security is visible, owned and actively managed, rather than implicitly assumed.



RACI (Summary)

Responsible	Service Director Enabling, Head of Service – Automation & Technology, Cyber Security Team, Business Process Owners.
Accountable	Chief Executive (Organisational cyber risk and resilience), s151 Officer (financial exposure and recovery impact).
Consulted	Service Directors, Unions, Information Governance, IGLOO, Internal Audit, Procurement, ICT Business Continuity working group
Informed	Members, staff, partners, suppliers, regulators (as appropriate)

Delivery approach

Cyber security delivery will be structured around:

- A rolling programme of CAF-aligned maturity improvement
- Risk-based prioritisation of activity and investment
- Integration of cyber requirements into projects, programmes and procurement
- Independent assurance to validate controls and identify improvement opportunities
- Continuous learning from incidents, exercises and sector insight

Delivery will balance prevention, resilience and response, recognising that sustainable cyber security is achieved through disciplined improvement over time rather than one-off interventions.

Benefits realisation

Investment in cyber security primarily delivers value through risk reduction, resilience and avoided harm rather than direct cashable savings.

Benefits will be realised through reduced likelihood and impact of cyber incidents, faster restoration of critical services, improved assurance to regulators and insurers, and reduced financial volatility associated with emergency response and recovery.

The council recognises that not all benefits will be immediately measurable or directly attributable. Progress will therefore be demonstrated through evidence-based assurance, resilience testing, CAF maturity outcomes and sustained reductions in unplanned disruption rather than headline financial returns.

Measuring Progress

Progress against this strategy will be monitored using a combination of:

- Cyber Assessment Framework maturity outcomes
- Independent assurance, including IT Health Checks
- Risk trend analysis and incident reporting
- Delivery milestones across priority initiatives
- Evidence of secure-by-design compliance across digital change

This approach ensures leadership has clear, consistent and defensible insight into both cyber risk and improvement over time.

Change & adoption

Successful cyber resilience depends on people, behaviours and decision-making, not just technology. To ensure security controls, processes and ways of working are consistently applied in practice, we will take a focused and pragmatic approach to cyber change and adoption across the organisation.

This will include preparing services early for security impacts, engaging staff and Members in clear, timely communication about cyber risks and expectations, and providing the right level of support so teams can work confidently and securely. Particular emphasis will be placed on helping people understand why controls exist, reducing unsafe workarounds and encouraging early reporting of concerns.

Adoption will be monitored through real-world usage, incident trends, exercise outcomes and observable behavioural change, ensuring secure practices become embedded in everyday work and that the benefits of cyber investment are realised in improved resilience, safer services and reduced organisational risk.

Information Governance Framework

A key foundation of our information security is the Shropshire Information Governance Framework, which ensures that all data is managed securely, ethically, and in accordance with statutory and local requirements. This framework underpins our initiatives, driving transparent practices and safeguarding confidential information across every system and service. By following the principles and protocols set out in the Shropshire framework, we sustain trust among residents, staff, partners, and stakeholders, while guaranteeing that each digital investment aligns with both regulatory standards and the organisational values of Shropshire.

Moving Forward

This strategy has been deliberately designed to be open, transparent and aligned to national frameworks so that it can be shared, reviewed and reused across the local government sector.

Shropshire Council welcomes peer challenge and collective learning and intends this strategy to contribute to raising cyber resilience standards beyond organisational boundaries.

In the next 12 months we will:

- Establish the cyber delivery and governance model, embedding clear ownership, oversight and assurance across the organisation.
- Baseline the council's cyber maturity using the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) and agree a priority improvement plan.
- Strengthen protection for systems supporting critical services, including care, safeguarding, democratic and financial functions.
- Improve monitoring, detection and incident response capability, including testing response and recovery arrangements.
- Embed secure-by-design principles into all major digital and technology change through design and assurance routes.
- Expand workforce cyber awareness and confidence, supporting safe and secure ways of working across all services.
- Actively participate in national and sector-led cyber resilience initiatives, contributing to collective defence through Defend as One.

Cyber security is an enabler of trust, resilience, financial sustainability and great public services. This strategy sets out a disciplined, pragmatic and forward-looking plan for Shropshire Council to meet its responsibilities, protect its communities and operate confidently in a complex threat landscape.

By integrating secure by design principles, adopting national frameworks, strengthening our workforce, modernising our technology, and fully participating in collective defence through Defend as One, we will deliver a safer, stronger and more resilient Shropshire.

CYBER STRATEGY 2026–2030

A people-centred approach to cyber resilience

Protect our people | Secure our data | Keep services running | Strengthen trust in Shropshire

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Cyber threats are growing in scale and sophistication
- We are transforming digitally and using more data than ever
- Our services must remain safe, reliable and available
- Our people, partners and communities trust us with their information

OUR APPROACH

This is a leadership-led cyber resilience strategy, not a technology strategy or a checklist.

- Outcome focused
- Aligned to national strategy and frameworks
- Risk managed, not risk avoided
- People, behaviours and organisational choices

ALIGNED WITH

- UK Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022–2030
- NCSC secure design principles
- LGA Cyber 360
- MHCLG Local Digital Cyber, the Cyber Support Programme and Defend as One
- Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) for local government
- Our Digital Strategy 2026–2030

OUR VISION

TRUST-DRIVEN, RESILIENCE-BUILT

> Shropshire Council will be a resilient, trusted and secure organisation, protecting residents' data, ensuring uninterrupted public services, and embedding security into every part of our digital future.

OUR FOUR PILLARS

1 PEOPLE-POWERED SECURITY

Empower our people to make safe decisions every day.

- Removing unnecessary complexity and insecure workarounds
- Embed secure defaults
- Clear leadership accountability for cyber behaviours
- Support early escalation without blame

2 SECURE-BY-DESIGN TECHNOLOGY

Build security in from the start.

- Design systems, services and processes with security by default
- Use modern, interoperable and resilient technology
- Continuously assess and uplift our defences

3 RISK-LED DECISIONS

Make informed choices that manage risk and protect what matters.

- Use threat intelligence and robust risk assessments
- Align with national frameworks (CAF)
- Prioritise actions that deliver the greatest impact
- Accept and manage residual risk transparently

4 STRONG PARTNERSHIPS & COLLECTIVE DEFENCE

Defend local government as one community.

- Share learning and intelligence
- Work with national and local partners
- Contribute to national initiatives
- Raise cyber maturity across local government

HOW WE WILL DELIVER

Strong leadership and governance	Security by design and default	Skilled and confident workforce	Resilient operations	Continuous improvement
Clear accountability at every level	Built into our processes	The right people with the right skills	Prepare, prevent, detect, respond, recover	Measure, learn and adapt

HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

- Improved security posture and CAF maturity
- Fewer and less severe incidents
- Minimal disruption to services
- Confident, aware and empowered staff
- Effective use of resources
- Strong trust from residents and partners

Together, we will protect our people, secure our data, keep services running and build trust in Shropshire.

Cyber security is everyone's responsibility.
Together, we are stronger. Together, we are resilient.

We care | We innovate | We collaborate | We are trusted

Shropshire Council

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Cabinet

July 8th 2026

Public

Digital Strategy Report

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Wagner
Lead Director:	Sam Williams – Service Director
Service Area:	Enabling Services
Report Author	David Baker – Head of Service for Automation & Technology
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Electoral Divisions Affected	N/A
Key Decision?	Non-Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	May 21st 2026
Report considered by	

1. Purpose of Report

1. Shropshire Council is at a pivotal moment. Rising demand, financial pressures and changing expectations mean the council must transform how it delivers services and supports communities.

The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 sets out a clear, people centred approach to this transformation. It focuses on using digital, data and automation to redesign services around real needs, reduce complexity and improve outcomes, while building a more sustainable and resilient organisation.

Through a single, integrated portfolio and a strong focus on measurable impact, the strategy establishes how the council will modernise services, strengthen capability and deliver long term financial sustainability.

2. Recommendations

1. Cabinet is asked to approve the Digital Strategy 2026-2030 in appendix 1, and the Plan on a Page Digital Strategy 2026-2030 in appendix 2.

2. Delegate authority to the Service Director Enabling and Head of Automation and Technology in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Transformation and Economic Growth to update the strategy annually aligned with any legislation change and best practice.

3. Background

1. Shropshire Council is operating in a context of increasing demand for services, significant financial pressure and rising expectations from residents for accessible, responsive and modern public services. The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) and Improvement Plan have identified the need for fundamental change in how services are delivered, including strengthening governance, improving efficiency and ensuring long term financial sustainability.

2. Digital transformation is a central enabler of this change. However, the Council's current operating model remains, in many areas, fragmented, process heavy and reactive. Residents are often required to navigate multiple systems, repeat information and access services at the point of escalation rather than earlier intervention, contributing to avoidable demand and increased cost to serve.

3. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 has been developed to address these challenges and to establish a clear, structured approach to transformation. It is not a technology strategy, but a delivery strategy for how the Council will reduce demand, improve outcomes and achieve financial sustainability through the disciplined use of digital, data and automation.

4. The strategy is underpinned by a clear vision of "People Powered, Technology Driven", recognising that transformation is not about technology alone but about improving lives, supporting staff and creating a more effective and sustainable organisation.

5. At its core, the strategy focuses on designing services around the needs of residents and communities, ensuring services are simple, accessible and inclusive, while maintaining strong support for those who are unable or unwilling to use digital channels. This includes a commitment to digital inclusion, ensuring that transformation reduces inequality rather than reinforcing it.

6. A key element of the strategy is the shift from reactive service delivery to a preventative, insight led model. This involves using data more effectively to anticipate need, support earlier intervention and reduce long term demand on services, particularly in high pressure areas such as health, care and safeguarding.

7. The strategy also recognises the need to modernise technology foundations. Many existing systems are legacy, fragmented and not designed to work together, creating duplication, inefficiency and increased risk. The strategy therefore prioritises the transition to modern, interoperable platforms that support integration, automation and more efficient service delivery.

8. Cyber security and resilience form a critical part of this approach. As reliance on digital systems increases, the Council must ensure that its services and data are protected, resilient and able to recover quickly from disruption. The strategy aligns closely with the Council's Cyber Security Strategy and the Cyber Assessment Framework, embedding security and resilience as fundamental design principles.

9. The effective use of data is also central to the strategy. Data will be treated as a strategic asset, with improved governance, ownership and quality enabling better decision making, performance management and service design. This supports the transition from retrospective reporting to proactive, insight driven services.

10. Delivering this level of transformation requires a step change in organisational capability. The strategy therefore includes a strong focus on building digital, data and technology skills across the workforce, with leaders accountable for outcomes and supported by multidisciplinary teams. Transformation will be delivered through services, rather than to services.

11. The strategy also sets out a structured approach to innovation, including the use of automation and artificial intelligence. These technologies will be applied in a controlled and ethical way, focused on delivering measurable outcomes such as improved efficiency, reduced cost to serve and better decision making, while maintaining transparency and public trust.

12. A further priority is strengthening partnership working across the Council's place-based system, including health, care and the voluntary sector. By improving data sharing and enabling more joined up services, the strategy supports a more integrated approach to meeting the needs of residents and communities.

13. The strategy is explicitly aligned to national policy, standards and best practice, including the Government Digital Service (GDS) Design Principles, the Technology Code of Practice, the Local Government Association digital frameworks, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) direction for modern digital government. It also aligns with national cyber security expectations, including the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), ensuring that transformation is delivered in a secure, consistent and standards-based way.

14. Delivery of the strategy will be managed through a single, council wide digital portfolio, bringing together service redesign, technology, data, automation and cyber into a coherent governance model. This will ensure that activity is prioritised based on statutory risk, financial impact and demand reduction, and that duplication and fragmentation are reduced.

15. A strong emphasis is placed on benefits realisation and financial discipline. All initiatives will be required to define, track and evidence measurable benefits, including financial savings, improved outcomes and productivity gains. This ensures that digital investment is transparent, controlled and demonstrably delivering value.

16. Overall, the Digital Strategy provides a clear and coherent framework for how the Council will use digital, data and technology to respond to the challenges identified through the CPC and Improvement Plan.
It establishes a structured, evidence led approach to transformation that is focused on reducing demand, improving outcomes and creating a more financially sustainable and resilient organisation for the future.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

1. Shropshire Council is at a critical point where rising demand, financial pressures and increasing expectations require a fundamental shift in how services are delivered. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 provides a clear, coherent and disciplined approach to achieving this transformation, positioning digital, data and automation as core enablers of the Council's Improvement Plan and long-term sustainability.

2. The strategy sets out a practical, benefits led approach, with strong governance, prioritisation and accountability, ensuring that digital investment is focused on reducing demand, improving outcomes and delivering measurable financial and service benefits.

3. Approval of the strategy will establish a clear direction of travel for the Council, enabling a more efficient, resilient and user centred operating model. It will ensure that transformation is delivered in a consistent, controlled and evidence-based way, aligned to both local priorities and national best practice.

4. The strategy will operate on a four-year review cycle, with annual reviews to reflect legislative changes or organisational priorities.

5. Cabinet is therefore recommended to approve the Digital Strategy 2026–2030 and endorse its implementation as a key component of the Council's overall improvement and financial recovery programme.

5. Key risks and Opportunities

1. Demand reduction and prevention.
2. Greater use of digital, data and insight enables earlier intervention, reducing avoidable demand and improving outcomes for residents.

3. Improved financial sustainability.
4. A disciplined, benefits led approach to digital investment supports reductions in cost to serve and contributes to the Council's medium term financial recovery.

5. Improved service quality and accessibility.
6. User centred service design simplifies access, reduces complexity and improves overall experience for residents, members and staff.

7. Strengthened organisational resilience and cyber security.
8. Investment in secure, resilient technology foundations reduces risk of service disruption and protects critical systems and data.

9. Workforce productivity and capability.
10. Automation, modern tools and improved digital capability enable staff to focus on higher value activities and improve service efficiency.

11. Better use of data and insight.
12. Data driven decision making supports proactive service delivery, improving targeting of resources and outcomes across services.

13. Stronger partnership working.
14. Improved data sharing and integrated digital services support more joined up delivery across health, care and community partners.

15. The risks associated with delivery of the Digital Strategy are cross-cutting and align to multiple risks within the Council's Strategic Risk Register. They contribute to:

16. The risk of inability to contain overall expenditure within available resources, through dependency on digital transformation to reduce cost and demand

17. The risk of critical skills shortage impacting recruitment, retention and organisational capacity, reflecting the need to build digital capability across the workforce

18. The risk of failure to protect systems and data from cyber-attack, given the increasing reliance on digital systems for critical services

19. The risk of failure to adhere to governance arrangements, including data governance, decision-making and programme oversight

20. Wider risks relating to service access, inequality and demand management, particularly where services remain complex, fragmented or reactive

21. Delivery of this strategy therefore represents a key mitigating response to these corporate risks, rather than a standalone or isolated risk area.

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Failure to deliver planned transformation and benefits	Delivery through a single, prioritised digital portfolio with governance oversight and benefits tracking	Inability to contain overall committed expenditure within available resources
Insufficient adoption of new systems and ways of working	Structured change and adoption approach with training, engagement and monitoring	Critical skills shortage impacting on retention, recruitment a nd succession planning Inability to deliver organisational objectives / economic and service delivery outcomes
Cyber security incident or system failure	Secure-by-design approach aligned to CAF and strengthened resilience capabilities. Link ed to Cyber Security Strategy 2026-2030.	Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Data quality or governance issues	Implementation of Data Quality Strategy and governance framework	Failure of officers and members to adhere to governance arrangements (including data governa e and decision-making controls nc)
Digital exclusion impacting residen ts	Inclusive design and non-digital access routes	Impact of increased waiting lists / service access pressures (linked to capacity and equitable access to services)
Dependence on legacy systems and technical debt	Planned replacement with modern, interoperable platforms	Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems

		Inability to deliver organisational objectives / economic and service delivery outcomes
Fragmented delivery across services	Strong governance, design authority and standards	Failure of officers and members to adhere to governance arrangements (organisational alignment and decision-making)

6. Financial Implications

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 and/or Portfolio Holders 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.

2. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 is a critical enabler of the Council's financial sustainability and Medium-Term Financial Plan. It does not in itself commit the Council to new expenditure, it establishes the framework through which digital investment will be prioritised, governed and delivered.

3. All investment will be subject to separate business cases and approval processes in accordance with the Council's financial regulations and scheme of delegation. These will define expected financial and non-financial benefits, including reductions in cost to serve, demand reduction and improved productivity.

4. The strategy adopts a benefit led delivery model, with all savings and efficiencies baselined, tracked and validated through established governance arrangements. Only verified benefits will be reported, ensuring transparency and financial robustness.

5. Delivery of the strategy is expected to make a material contribution to the Council's medium term financial position by reducing demand, improving efficiency and supporting more sustainable service delivery.

7. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

1. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 supports the Council's environmental sustainability objectives through more efficient and digitally enabled service delivery. This includes reducing reliance on paper-based processes, enabling remote access to services and supporting more flexible working arrangements, which may contribute to reduced travel and lower carbon emissions.

2. The strategy also includes a commitment to the ethical and sustainable use of technology, ensuring that digital solutions are designed and delivered with consideration of environmental impact.

3. The move towards modern, cloud-based platforms has the potential to improve energy efficiency by reducing reliance on on-premises infrastructure and making use of large scale, energy optimised data centres operated by technology providers. Many suppliers, including strategic partners, have established sustainability commitments, including carbon reduction and offsetting programmes.

4. As the primary focus of the strategy is service transformation rather than environmental change, impacts are expected to be indirect. Individual initiatives will be subject to appropriate appraisal, including environmental considerations where relevant, to ensure alignment with the Council's wider climate change objectives.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Digital Strategy 2026
Appendix B – 1 Page Digital Strategy 2026

Digital Strategy

2026 – 2030

A people-centred approach to digital transformation

Foreword

Shropshire stands at a pivotal moment. As demand for services rise, financial pressures intensify, and public expectations continue to evolve, the council must transform how it works, how it delivers services, and how it uses data, technology and human expertise to make better decisions and better outcomes possible.

This Digital Strategy sets out a bold, practical and people-centred vision for the future of public services in Shropshire. Built on the principle of People-Powered, Technology-Driven, it recognises that digital transformation is not about technology alone, but about improving lives, strengthening communities and creating a council capable of sustainable, modern service delivery.

At its heart, this strategy is about:

- Designing services around people's real needs
- Removing complexity and improving access
- Strengthening digital skills across the workforce
- Modernising the legacy systems that hold us back
- Using automation, AI and data responsibly
- Building secure, resilient foundations
- Working in partnership across health, care, voluntary and community sectors
- Creating long-term financial sustainability

By 2030, Shropshire Council will be a more modern, connected, and confident organisation, providing efficient, straightforward, secure, and integrated services that leverage data and technology to prevent escalation and improve outcomes. Staff will be equipped with the necessary skills, tools, systems, and organisational culture needed to succeed. Communities will benefit from improved access, easier interactions, and a council that is more responsive and transparent.

This strategy is a commitment to change and a promise to our residents and staff that Shropshire will meet the challenges ahead, invest wisely, and build a digital future that works for everyone.

Introduction

Shropshire Council is at a critical point. Communities demand on services is increasing, the cost of delivering public services continues to rise, and expectations of digital access are evolving rapidly. At the same time, the pressures on local government finance require new approaches that are more efficient, more preventative, and more joined up across services.

Digital transformation is central to the council's long-term future. However, this strategy makes clear that digital transformation is not a technology project, it is a people centred transformation of how we work. It is about designing services that work better for residents, supporting staff to succeed, modernising our systems, using data ethically, and ensuring we meet the challenges of financial recovery with confidence and ambition. This includes recognising the risks technology can pose for vulnerable residents and ensuring services are safe by design.

This document sets out our digital vision for 2026–2030 and the priorities that will help us build a council that is future ready, sustainable and trusted.

Sam Williams
Service Director Enabling

David Baker
Head of Service – Automation and Technology

What Makes This Strategy Different

This is not a technology strategy. It is a delivery strategy for how Shropshire Council will reduce cost, manage demand and improve outcomes through disciplined use of digital, data and automation.

It is built on a simple principle, digital transformation must deliver measurable impact, not activity.

This approach moves the council from technology projects to sustained organisational change.

What makes this approach distinctive is:

- A single, integrated digital portfolio bringing together service redesign, technology, data, AI, and automation under one governance model
- A clear prioritisation framework ensuring investment is focused on statutory risk, financial sustainability, and demand reduction
- Benefits-led delivery, every initiative must define, track and evidence measurable value
- Design authority and standards ensuring consistency, reuse and reduced fragmentation
- A strong focus on prevention using data and insight to intervene earlier and reduce long-term demand
- Digital is embedded in service accountability, transformation is owned by services, not delivered to them

Our Vision:

People-Powered, Technology-Driven

Our vision is simple:

"Shropshire will be a place where people flourish. Supported by services that are straightforward, joined up, and tailored to their needs, powered by our people and enabled by secure, innovative technology."

The council will embrace a 'digital by choice, human when it matters' approach, delivering more efficient, secure, and predictive services that use data wisely and cost less to provide. This transformation will not only improve outcomes for residents and enhance staff experience but also achieve significant recurring savings by the financial year 2029/30.

People-Powered means:

Placing our residents, communities, and staff at the heart of every digital initiative. We are committed to co-designing services with those who use them, ensuring their voices shape the solutions we create. This involves engaging regularly with a diverse cross-section of our community, seeking feedback, and acting on it to continually improve our services.

We strive to break down barriers to digital inclusion, making sure that our services are accessible to everyone. Our approach values empathy and understanding, focusing on the actual lived experiences of residents rather than relying on assumptions. By empowering staff through ongoing training and support, we foster a culture where everyone can contribute ideas and feel ownership of the transformation journey.

Ultimately, our people-powered approach builds trust and strengthens relationships between the council and the communities we serve, ensuring that digital change benefits all and leaves no one behind.

Technology-Driven means:

Being technology-driven means more than simply adopting the latest digital tools. It is about embedding secure, modern, and interoperable platforms at the foundation of our services. This approach ensures that our systems can communicate seamlessly and adapt to changing needs over time. We are committed to scaling automation and artificial intelligence in a responsible way, streamlining routine tasks so staff can focus on work that requires human insight and empathy.

It is about providing our staff with the right tools to work efficiently and collaboratively, wherever they are based. By investing in resilient and sustainable digital infrastructure, we build the capacity to withstand future challenges and support long-term growth. This means prioritising the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of our data and systems, ensuring that both our staff and the communities we serve can have confidence in our digital services.

Together, these principles create a digital future that is both human and high-performing. This vision is not just about adopting new technology; it's about reshaping the council and our partners to be more efficient, inclusive, and forward-thinking. It's about creating a council that doesn't just respond to needs but anticipates them, breaking down barriers and building a society where every individual can thrive.

Why We Must Change

Our LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), Improvement Plan, and the administration's new direction for the council all indicate one clear conclusion, we cannot continue with our current approach.

Financial Pressures

Like all councils across the country, Shropshire is currently facing considerable financial challenges, with increasing demands on services and tightening budgets. We need to ensure we can remain resilient in the face of economic challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and continue to support our communities in the years ahead.

Rising Demand and Complexity

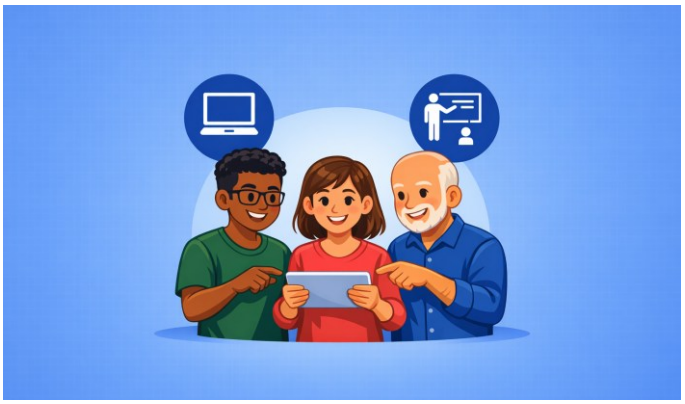
Shropshire's population is ageing, with many residents living in rural and geographically dispersed areas. This creates increasing pressure on health, care, and support services, which are already struggling to keep up with the growing and complex needs of the community. At the same time, resources are becoming ever more constrained, making it challenging to deliver high-quality, accessible services to everyone who needs them.

Expectations for Modern Services

Residents expect simple, accessible, digital-first interactions like those they experience in banking and retail.

Need for a Skilled, Confident Workforce

Staff need modern tools, training, and ways of working to deliver the council's priorities effectively.



The Cyber and Resilience Imperative

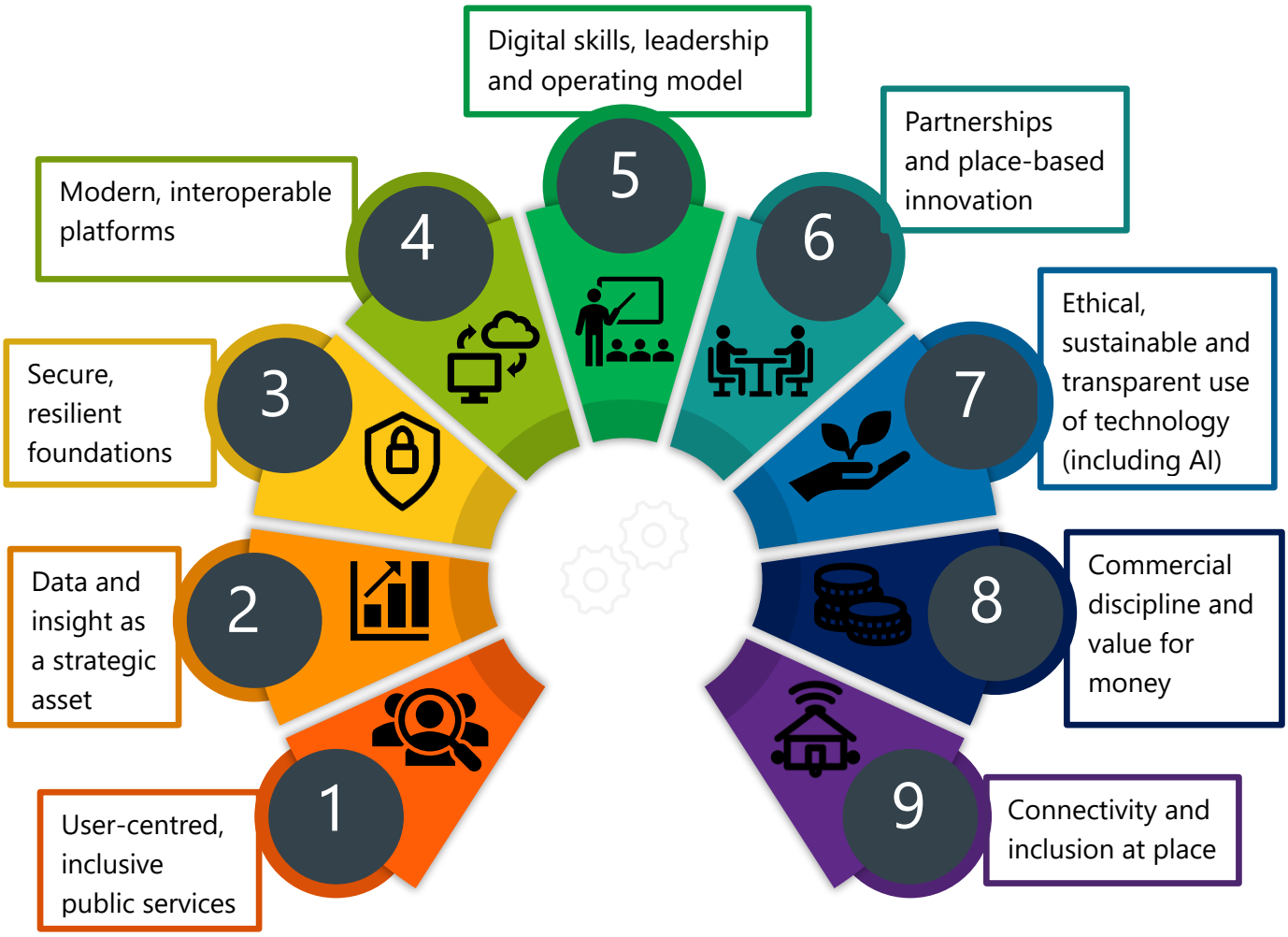
The United Kingdom is in a state of heightened security. Establishing a robust and secure digital infrastructure is essential to ensuring the confidentiality, integrity and availability of our data and systems.

Guiding Principles

Our approach follows 9 principles. These principles reflect national strategies, including the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO), the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT), and the Local Government Association (LGA). They Focus on outcomes, "Better services, lower costs, stronger security."

These principles will be actively enforced through standards, design assurance, and governance. All digital activity must align to them.

They are not optional and will be applied consistently across all services, programmes and technology decisions to ensure coherence, reuse and value for money.



1) User-centred, inclusive public services

Plain message: "We design services around real people, making them simple to use, accessible to all, and focused on resolving needs at the earliest opportunity. Services will be designed with safeguarding in mind, including risks of technology-facilitated abuse and coercive control."

Why it matters: Residents, staff and Members rely on council services at important and often complex moments. Poorly designed services increase demand, create avoidable contact and make it harder for people to get the support they need. Designing services around user needs improves access, reduces failure demand and supports better outcomes while lowering cost-to-serve.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns directly with the Government Design Principles, particularly "Start with user needs", "This is for everyone" and "Design with data", which establish that public services must be based on real user needs, inclusive by default and continuously improved through insight.

It also reflects the Technology Code of Practice requirement to "make things accessible and inclusive" and "define user needs", ensuring that technology and services are designed to meet the needs of all users from the outset.

At a sector level, this supports the Local Government Association's principle of "user-centric and inclusive services", which emphasises designing services around residents rather than organisational structures.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear national expectation that public services should be user-centred, inclusive and designed to deliver better outcomes, not just digital access.

User-centred design will be treated as a mandatory standard for all service transformation, not an optional design approach.

2) Data and insight as a strategic asset

Plain message: "We use data to inform decisions, anticipate need and act earlier, not just to report on what has already happened."

Why it matters: Many council services currently rely on reactive models, responding to demand at the point of escalation. Without effective use of data, opportunities for early intervention are missed, driving higher demand, increased cost and poorer outcomes. Using data to support proactive decision-making enables earlier action, more targeted services and improved value for money.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns with the Government Design Principle "Design with data", which emphasises using real-world data and continuous insight to inform service design and decision-making.

It also reflects the Technology Code of Practice requirement to "make better use of data" and "define user needs", ensuring that data is used actively to shape services and improve outcomes rather than simply for reporting.

At a sector level, this supports the Local Government Association's digitalisation framework, which identifies data and analytics as a core enabler for improving service delivery, decision-making and community outcomes.

This approach is consistent with national direction, including MHCLG's Local Digital agenda, which emphasises the need to unlock the value of data to support preventative, integrated and more efficient public services.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that councils move from retrospective reporting to proactive, insight-led decision-making.

Data will be treated as a strategic asset, with clear ownership, governance and accountability for how it is managed and used across the organisation.

3) Secure, resilient foundations

Plain message: "We build security, resilience and recovery into services and technology from the outset, protecting residents' data and ensuring services remain available when they are needed."

Why it matters: Council services rely heavily on digital systems to support critical activities, including care, safeguarding, finance and customer services. Without secure and resilient foundations, cyber incidents can disrupt services, delay support and impact vulnerable residents. Embedding security and resilience from the start reduces risk, protects public trust and ensures services can continue operating safely even in the face of disruption.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns with the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), which sets out a structured, outcome-based approach to managing cyber risk and protecting essential services. In particular, it reflects CAF Objectives A (Managing security risk), B (Protecting against cyber attack) and D (Minimising the impact of cyber incidents), ensuring that governance, protection, detection and recovery are embedded into service design and operation.

It also supports the UK Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022–2030, which positions cyber resilience as essential to maintaining public services and trust, and emphasises security being built into systems "by design" rather than applied retrospectively.

At a sector level, this aligns with the Local Government Association's principle of "cyber-resilient services", ensuring councils can withstand and recover from cyber threats while maintaining continuity of essential functions.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that cyber security and resilience are integral to service delivery, not optional technical controls.

Cyber resilience will be treated as a critical organisational capability, with clear accountability and assurance at all levels of the council.

4) Modern, interoperable platforms – 'fix the plumbing'

Plain message: "We replace fragmented, outdated systems with modern, interoperable platforms so services can work together seamlessly."

Why it matters: Many council services rely on disconnected systems that do not share data effectively, creating duplication, delays and fragmented user experiences. This increases cost, limits insight and makes it harder for services to work together. Without modern, interoperable platforms, digital transformation is constrained and services cannot operate efficiently or in a joined-up way. Addressing this improves service integration, reduces complexity and supports better outcomes for residents.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns directly with the Local Digital Declaration commitment to "fix our plumbing", reducing reliance on inflexible legacy systems and adopting modular, standards-based technology that enables integration and reuse.

It is also supported by the Technology Code of Practice, particularly the requirements to "make use of open standards", "integrate and adapt technology", and "share, reuse and collaborate", which promote interoperability, flexibility and reduced supplier lock-in.

This reflects national learning from the MHCLG Local Digital programme, which highlights that lack of interoperability between systems is a key barrier to effective data use, service integration and transformation across local government.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that councils move away from siloed systems towards open, connected platforms that enable integrated services and better use of data.

Interoperability and open standards will be treated as mandatory requirements for all system design and procurement.

5) Digital skills, leadership and operating model

Plain message: "We build digital, data and technology capability across the organisation, with leaders accountable for outcomes and services supported by multidisciplinary teams."

Why it matters: Digital transformation cannot be delivered by technology teams alone. Without strong leadership, clear accountability and the right capability across services, transformation becomes fragmented, slow and dependent on specialist teams. This limits impact, increases delivery risk and prevents the council from realising financial and service benefits. Building capability and accountability across the organisation ensures that transformation is owned by services, embedded in day-to-day delivery and sustainable over time.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns with the Local Digital Declaration commitment to "demonstrate digital leadership" and create the conditions for genuine organisational transformation, including embedding digital ways of working across the workforce.

It also reflects the Technology Code of Practice requirement to "define user needs" and "share, reuse and collaborate", supporting multidisciplinary teams and service-led ownership of delivery rather than siloed approaches.

At a national level, it supports the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) mission to build "digital skills at scale" and the expectation set out in the DSIT Blueprint for modern digital government that digital leadership should be embedded at executive level across organisations.

This is reinforced by the Local Government Association's digitalisation framework, which identifies leadership, organisational capability and collaboration as core enablers for successful digital transformation.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that digital capability, leadership and accountability must be embedded across the organisation, not contained within specialist teams.

Digital transformation will be delivered through services, not to services.

6) Partnerships and place-based innovation

Plain message: "We work with partners across health, care, voluntary and community sectors to deliver joined-up services, share insight and improve outcomes for residents."

Why it matters: Residents often interact with multiple organisations to meet their needs, particularly in areas such as health, care and community support. Without effective partnership working, services can become fragmented, duplicated and harder to access, leading to inefficiency, increased demand and poorer outcomes. Working in a coordinated, place-based way enables earlier intervention, more effective use of resources and better support for individuals and communities.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns with the Local Digital Declaration commitment to redesign services around user needs and "design safe, secure and useful ways of sharing information" to support vulnerable residents and improve outcomes through collaboration.

It also reflects the Technology Code of Practice requirement to "share, reuse and collaborate" and "integrate and adapt technology", supporting joined-up delivery across organisational boundaries.

At a national level, this supports the DSIT Blueprint for modern digital government, which emphasises the need for joined-up public services and shared digital and data infrastructure across organisations.

This is reinforced by the Local Government Association's digitalisation framework, which identifies partnership, collaboration and connectivity as essential enablers for improving services and delivering better outcomes at place level.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that councils work collaboratively across organisational boundaries, using shared data, platforms and approaches to deliver integrated, citizen-focused services.

Partnership working will be treated as a core delivery model, not an optional enhancement, with shared objectives, data and accountability across organisations.

7) Ethical, sustainable and transparent use of technology (including AI)

Plain message: "We use technology, data and AI responsibly, ensuring decisions are fair, transparent, secure and sustainable."

Why it matters: The use of technology, data and AI in public services carries significant responsibility. Without clear governance and oversight, there is a risk of unintended bias, reduced transparency and loss of public trust. Ensuring that technology is used ethically and sustainably protects residents, supports fair decision-making and maintains confidence in how services are delivered.

Link to policy:

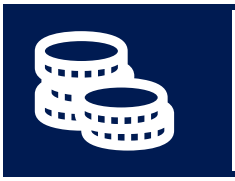
This principle aligns with the Technology Code of Practice, particularly the requirements to "make things secure", "make privacy integral" and "make your technology sustainable", ensuring that ethical, secure and environmentally responsible practices are built into all technology decisions.

It also reflects the Local Government Association's digitalisation framework principles of "ethical", "sustainable" and "transparent use of technology and data", supporting fair, accountable and responsible innovation.

At a national level, this supports the DSIT Blueprint for modern digital government, which emphasises harnessing AI for public good while ensuring transparency, accountability and responsible use.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that emerging technologies, including AI, are used in a way that is fair, explainable, proportionate and aligned to public sector values.

All use of AI and advanced technology will be subject to clear governance, oversight and accountability, with decisions explainable and open to scrutiny.



8) Commercial discipline and value for money

Plain message: "We manage technology and suppliers strategically, avoiding lock-in, reducing long-term cost and ensuring value for money for residents."

Why it matters: Technology and supplier decisions have long-term financial and operational consequences. Poor procurement, inflexible contracts and dependence on single suppliers can increase cost, limit flexibility and constrain the council's ability to transform services. Taking a disciplined, outcome-focused approach ensures that investment delivers value, reduces risk and supports sustainable service delivery.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns with the Digital, Data and Technology Playbook, which promotes outcome-based procurement, effective supplier management and reducing dependency on legacy systems through structured remediation and commercial strategy.

It also reflects the Technology Code of Practice requirements to "define your purchasing strategy", "be open and use open source", and "make use of open standards", ensuring systems are flexible, interoperable and not dependent on single suppliers.

At a sector level, this supports the Local Digital Declaration commitment to "fix our plumbing" and move away from expensive, inflexible technology towards modular, reusable solutions that provide better value for the public sector.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that councils take a strategic, whole-life view of technology investment, balancing cost, risk, flexibility and long-term value.

Technology investment will be managed on a whole-life basis, with clear accountability for value, risk and outcomes.

9) Connectivity and inclusion at place scale

Plain message: "We ensure residents and communities have access to reliable, affordable connectivity, enabling them to access services, participate fully in society and benefit from digital opportunities."

Why it matters: Access to reliable connectivity is now essential for accessing public services, education, employment and community support. Without it, residents' risk being excluded from digital services and opportunities, widening inequality and limiting economic growth. Improving connectivity supports inclusion, enables service transformation and ensures that digital change benefits all communities across Shropshire.

Link to policy:

This principle aligns with the Local Government Association's digitalisation framework, which identifies "connectivity" and "economic productivity and growth" as key enablers for thriving communities and digitally enabled places.

It also reflects national direction from the DSIT Blueprint for modern digital government, which emphasises the importance of strong digital infrastructure to support inclusive, connected public services and economic development.

This is reinforced by the Local Digital Declaration, which highlights the need to create the conditions for modern, connected public services through shared infrastructure, data and collaboration across organisations.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that connectivity is a foundational enabler of digital inclusion, service access and place-based economic growth.

Connectivity will be treated as a core enabler of service delivery, inclusion and economic growth, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach communities.

Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Connected, Preventative and User-Centred Public Services

Residents experience council services as simple, joined up and accessible, with support provided early to prevent escalation and reduce avoidable demand.

Shropshire Council delivers services that people rely on at important moments in their lives, including housing, care, safeguarding and community support. However, many services remain fragmented, process-heavy and reactive, requiring residents to navigate multiple systems, repeat information and engage at points of crisis rather than earlier intervention. Without transformation, this model will continue to drive avoidable demand, increase cost-to-serve and place additional pressure on already constrained services.

This priority shifts the council from fragmented, reactive service delivery to a model where services are designed end-to-end around user needs, supported by digital, data and automation to intervene earlier, reduce failure demand and improve outcomes. Digital is not an add on, it's how we redesign services to work differently.

What we will do

- Redesign priority services end-to-end based on user need, removing unnecessary complexity and duplication
- Create joined-up digital journeys that span organisational boundaries and reduce hand-offs between services
- Shift from reactive transactions to earlier intervention and prevention using digital access, triage and communication
- Reduce avoidable contact and failure demand through clearer processes, automation and improved service design
- Ensure consistent digital standards across services, aligned to Government Design Principles
- Provide clear, accessible and inclusive digital routes, while maintaining strong non-digital support where needed
- Ensure digital services are designed to be safe to use in contexts of domestic abuse, including appropriate controls for visibility, notifications, shared access and safeguarding escalation
- Use real-time data and insight to improve responsiveness, track service performance and continuously improve user experience

Priority 2: Secure, Standardised and Resilient Technology Foundations

A modern, secure and resilient technology foundation that reduces organisational risk, supports reliable public services and enables sustainable digital transformation.

The Council is increasingly dependent on digital systems to deliver critical services, including care, safeguarding, finance and customer operations. However, legacy systems, fragmented architecture and inconsistent standards increase complexity, cost and exposure to service disruption. Without a clear shift to modern, standardised platforms, this technical debt will continue to constrain transformation, increase cyber risk and undermine service reliability.

This priority establishes technology foundations as a core organisational capability, not a back-office concern. It ensures that security, resilience, interoperability and scalability are designed in from the outset, enabling the council to modernise services safely and at pace. Technology foundations will be treated as critical infrastructure for the council, requiring the same level of discipline, investment and assurance as any other essential service.

This priority is underpinned by the council's Cyber Strategy 2026–2030, ensuring that security and resilience are integral to all technology and digital change. The two strategies operate together, with Digital setting direction for transformation and Cyber ensuring that transformation is delivered safely, resiliently and with confidence.

What we will do

- Replace legacy systems with modern, secure and interoperable platforms, reducing complexity and technical debt
- Standardise core technology components including infrastructure, networks, identity and access management
- Embed secure-by-design principles across all technology, architecture and change activity
- Adopt consistent architectural standards to ensure systems integrate effectively and data flows across services
- Strengthen cyber resilience in line with the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), ensuring protection, detection and recovery capabilities are in place
- Build scalable, cloud-based platforms that support automation, AI and data-driven services
- Improve business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements, ensuring critical services can be restored quickly and safely

Priority 3: Data-Driven, Preventative and Insight-Led Services

Data is used as a strategic asset to anticipate need, support earlier intervention and improve outcomes, reducing long-term demand on services.

In key service areas such as health, care and safeguarding, early intervention has a significant impact on outcomes. However, much of the current operating model remains reactive, relying on service contact at the point of escalation rather than insight-led prevention. Without a step-change in how data is used, the council will continue to face rising demand, increasing cost and reduced capacity to intervene early and effectively.

This priority moves the organisation from retrospective reporting to real-time insight and forward-looking decision-making. Data will be used to identify risk earlier, target support more effectively and enable services to act before issues escalate. This is not about producing more data, it is about using data to fundamentally change how services operate. Prevention through data will be a primary driver of financial sustainability, enabling the council to reduce cost while improving outcomes.

This priority is underpinned by the council's Data Quality Strategy, which sets out a structured, organisation-wide approach to data governance, quality improvement and accountability. This includes defined ownership of critical data sets, a formal governance model, and a continuous improvement approach to data quality aligned to the Government Data Quality Framework. Together, these strategies ensure that data is trusted, consistent and usable across services, enabling predictive insight, integrated service delivery and evidence-led decision-making.

What we will do

- Establish clear data governance, ownership and accountability to ensure data is trusted, accessible and used consistently
- Develop a unified data architecture that enables integration, sharing and reuse of data across services
- Strengthen analytics capability to provide actionable insight, not just reporting
- Use predictive insight to identify and support individuals and communities earlier, particularly in high-demand services
- Enable secure, appropriate data sharing with partners across health, care and community services to support joined-up delivery
- Embed data into operational decision-making, performance management and service design
- Ensure transparency, ethical use and clear oversight of data, maintaining public trust and confidence

Priority 4: Digitally Confident Leadership, Staff and Ways of Working

Digital capability is embedded across the organisation, with leaders accountable for outcomes and staff supported to work effectively in a modern, data and technology enabled environment.

Delivering sustainable, high-quality services depends on more than technology. It requires confident leadership, clear accountability and a workforce equipped to operate in increasingly digital, data-driven and automated service models. Without this shift, digital transformation will remain fragmented, dependent on specialist teams and limited in its ability to deliver meaningful service improvement or financial sustainability.

This priority ensures digital as a core organisational capability. Leaders will be accountable for transformation within their services, supported by multidisciplinary teams and modern ways of working. Staff will be enabled to use digital tools, data and automation as part of everyday practice, not as additional or optional activity.

Staff success is central to digital success. Digital transformation will be delivered through services, not to services.

What we will do

- Establish clear accountability for digital outcomes within services, with leaders responsible for adoption, performance and benefits
- Develop digital, data and technology capability across the workforce, aligned to role and responsibility
- Embed multidisciplinary, cross-functional teams combining service, digital, data and technology expertise
- Support leaders to understand and actively lead digital transformation, including data, technology and automation opportunities
- Provide modern tools, platforms and working environments that enable efficient, flexible and collaborative working
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement, experimentation and learning, supporting safe innovation and evidence-led change
- Ensure digital and data skills development is targeted, practical and aligned to service outcomes rather than generic training

Priority 5: Responsible, Scalable Innovation, AI and Automation

Automation and artificial intelligence are used at scale to improve service efficiency, reduce cost-to-serve and support better, more consistent decision-making.

Increasing demand, financial pressure and workforce constraints mean traditional approaches to service delivery are no longer sufficient. Automation and AI offer significant opportunities to improve productivity, reduce manual effort and enhance service quality. However, without a structured and disciplined approach, innovation risks becoming fragmented, low-impact and poorly governed.

This priority establishes automation and AI as core organisational capabilities, focused on delivering measurable outcomes rather than isolated pilots. Innovation will be targeted at high-impact use cases, aligned to service priorities and delivered in a controlled, ethical and transparent way. Innovation will be treated as a disciplined capability, not an experimental activity. AI and automation will be used to augment staff capability, not replace professional judgement. Automation and AI will be critical to maintaining sustainable services in the context of rising demand and constrained workforce capacity.

Where appropriate, Shropshire Council will contribute learning and best practice to the wider local government sector, helping to shape how AI and automation are applied responsibly in public services.

What we will do

- Deploy automation at scale to reduce manual, repetitive tasks, improving efficiency, consistency and service speed
- Apply AI to support decision-making, triage and demand management, particularly in high-volume and high-pressure services
- Prioritise use cases that deliver measurable impact, including cost reduction, demand reduction and improved service outcomes
- Move from isolated pilots to reusable, scalable components that can be applied across multiple services
- Establish clear governance, oversight and ethical frameworks for the use of AI and automation, ensuring transparency and accountability
- Embed innovation within the digital portfolio, ensuring it is prioritised, governed and aligned to organisational objectives
- Pilot and test new approaches safely, with clear evaluation criteria before wider adoption

Priority 6: Digital Inclusion, Equity and Fair Access

All residents can access, understand and benefit from digital services, ensuring that digital transformation reduces inequality rather than reinforcing it.

Shropshire Council serves diverse communities, including rural populations, older residents and individuals with varying levels of digital access and confidence. As services become more digital, there is a risk that some residents may be excluded or disadvantaged if appropriate support is not in place.

Without a structured and targeted approach to digital inclusion, the council risks widening inequality, reducing access to essential services and undermining the benefits of digital transformation.

This priority ensures that inclusion is designed into services from the outset. Digital access, confidence and fairness will be addressed alongside service redesign, ensuring that all residents can engage with services in ways that meet their needs. Digital inclusion will be treated as a core requirement of service design, not a separate initiative.

What we will do

- Ensure services are designed to be accessible, inclusive and easy to use, aligned to recognised accessibility standards
- Provide targeted digital support for residents who need it, including access to assistance, training and community-based support
- Maintain strong non-digital routes for services where digital access is not appropriate
- Use data and insight to identify communities at risk of exclusion and target support effectively
- Work with partners, including libraries, schools and voluntary organisations, to extend reach and impact
- Support improvements in connectivity and access across the county, particularly in rural areas
- Ensure that the use of digital tools, data and AI is fair, transparent and does not disadvantage any group

Delivery Plan, Governance, and Benefits Realisation

How we will deliver

We will operate a single, council-wide Digital Portfolio, structured around services rather than systems. This integrates service redesign, infrastructure, applications, integration, development, data, cyber and automation into a coherent delivery model.

Each service area will have clear ownership of outcomes, supported by multidisciplinary teams combining service, digital, data and technology skills. Delivery will be iterative, evidence-led and focused on measurable improvements in outcomes, cost and experience.

Operating model

Improvement Board - The Improvement Board is the Council's top-level, external scrutiny and assurance body for improvement. It checks progress, challenges the organisation, ensures accountability, and provides confidence to Members, residents, partners, and Government that the Council's Improvement Plan is being delivered with urgency, rigour, and transparency.

Leadership Board - The Leadership Board is the senior-most officer leadership group in Shropshire Council. It sets the organisation's direction, makes or shapes key decisions, oversees major risks and programmes, and ensures all services are aligned to the Council's long-term plan

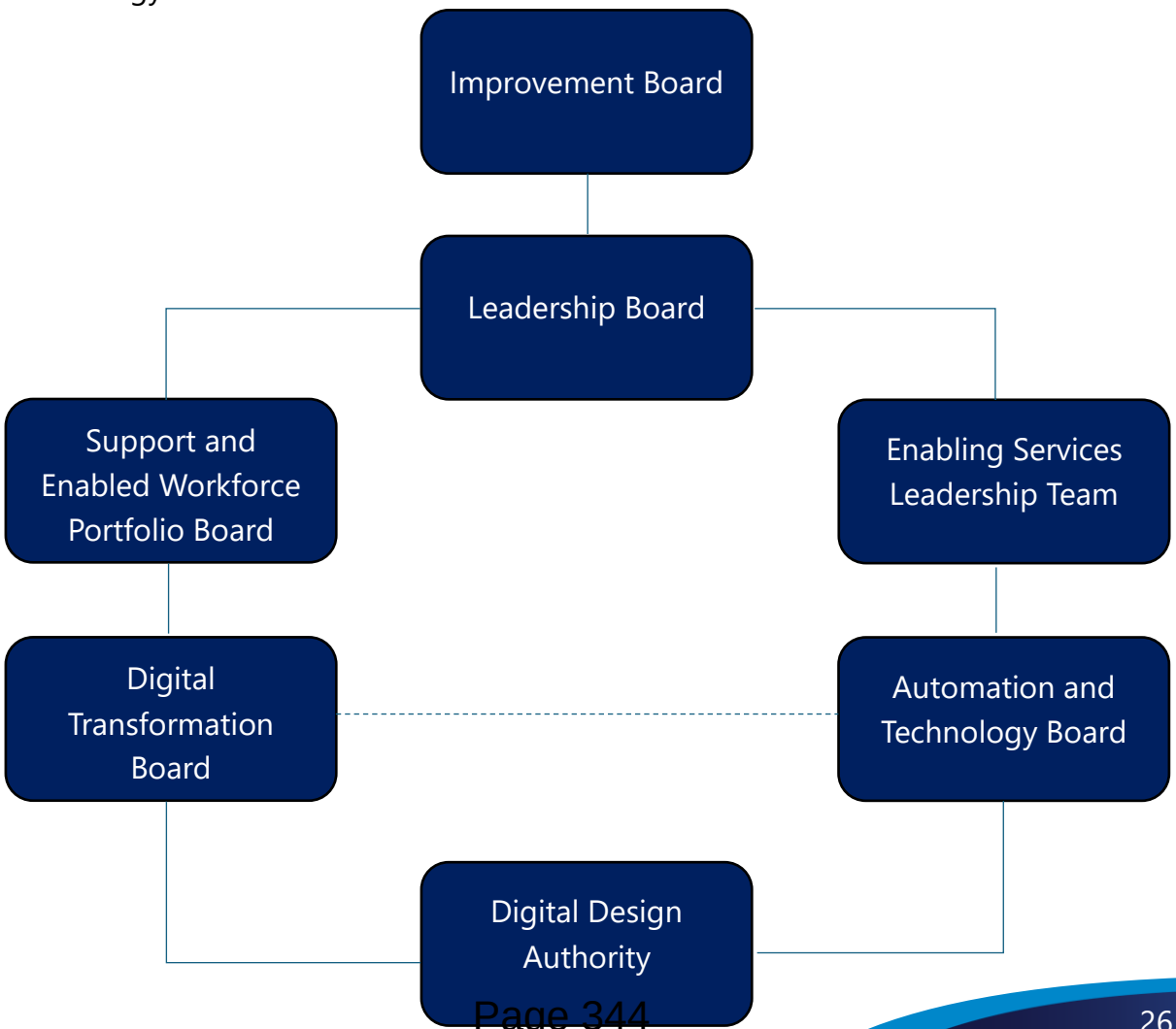
Support and Enabled Workforce Portfolio Board – Govern's the execution, risk and dependencies of all programmes and projects within its specific portfolio, ensuring effective governance, risk resolution, and benefit realisation at the executive level. The board will meet every 4 weeks.

Digital Transformation Board (DTB) – The DTB provides strategic oversight, governance, and assurance for all digital transformation activities within the council. The DTB will meet monthly, with additional meetings as required.

Digital Design Authority (DDA) - The DDA is responsible for the technical and architectural oversight of all digital programmes and projects. Its purpose is to own and maintain the overarching programme design and design principles. Evaluate and make decisions on technical and digital design matters. Ensure all design activities align with strategic objectives, comply with standards, and deliver quality and consistency. Provide assurance that design decisions support operational service delivery and council priorities. The DDA will meet weekly, or as required based on the volume and urgency of design decisions.

Enabling Services Leadership Team (ESLT) – The Enabling Services Leadership Team (ESLT) is the senior leadership group for Enabling Services within Shropshire Council. It is chaired by the Service Director – Enabling Services and brings together the Heads of Service and senior managers from all Enabling Services functions to coordinate delivery, provide updates, share risks and issues, and align activity with the Council's strategic direction.

Automation and Technology Board - The Automation and Technology Board is the central leadership and governance forum for all ICT functions within Shropshire Council. It coordinates service performance, programmes, digital transformation, risks, staffing, and technology decisions across the whole Automation and Technology service.



RACI (Summary)

Responsible	Service Director Enabling, Head of Service – Automation & Technology, Business Process Owners.
Accountable	Chief Executive (Portfolio outcomes), s151 Officer (financial benefits).
Consulted	Service Directors, Unions, Information Governance, Procurement.
Informed	Members, staff, partners, residents.

Prioritisation approach

We will rank initiatives using a transparent scoring model across six dimensions, which will be reviewed by the boards each quarter:

- Statutory / legal risk
- Financial impact
- Demand reduction potential
- Deliverability (team capacity, complexity, dependencies)
- Dependency risk (does it unblock other initiatives)
- Political and reputational sensitivity

Benefits realisation

Our benefits realisation approach ensures every digital investment delivers measurable value by agreeing expected financial and non-financial benefits up-front in individual business cases. All progress will be tracked through standardised benefits profiles, with the delivery and financials validated and reviewed via the operating model. Only verified benefits will be recorded giving clear, transparent sight of savings, service improvements, and productivity gains. This ensures digital investment is controlled, measurable and demonstrably delivering financial and service outcomes.

How We Will Measure Success

We will track delivery of this strategy against a small, clear set of outcome measures reported regularly to leadership and Members:

- Reduction in cost-to-serve across key services
- Reduction in avoidable demand through earlier intervention
- Increased digital uptake across priority services
- Reduction in service processing times and backlogs
- Improved user satisfaction (residents and staff)
- Reduction in legacy systems and technology risk
- Increased automation of routine transactional activity
- Improved cyber maturity (CAF) and resilience metrics

Each programme will define its contribution to these outcomes, with benefits baselined and tracked through the portfolio.

Change & adoption

Successful digital transformation depends on people, not just technology. To ensure new systems, processes and ways of working are fully embedded, we will take a focused and practical approach to change and adoption across all programmes. This means preparing services for change early, engaging staff and Members in a clear and timely way and providing the right support so teams can confidently adopt new tools and ways of working. Adoption will be monitored through real usage, feedback and measurable behavioural change, ensuring that improvements become part of everyday practice and that the benefits of digital investment are fully realised across the organisation.

Information Governance Framework

A key foundation of our digital transformation is the Shropshire Information Governance Framework, which ensures that all data is managed securely, ethically, and in accordance with statutory and local requirements. This framework underpins our initiatives, driving transparent practices and safeguarding confidential information across every system and service. By following the principles and protocols set out in the Shropshire framework, we sustain trust among residents, staff, partners, and stakeholders, while guaranteeing that each digital investment aligns with both regulatory standards and the organisational values of Shropshire.

Moving Forward

Shropshire Council will actively share learning and good practice with the wider local government sector, contributing to collective improvement and raising standards across the sector.

In the next 12 months we will:

- Establish the full operating model and governance with clear accountability and transparency
- Deliver a modern, user-centred website and intranet improving access and staff productivity
- Scale automation to reduce cost-to-serve and improve service responsiveness.
- Replace the legacy contact centre platform to enable consistent, multi-channel customer experience
- Baseline and improve our cyber maturity using the CAF framework
- Continue to replace outdated systems with modern, connected platforms so services work together, embracing Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Integration.

These actions will prioritise measurable improvements in service experience, cost and resilience. Success will be measured not only in savings but in better services and better outcomes for residents, staff and communities.

This is a strategy of ambition, responsibility and long-term transformation. It centres on people, strengthened by technology, and is driven by a commitment to deliver a more efficient, sustainable, inclusive and resilient council for the people of Shropshire.

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DIGITAL STRATEGY 2026–2030

People-Powered. Technology-Driven.

Creating better lives in Shropshire through simple, joined-up, secure and innovative digital services.

WHY CHANGE?

- Rising demand and financial pressure
- Increasing service complexity
- Expectations for simple digital services
- Workforce needs modern tools
- Growing cyber risk and legacy systems

THE OUTCOME

By 2030 we will deliver:

- Better services for everyone
- Lower cost to serve
- Reduced demand through prevention
- Stronger security and resilience

OUR APPROACH

Not a technology strategy, a delivery strategy

- Focus on measurable outcomes, not activity
- Transformation owned by services
- Single integrated digital portfolio

OUR 6 PRIORITIES

1 CONNECTED, PREVENTATIVE SERVICES

- Redesign services end-to-end around people's needs
- Shift from reactive to early intervention
- Reduce failure demand and simplify access

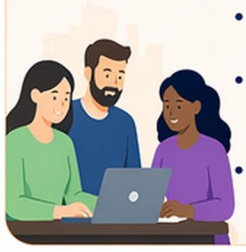
2 SECURE, STANDARDISED FOUNDATIONS

- Replace legacy systems
- Embed secure-by-design and resilience
- Build scalable, interoperable platforms

3 DATA-DRIVEN ORGANISATION

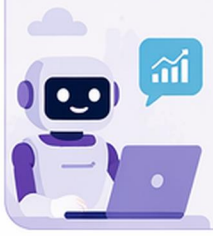
- Treat data as a strategic asset
- Move from reporting to real-time insight and prediction
- Support earlier intervention and better decisions

4 DIGITALLY CONFIDENT WORKFORCE



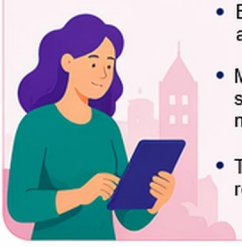
- Leaders accountable for outcomes
- Build digital, data and automation capability
- Services lead transformation

5 AI, AUTOMATION & INNOVATION AT SCALE



- Automate routine activity
- Use AI to improve decision-making and efficiency
- Focus on high-impact, measurable outcomes

6 DIGITAL INCLUSION & FAIR ACCESS



- Ensure services are accessible to all
- Maintain human support where needed
- Target support to reduce inequality

HOW WE DELIVER

- One integrated digital portfolio
- Clear governance (Boards + Design Authority)
- Benefits-led delivery
- Standardised design and architecture

Putting people at the heart of everything

HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

- ↑ Automation
- ↑ Cyber maturity
- ↑ Digital uptake
- ↑ User Satisfaction
- ↓ Cost to serve
- ↓ Technology risk
- ↓ Avoidable demand

We are redesigning council services around people, using data, technology and automation to reduce demand, lower cost and improve outcomes, securely and sustainably

We care | We innovate | We collaborate | We are trusted

Shropshire Council

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Committee

Cabinet
8th July 2026

Public

Town Centre Public Space Protection Order

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Heather Kidd
Lead Director:	Rachel Robinson Executive Director Public Health
Service Area:	Service Area
Report Author	Lisa Gardner, Temporary Business Manager
Officer contact details	01743 250019, Lisa.gardner@shropshire.gov.uk
Electoral Divisions Affected	Alex Wagner
Key Decision?	Non Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	Yes - 27th May 2026
Report considered by	

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is provide Cabinet with a comprehensive overview of the key findings and information relevant for their consideration to extend the Public Space Protection Order in Shrewsbury Town Centre for a further three years. This is in line with statutory requirements laid out in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to

2.1 Agree that the Council extend the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (No.1) 2017, as set out in **Appendix A** (the Order), with an effective commencement date of August 1st 2026.

2.2 Delegates authority to the Director Legal & Governance (MO) for holding responsibility for functions relevant to the Order (as extended).

2.3 Delegate authority to the Director Legal & Governance (MO) to publish and cause to be erected notices in accordance with Regulations made under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

3. Background

3.1 The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced Public Space Protection Orders, which were intended to provide the means of preventing individuals or groups committing anti-social behaviour in a public space. Section 59 of the Act sets out the test which must be satisfied before a local authority makes an Order… "where the behaviour is having, or likely to have, a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality; be persistent or continuing in nature; and be unreasonable".

3.2 The power to make an Order rests with the local authority in consultation with the police and other relevant bodies who may be affected. The local authority can make an order in respect to any public space to deal with particular nuisance behaviour that is detrimental to the local community's quality of life, by imposing conditions on the use of the area which apply to everyone. This is to help ensure that the law-abiding majority can use and enjoy public spaces, safe from anti-social behaviour.

3.3 An Order can be in place for a maximum period of three years after which time the local authority must consider whether to extend the Order.

3.4 A challenge to the validity of the Order or aspects of it can be lodged by anyone who lives in, or regularly works in or visits the area in the High Court within six weeks of issue. Further challenge can only be made when an Order is varied by the local authority. Given there is no proposal to amend/vary the current Order, there will be no opportunity for challenge to the validity of the Order.

3.5 An order may be applied wherever there is material evidence of anti-social behaviour, for example, in reports to the police, local authorities or partner agencies.

3.6 The restrictions and requirements included in an order may be comprehensive or targeted on specific behaviours by particular groups and/or at specified times.

3.7 Orders can be enforced by a police officer, a police community support officer, authorised council officers and employees of other delegated organisations. In Shrewsbury town centre the Town Rangers have been given this authority and they have informed the consultation that they feel the Order supports them significantly in managing low level anti-social behaviour within the town centre.

3.8 A breach of the Order can be dealt with through the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notice of up to £100, or a Level 3 fine (max £1,000) on prosecution. When the Order was first introduced the level of FPN was set at £75. There are no changes proposed to the current level of FPN at this time.

3.9 In establishing an Order, appropriate signage must be displayed in accordance with the requirements of the Act on entry points to the public area and within the said area.

3.10 The area covered by the Order, known as the 'restricted area', is identified within the Order by a map, which covers the town centre area within the river loop and a part of Mountfields, which includes Frankwell car park and the adjacent playing fields. There is no proposed change to the restricted area.

4. Summary of Main Proposals –

4.1 This report has been prepared in line with Shropshire's Corporate Plan. It specifically relates to the Council's ambition for people to "live in safe, inclusive places with home that meet their needs" and the Council's statutory responsibilities through Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), which were established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

4.2 The Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (No.1) 2017 ('the Order') was originally approved by Cabinet on 21st June 2017 with an effective commencement date of 1st August.

4.3 There was further Cabinet approval for renewal (without variation) on 6th July 2020, and this took effect from 1st August 2020.

4.4 In July 2023 Cabinet approved amendments to the existing Order. These amendments were to include three additional powers to the order. This is the Order that is in place today.

4.5 The current Order allows authorised officers, which includes a Police Constable, Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), an authorised officer of Shropshire Council or any person authorised by Shropshire Council to tackle specific behaviours that are causing nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress. The prohibited activities are:

a) No person shall urinate or defecate in a public area not being a facility intended for such use

b) No person shall, for any duration of time, leave unattended in a public area any personal effects or belongings or any other material or paraphernalia including anything that may be considered discarded or waste material.

c) No person shall refuse to stop drinking alcohol or hand over any containers (sealed or unsealed) which are believed to contain alcohol, when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or is likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

d) No person shall refuse to stop drinking alcohol or hand over any containers (sealed or unsealed) which are believed to contain alcohol, when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or is likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

e) No person shall refuse to leave a public toilet when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

f) No person shall refuse to stop using a device intended to amplify sound when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided the officer has reason to believe that the person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

g) No person shall refuse to disperse from a public area and not to return to that public area for 48 hours when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

4.6 Prior to the original Order and the subsequent variation being made in 2020 there was significant consultation regarding the need for the PSPO. The context as to why the prohibitions have been included is provided below.

4.7 The first prohibition relates to urinating and defecating in the public area. Despite public belief prior to the introduction of the Order, neither would amount to a criminal offence and the police in dealing with this behaviour had to rely on gathering evidence to consider an indirect offence, e.g. ‘exposure’, which would often prove too difficult to pursue.

4.8 The second prohibition bans the leaving of personal belongings without reasonable excuse. Inadvertently or accidentally leaving behind personal items would not breach the Order as this could be considered a reasonable excuse. As a result, this prohibition is clearly aimed at those individuals intentionally leaving their possessions in the public area. Leaving behind personal belongings, given the national security risk, is simply unacceptable. Further, there is strong evidence of discarded drug paraphernalia in the town centre which provides an indication as to the possible or likely contents of the possessions being left behind potentially exposing members of the public in particular children to unnecessary risk.

4.9 The third prohibition has an impact on behaviours linked to the consumption of alcohol in the public area. Whilst drinking is currently permitted and will remain so, the prohibition allows intervention by an authorised officer where a person’s behaviour as a result of continued alcohol consumption is causing nuisance, alarm, harassment or

distress to any other person or public disorder. Only if that person fails to stop drinking and/or hand over the alcohol does a criminal breach occur.

4.10 The fourth prohibition provides authorised officers with the ability to engage with individuals who are sitting or lying on any footpath or pedestrian area or in any fire escape, stairway or other entrance or exit to any premises and are causing nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person or public disorder to move from that area. Only where a person fails to respond positively to an officer's request to move would a criminal breach occur. It is aimed at helping to reduce aggressive begging and the menacing of passing public. It also helps town centre businesses gain unimpeded access to their premises, which was a concern that had been raised in a number of responses received during a previous consultation from town centre businesses.

4.11 The fifth prohibition provides authorised officers with the ability to engage and require individuals, whilst within a public toilet and where they are considered to be causing nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person or public disorder, to leave the toilet. Reports of anti-social behaviour by individuals using public toilets including drug related activity were a significant concern prior to this prohibition being added to the Order.

4.12 The sixth prohibition provides authorised officers with the ability to require a person to stop using a device intended to amplify sound where that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress. This is not an outright ban on sound amplification, but it does require a more considered use of such a device as well as greater concerns for those within the vicinity.

4.13 The Evaluation Report that accompanies this report identifies that the Order has had a strong positive impact and there has been major reductions across incidents such as aggressive begging, drug misuse and damage in the last three year. Enforcement activity remains low suggesting that the Order is acting as a deterrent rather than being relied on heavily in terms of formal enforcement action.

4.14 A public consultation has been undertaken on the renewal of the current Order and letters of support from local stakeholders have been received. These indicate significant endorsement for the extension of the Town Centre Public Space Protection Order as it currently stands without any need for changes to the order as outlined in section 2.5.

5. Alternative Options

5.1 A meeting with key stakeholders was held where the option of not extending the Order was discussed. Those present, which included West Mercia Police, Environment Health, Licencing and Shrewsbury Town Council there was an overwhelming consensus that the Order continues to provide police and authorised officers with a tool to tackle low level anti-social behaviour. The removal of the PSPO would have a detrimental effect on the wider community.

6. Key risks and Opportunities

6.1 The Order was introduced to help improve the commercial nature of Shrewsbury town centre (including the evening and night-time economy and visitor experience), whilst ensuring that public spaces are enjoyed by the majority and not spoiled by the actions of the minority, and this remains at the heart of the purpose of the Order.

6.2 When the Order was made in 2017 there was no legal challenge made over it's validity. Under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, where a Public Space Protection Order is introduced or where a variation is made, a legal challenge over the validity of such an order is possible for a period of up to six weeks. No variations are requested and this order has been in place since 2017 and therefore it is not being introduced.

6.3 In line with the requirements of the Act, a public consultation seeking views from statutory consultees and the public on the extension has been undertaken.

6.4 West Mercia Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Shrewsbury Town Council, the Residents Association, Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID) and other community representatives and landowners were notified of the consultation and encouraged to respond.

6.5 Responses to the consultation have been collated and can be found at **Appendix B.**

6.6 There have been some responses that could not be captured within Appendix B and have been provided separately as follows:

- Response from Town Centre Residents Association **Appendix C**
- Response from Pubwatch **Appendix D**
- Response from Shrewsbury BID **Appendix E**
- Response from Prosecure **Appendix F**
- Response from West Mercia Police **Appendix G**

6.7 The Order has been in operation since 2017 and, in accordance with the Council's Better Regulation and Enforcement Policy, it has primarily been used to address low level anti-social behaviour with the primary aim being to modify or change the behaviour of individuals using the lowest level of enforcement intervention. The wording of the Order has been designed to enable authorised officers to intervene in circumstances in an attempt to de-escalate situations and resolve matters, as opposed to criminalising individuals; this remains the case.

6.8 Team Shrewsbury partners collect and collate data on behaviours/incidents/reports in Shrewsbury Town Centre; there are currently 17 categories to which these are assigned. This data is regularly shared and reviewed within Team Shrewsbury Meetings. In addition, West Mercia Polices OIS and Hot Spot data contributes to the understanding of activity within the Town Centre. What has been demonstrated in the last three years, which can be seen in the full Evaluation Report (**Appendix H)** is that there is a continuing need for the existing Public Space Protection Order prohibitions. Whilst all incident types have continued to generate reports the Order has contributed

to a significant and sustained reduction in anti-social behaviour in the town centre with a major decrease in high harm behaviours such as aggressive begging.

7. Council Priorities

7.1 In line with the Council's Corporate Plan the Town Centre Public Space Protection Order provides both police and authorised officers with a tool to tackle low level anti-social behaviour. This means that the local community feels safer and there is a sense of safety and security in the area for those who live, visit and work there.

7.2 7.2 The Evaluation Report identified that whilst all incident types have continued to generate reports the Order has contributed to a significant and sustained reduction in anti-social behaviour in the town centre with a major decrease in high harm behaviours such as aggressive begging.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 An identified breach of the Order is a criminal offence and a person guilty of an offence is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding Level 3 (maximum £1,000). However, the legislation enables such offences to be dealt with, where appropriate, by way of a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN), which, if paid, would discharge an individual's liability to conviction for the offence. The amount of the FPN was set by Cabinet at £75, reduced to £50 if paid within 10 days. It should be noted that The Crime and Policing Act 2026 Section 4 (3) amends the maximum level with the value of £500, however statutory guidance is to be issued by the Secretary of State prior to this coming into force. We will review the FPN value once the statutory guidance has been issued.

8.2 In the last three years there have been 9 Written Warnings issued. 7 Fixed Penalty Notices, 3 of which have been paid and 4 prosecutions pursued for 4 unpaid Fixed Penalty Notices. Any costs, including officer time, associated with investigating breaches and bringing legal proceedings in the criminal courts have been met from within the Business and Consumer Protection Service operational budget. This adversely impacts the delivery of Trading Standards related mandatory statutory duties as the officers who take on these cases are based in the Trading Standards Team. Any costs awarded in court proceedings invariably do not cover the Council's expenditure and even when awarded are rarely received due to the personal circumstances of the individuals who are facing prosecution.

8.3 It has also been recognised that enforcement of the Order can be difficult, with financial and resource pressures on Shropshire Council, West Mercia Police and other partners (Town Rangers are authorised Officers), there is currently no agreement to extend these powers to any particular persons. The inclusion of this power will be utilised when appropriate and when the Council is in a position to provide sufficient assurance that it can resource any anticipated outcomes from an increase in the number of enforcement actions. This will include back-office administrative support, additional officer time to review criminal reports and accompanying evidence,

administering appropriate sanctions, undertaking investigations for cases requiring formal action and finally costs associated with bringing criminal legal proceedings.

9. Legal and HR implications

9.1 A challenge to the validity of the Order or aspects of it can be lodged by anyone who lives in, or regularly works in or visits the area in the High Court within six weeks of issue. Further challenge can only be made when an Order is varied by the local authority. Given there is no proposal to amend/vary the current Order, there will be no opportunity for challenge to the validity of the Order. Other legal implications are explained within the body of the report.

10. Electoral Division Implications

10.1 Cllr Wagner has been consulted with in regard to the extension of the Town Centre PSPO and was made aware of the public consultation.

11. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

11.1 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been undertaken in relation to the extension, as it was in relation to the initial implementation of the Order. Further details are contained within the section below The ESHIA can be read **Appendix I.**

11.2 Prohibitions within the Order such as no leaving personal belongings, no urinating and defecating have a positive impact on the health of those within the community as a whole, including children.

12 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 When the Order was first proposed an Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment was undertaken to assess the likely impact for individuals within any of the nine protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The ESIIA also weighed the impact of the Order in regard to social inclusion considering the needs of those who are vulnerable, including rough sleepers. The original ESIIA was updated in 2023 when there was an extension and variations made to the Order. Both indicated that the overall equality impact would be low positive across groupings.

12.2 An updated Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been carried out, which reflects the feedback from the public consultation and which draws upon the latest data. The ESHIA may be found at **Appendix I.** It is anticipated that the impact for the community and for and across Protected Characteristic groupings and local groupings, as a result of the proposed extension to the Order will remain 'low positive' as it is remaining the same.

12.3 There is potential to move to medium positive for the groupings of Age, Disability, Carers, and Social Inclusion. This is in relation to those who are vulnerable or consider themselves vulnerable when out in the public realm. By way of example, consultation feedback was given by a parent in their caring role with an adult son who has learning disabilities, in regard to intimidation experienced. Further actions through the PSPO could minimise this for them and for other individuals, including those who may have neurodivergent conditions or those with caring responsibilities such as for carers of young children. The feedback within the consultation report also includes concerns expressed around safe access to and usage of Shrewsbury Library due to anti-social and intimidating behaviour of persons outside the Library. To not renew the PSPO could cause such issues to be exacerbated and lead to a decline in usage of the library, particularly by people who are either vulnerable, such as children and young people, or who consider themselves to be vulnerable. Further targeted action in this location through the PSPO if renewed, could minimise this current negative societal and cultural impact.

12.4 The likely positive impact of a renewal of the PSPO for those who are vulnerable by virtue of their circumstances, for example rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness, may also rise to medium positive. Here, the groupings of particular regard are Social Inclusion, and Veterans and Serving Members of the Armed Forces and their families, for whom we are required to show 'due regard' under the Armed Forces Act 2021.The proposal to extend the Order is anticipated to have a positive direct impact on health, mental health and physical wellbeing of those who are currently sleeping rough, when they are assisted to find accommodation. It is also anticipated to have a positive impact on social, economic and environmental living conditions that would indirectly affect health, given that it relates to the built and green environment of Shrewsbury town centre. There is likely to be a cleaner and safer street scene, which brings broader health benefits for all who live, work and visit Shrewsbury.

12.5 There may be opportunities for individuals to improve their own health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to reducing drug use and alcohol consumption; however, to do so, individuals are likely to require support from other health and social care services, including housing services, mental health services and also from the Shropshire Recovery Partnership

13 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1 It is acknowledged that the Order is expected to have a “no effect” outcome on the climate change impacts listed below:

- energy and fuel consumption (buildings and/or travel)
- renewable energy generation;
- carbon offsetting or mitigation; and
- climate change adaptation.

14 Background Papers

Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
Shropshire’s Corporate Plan

15 Appendices

Appendix A - Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (No.1) 2007

Appendix B - Consultation responses

Appendix C – Response from Town Centre Residents Association (Email Addresses redacted)

Appendix D – Response from Pubwatch

Appendix E – Response from Shrewsbury BID

Appendix F – Response from Prosecure

Appendix G –Response from West Mercia Police

Appendix H – Evaluation Report

Appendix I – Updated ESIIA

Shropshire Council

Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

Part 4 Section 59

SHREWSBURY TOWN CENTRE
PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (No 1) 2017

Shropshire Council in exercise of its powers under section 59 Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (The Act) being satisfied that the conditions set out in Section 59 of the Act have been met, makes the following Order:

1. The order applies to the public areas shown within the lined area on the plan Appendix 1 attached to this order (the Restricted Area). For the purpose of this order, public area shall include the doorway or alcove of any premises or any other outdoor location to which the public would normally have free access but does not include any area covered by a premises license issued under the Licensing Act 2003.

2. An authorised officer includes a Police Constable, Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), an authorised officer of Shropshire Council or any person authorised by Shropshire Council.

3. PROHIBITIONS

    a) No person shall urinate or defecate in a public area not being a facility intended for such use.

    b) No person shall, for any duration of time, leave unattended in a public area any personal effects or belongings or any other material or paraphernalia including anything that may be considered discarded or waste material.

    c) No person shall refuse to stop drinking alcohol or hand over any containers (sealed or unsealed) which are believed to contain alcohol, when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or is likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

    d) No person, who is sitting or lying on any footpath or pedestrian area or in any fire escape, stairway or other entrance or exit to any premises within the protected area, shall refuse to move when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

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e) No person shall refuse to leave a public toilet when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

f) No person shall refuse to stop using a device intended to amplify sound when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

g) No person shall refuse to disperse from a public area and not to return to that public area for 48 hours when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

4. Any person who without reasonable excuse fails to comply with the requirements of the Order commits an offence and shall be liable, on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

5. This order shall come into force on 1st August 2023 and shall remain in force, unless renewed, for a period of not more than three years or until such time as the Order is no longer considered necessary, whichever is the sooner

Dated

Signed

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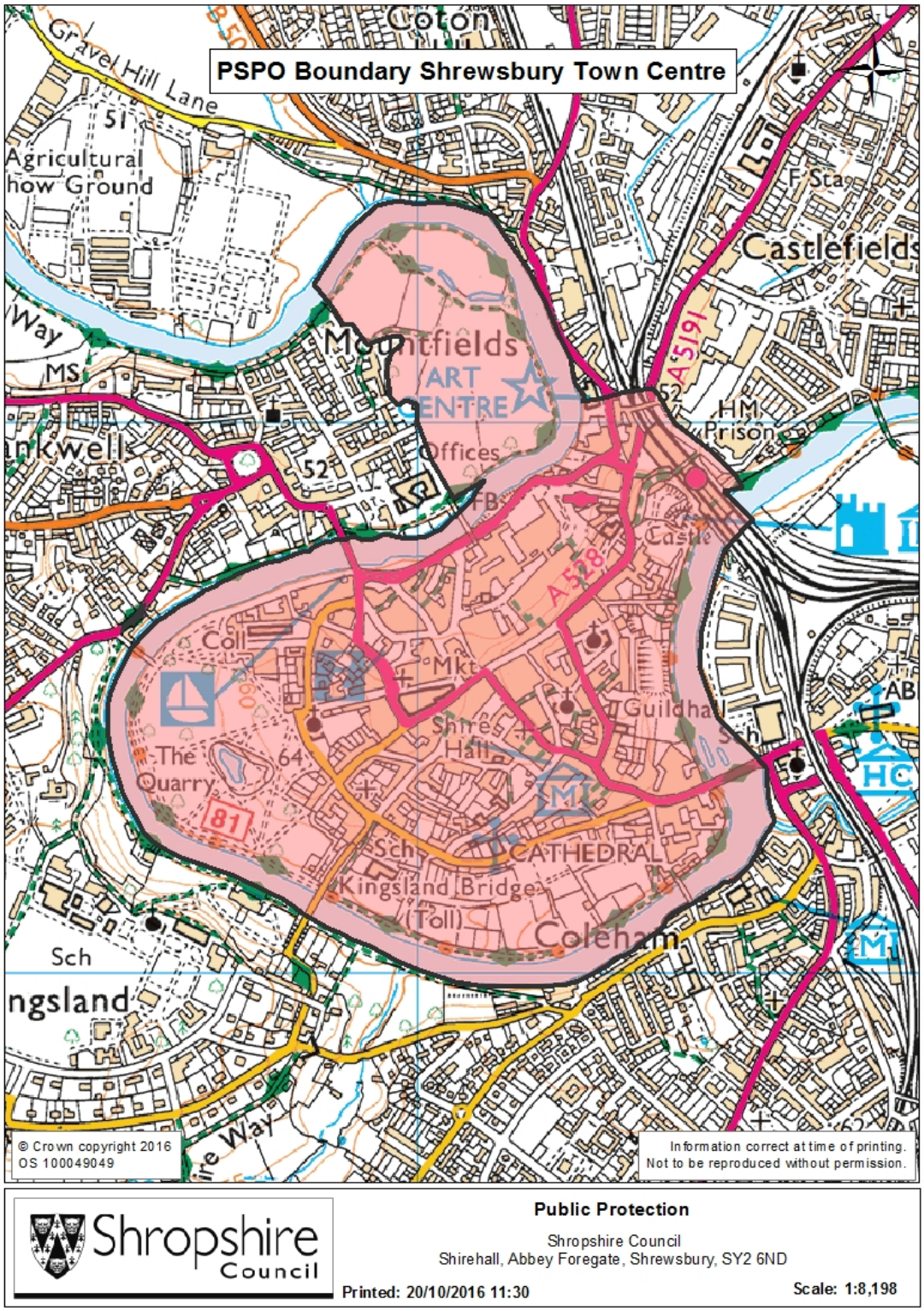
Appendix 1 – The Restricted Area



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Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the consultation on the proposed extension of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for a further three years from August 2026. The PSPO has been in place since 2017 and covers Shrewsbury town centre within the river loop, as well as part of Mountfields including Frankwell car park and the adjacent playing fields. The consultation ran from 2 June to 16 June 2026 and received 31 online responses and one email response.

Overall, the consultation indicates strong support for extending the PSPO. Most respondents had read the accompanying Evaluation Report and demonstrated a clear understanding of the purpose of the PSPO, the reasons for considering an extension, and the consultation process. Respondents also showed strong agreement with the seven existing PSPO categories, suggesting that the current conditions continue to be viewed as relevant and necessary.

The feedback shows that anti-social behaviour continues to affect residents, businesses, workers and visitors in Shrewsbury town centre. Key concerns included drinking and drug use, urination and defecation in public spaces, intimidation, threatening behaviour, littering, rough sleeping, groups congregating, and reduced feelings of safety. Some respondents reported avoiding parts of the town centre or feeling less confident using certain areas, particularly where anti-social behaviour is perceived to be concentrated.

Example comments

- *Having to walk around drunks and druggies who have no concept of the issues they are causing and frightening it can be for some.*
- *Still have people using quiet side streets as a toilet.*
- *Drunks, Drugs, Human excrement and urine. Rubbish left by groups.*
- *Shouting and swearing in front of my children. Refusing to leave an area. Drunk people are still drinking even though collapsing. Belongings such as sleeping bags in doorways. Urine in shop doorways. Begging on Frankwell carpark bridge.*
- *The congregation of drunk, homeless people is intimidating for many people. This has improved, but I notice they are still congregating in doorways of closed down shops e g. Furniture scheme shop on Castle Gates.*
- *Clouds of cannabis smoke from people congregated in front of library, threatening behaviour and foul language meaning I feared for my safety and could not access the library. Can no longer use any of the shuts for easy pedestrian access across town as I used to. Actively avoid pride hill, prefer to walk along Smithfield Road and up castle gates. Area immediately in front of bus station door by premier inn also a big problem with loitering and drug taking during the day.*

There was evidence that the PSPO is seen as having had a positive impact. Many respondents felt it had helped to reduce anti-social behaviour and contributed to a safer, quieter and more pleasant town centre, particularly in areas such as Pride Hill. A clear majority of respondents supported extending the PSPO, with many stating that not extending it could lead to a return or worsening of previous issues.

However, the consultation also highlighted important areas for consideration. A high proportion of respondents who had experienced issues had not reported them, suggesting a need to improve awareness of reporting routes, simplify reporting processes, and build public confidence that concerns will be acted upon. Feedback also raised concerns about the consistency and visibility of enforcement, the role of different agencies, and whether the PSPO is being implemented effectively in practice.

Example comments

- *The PSPO is clearly aimed at tackling homelessness and associated issues, despite guidance that it should not be.*
- *Issues in Coleham, after being given a PSPO banning from town, they then come and carry on in Coleham.*
- *I don't know whom to contact about this issue, which is frustrating.*
- *It is not easy to identify the correct agency. My example is that I found syringes in the town and tried to telephone to get these safely removed. What followed was a debate between the two councils about who was responsible for that particular location. So where do you report it? How do you report it? Perhaps adopt a system similar to that on the trains - 'see it sort it' with contact details and signs.*
- *I would increase the visibility of the police at hot spots and PCSO's as a first step.*

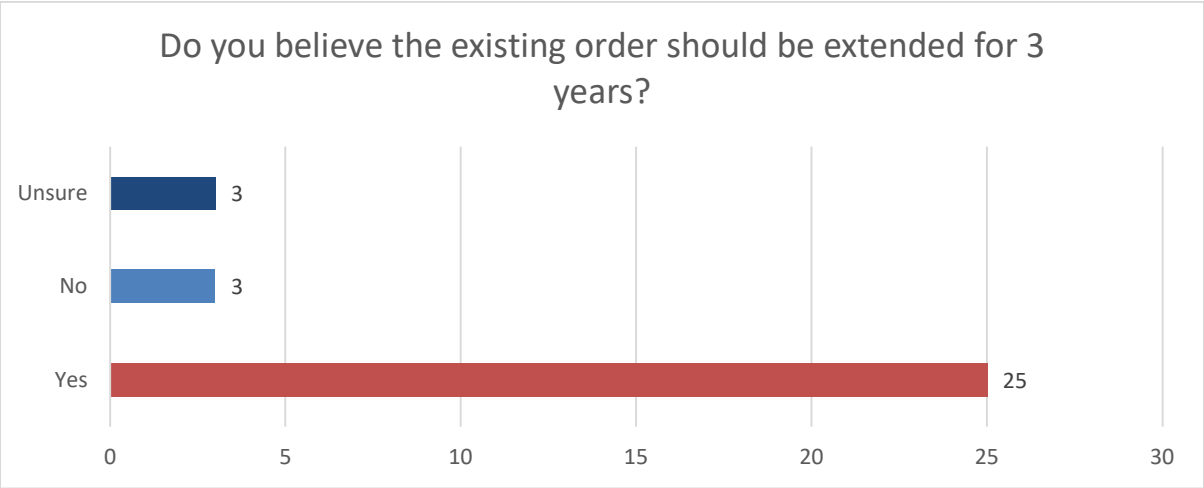
Respondents also raised concerns about displacement of anti-social behaviour into neighbouring areas, particularly Coleham. This was reflected in both the online survey and the email response from a local business owner. Future monitoring and consultation should therefore consider whether the PSPO boundary remains appropriate and whether surrounding areas are being affected by displacement.

The feedback also emphasised the need to balance enforcement with support for vulnerable people, including those who are homeless or experiencing substance misuse. Respondents highlighted the importance of public toilet provision, seating, accessibility, and links with housing, public health, drug and alcohol services. These issues suggest that the PSPO should continue to operate as part of a wider multi-agency approach rather than as a standalone measure.

The respondent profile indicates that most feedback came from people with a clear connection to Shrewsbury and Shropshire, particularly local residents. However, the response was weighted towards older age groups, with younger people less represented. The short consultation period should also be noted when interpreting the findings, particularly if future consultation is required on any changes to the PSPO boundary or conditions.

In conclusion, the consultation provides a clear basis for recommending that the Shrewsbury Town Centre PSPO is extended for a further three years. The PSPO is valued by many respondents as a tool for reducing anti-social behaviour and supporting a safer, more welcoming town centre. Alongside extension, the Council and partners should focus on clearer communication, accessible reporting routes, visible and consistent enforcement, monitoring of displacement, consideration of town centre infrastructure, and appropriate support for vulnerable people.

Figure 1 – How many respondents agree to the extension of the PSPO



Example comments

- *There's still work to be done esp. with young people rampaging around just to make trouble*
- *Anything that will help to reduce ASB in the town is a good thing. However, having security at licenced premises simply moves drug activity onto the streets.*
- *Particularly important as Shrewsbury is being recognised nationally as a great place to visit and live.*
- *If the order is not in place, then the anti-social behaviour will rapidly increase.*
- *I think we need a PSPO but it needs to be changed so you're simply not redirecting anti-social behaviour to other parts of Shrewsbury.*
- *Don't stop now. We lost a lot of repeat visitors when things were bad. We need to encourage visitors to come back.*
- *The current PSPO obviously works well & should continue.*

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SSCPBusinessUnit

From: Michelle Farmer <Michelle.Farmer@shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk> **On Behalf Of** Helen Ball
Sent: 04 June 2026 09:29
To: Lisa Gardner <lisa.gardner@shropshire.gov.uk>
Subject: FW: PSPO support from STCRA

Good Morning Lisa

We have received an email of support from the Town Centre Residents Association regarding the renewal of PSPO.

Kind Regards

Michelle

Michelle Farmer

Committee Officer & Executive Assistant

Shrewsbury Town Council

Livesey House

7 St Johns Hill

Shrewsbury

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From: Caroline John <ccj508@hotmail.co.uk>
Sent: 01 June 2026 20:41
To: Helen Ball <Helen.Ball@shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk>
Subject: PSPO support from STCRA

Dear Helen

On behalf of the Committee of STCRA, I am pleased to confirm our wholehearted support for the renewal of the PSPO for a further three years.

Over the last three years we have seen a very significant improvement in behaviour in the town centre. Whilst there are some detailed points on which improvements could be made, there is no doubt that the Residents, and the various Authorities and Authorised Persons must have the strength of this Order so that they can keep our town safe and an attractive place to live, to work, to visit and to conduct business.

Kind regards

Caroline John

Chair, STCRA

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1st June 2026

Formal Representation in Support of the Renewal of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of Shrewsbury Pubwatch to provide our organisation's strong and unequivocal support for the renewal of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), which is due to expire on 27 July 2026.

Shrewsbury Pubwatch represents licensed premises across the town centre and plays a key role in supporting responsible retailing, promoting public safety, and working collaboratively with statutory partners to manage the evening and night-time economy. From this operational perspective, the PSPO is a critical tool in maintaining order, safety, and a positive environment for both customers and businesses.

The licensed trade operates in a highly visible and often challenging environment, where issues linked to anti-social behaviour can escalate quickly if not addressed effectively. The PSPO provides a clear and enforceable framework that enables early intervention and proportionate action where behaviours risk undermining public safety or the experience of others.

In particular, the PSPO supports:

- The prevention and management of anti-social behaviour that can impact licensed premises and surrounding areas
- The safety of staff and customers, particularly during peak evening and nighttime hours
- A coordinated approach between enforcement partners, including local authority officers, police, and authorised personnel
- The sustained delivery of a safe and well-managed night-time economy, which is essential to the town's overall vitality

The current partnership arrangements, including those set out between Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, and Shrewsbury BID, enable trained authorised personnel to operate within a structured and accountable framework, ensuring a consistent, proportionate, and evidence-based approach to enforcement. This is particularly important in reinforcing confidence among premises that issues will be addressed appropriately and in a timely manner.

From Pubwatch's experience, the absence of such powers would create a significant operational gap. Without the PSPO, there would be reduced ability to address persistent or emerging behaviours in public spaces, increasing the risk of:

- Disorder and escalation in the night-time economy
- Increased pressure on police and venue staff
- Deterioration in customer perceptions of safety
- Negative impacts on the reputation and sustainability of the town centre's evening offer

The PSPO therefore plays a preventative as well as enforcement role, enabling issues to be managed before they become more serious or resource-intensive to resolve. This aligns directly with Pubwatch objectives of early intervention, shared intelligence, and partnership-led problem solving.
In policy terms, sustaining a safe and attractive night-time economy is fundamental to broader objectives around economic development, public protection, and place-making. The continued application of the PSPO is an essential component in achieving these outcomes.

Accordingly, Shrewsbury Pubwatch strongly supports the renewal of the PSPO in full and would urge the Council to recognise its importance as a core tool in managing both the daytime and night-time economy. We remain committed to working closely with all partners to support its effective implementation.

Yours faithfully,

Kevin Rippard
Chair
Shrewsbury Pubwatch

SHREWSBURY BID

SHREWSBURY BID

1 June 2026

Letter of Support – Renewal of Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO)

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID), I am writing to express our strong support for the renewal of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), which is due to expire on 27 July 2026.

The BID represents the interests of local businesses across Shrewsbury town centre, and we recognise the vital role the PSPO plays in maintaining a safe, welcoming, and well-managed environment for businesses, residents, and visitors alike.

Since its introduction, the PSPO has been an important tool in addressing anti-social behaviour and ensuring that public spaces remain accessible and enjoyable for all. Through the collaborative framework set out between Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, and Shrewsbury BID, the Order has enabled a proportionate and effective response to issues impacting the town centre. In particular, we value:

- The ability for trained authorised personnel to take both advisory and enforcement-based approaches, ensuring responses are appropriate and balanced.
- The partnership working arrangements, which support consistent application of the Order and reinforce shared responsibility for town centre management.
- The role the PSPO plays in supporting wider initiatives to promote Shrewsbury as a safe, vibrant, and economically resilient destination.

From a business perspective, maintaining a positive visitor experience is critical. The presence of the PSPO helps to reassure businesses, employees, and customers that concerns relating to anti-social behaviour are taken seriously and managed effectively. This has a direct impact on footfall, dwell time, and overall confidence in the town centre.

We also recognise that the PSPO is implemented in line with the principles of proportionality and good enforcement practice, ensuring that it supports engagement and prevention alongside enforcement where necessary.

For these reasons, Shrewsbury BID fully supports the continuation of the PSPO and strongly recommends its renewal. We remain committed to working in partnership with Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, and other stakeholders to ensure the ongoing success of the Order.

Yours faithfully,

Seb Slater

Seb Slater
Executive Director

First Floor, 11a Fish Street, Shrewsbury, SY1 1UR
T: 01743 358625 E: info@shrewsburybid.co.uk
shrewsburybid.co.uk

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Formal Consultation Response Supporting the Renewal of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order

Prosecure2000 Ltd welcomes the opportunity to submit this formal response to the consultation on the renewal of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO). Prosecure2000 Ltd delivers the Shrewsbury Town Rangers, Quarry Park Security Teams and the Shrewsbury Taxi Marshals, and works in close partnership with Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, Shrewsbury Business Improvement District and West Mercia Police.

In our view, the Shrewsbury Town Centre PSPO remains an important and effective measure for maintaining public order, reducing anti-social behaviour and supporting community safety within the town centre. Prosecure2000 therefore strongly supports the continuation of the Order. We consider the PSPO to be an essential part of the wider partnership framework that helps reduce pressure on frontline services and sustains public confidence in Shrewsbury as a safe and welcoming destination during both daytime activity and the night-time economy.

In support of the renewal and consultation process, we set out the following comments:

Authorised Officers

Prosecure2000 personnel working within the above roles already hold authorisation, on behalf of Shropshire Council, to issue PSPO notices where appropriate. Our staff have undertaken extensive training delivered by Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, West Mercia Police and our own internal training department. This includes training in taxi licensing and licensing legislation, contextual safeguarding, county lines awareness, ACT and SIA-CT training, SCaN, VAWG and Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles. Our staff also maintain detailed operational notes for inclusion in daily and weekly reports shared through Team Shrewsbury partners.

In addition, Prosecure2000 is an approved SafeContractor company and is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. All of our staff hold the appropriate Security Industry Authority licences and bring significant operational experience to their roles.

Our operational experience demonstrates that these powers are applied proportionately and only where engagement, support and other reasonable interventions have not secured compliance. Where PSPO and PCR notices have been issued, they have resulted in successful court outcomes, providing clear evidence that the enforcement action taken has been appropriate, justified and effective in practice.

Public Conveniences and Sitting on the Ground

Our teams work actively with a range of partner agencies, including the police, the ARK, the RESET team, Youth Services, Shrewsbury Town Council, Shropshire Council and the BID. Through this work they have developed strong operational relationships and a detailed understanding of the issues affecting people who regularly frequent the town centre.

At present, our teams regularly encounter anti-social behaviour, criminality and vulnerability-related issues, including:

- street drinking
- begging
- people sitting or lying in shop doorways
- urinating and defecating in public spaces
- misuse of public conveniences for alcohol or drug consumption

While many incidents can be resolved through engagement, reassurance and de-escalation, there are occasions when a more immediate and formal enforcement response is necessary. The continued availability of PSPO powers to authorised Prosecure2000 personnel enables prompt, proportionate and effective intervention, particularly at times when partner agencies are managing wider operational pressures.

Amplified Busking

More recently, the Town Rangers have undertaken an initial triage role in relation to reports of busking and have passed relevant concerns to Shropshire Council Public Protection. This has allowed Public Protection Officers to focus on higher-priority matters. We believe that including clearer provisions in relation to amplified busking would help to create a more balanced and harmonious town centre environment and reduce prolonged disruption for nearby businesses, employees and visitors.

Conclusion

In our assessment, the resources of West Mercia Police and Shropshire Council, as the principal agencies responsible for the PSPO, remain under considerable pressure. The ability of authorised Prosecure2000 personnel to issue PSPO notices as part of the wider partnership response helps ensure that enforcement can continue to be delivered promptly and proportionately when required, notwithstanding competing operational priorities and wider service demand.

For those reasons, we consider renewal of the PSPO to be both necessary and proportionate in order to support partners in addressing persistent issues at the earliest possible stage. In practical terms, the value of the PSPO lies not only in the authority it gives officers to require relevant behaviour to cease, but also in the ability to escalate to formal enforcement where non-compliance persists. The successful court outcomes arising from PSPO and PCR notices further demonstrate the legitimacy, effectiveness and continuing relevance of the current arrangements.

In summary

Prosecure2000 strongly supports the continuation of the Shrewsbury Town Centre PSPO through the present renewal and consultation process. In our view, the Order continues to provide a necessary, proportionate and effective framework for addressing anti-social behaviour and associated nuisance within the town centre. We would welcome the opportunity to continue contributing as an active delivery partner in its implementation and enforcement, in order to maximise the benefit, it provides to the town, local businesses and the wider public.

Kind Regards

Jon Frroku

Jon Frroku
MD
Prosecure2000 Ltd
Suites 6 & 7
High Street Chambers,
10-11 High Street,
Shrewsbury,
England,
SY1 1SP

Lisa Gardner
Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership

Via email:
lisa.gardner@shropshire.gov.uk

Superintendent Edward Hancox
West Mercia Police
Malinsgate
Telford
TF3 4HW

edward.hancox@westmercia.police.uk

Date: Monday 15th June 2026
Our ref: 150626/EH/RP

Dear Lisa,

On behalf of West Mercia Police and as Chair of Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership, I am writing to express my support for the continuation of Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Shrewsbury Town Centre. Since the introduction of PSPO there has been a significant reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). The order has provided officers with an effective means of addressing persistent issues and preventing behaviour from escalating. The PSPO is one of many tools used to by officer's tackle ASB within the town and will have contributed to the year-on-year fall of recorded ASB.

Between the 1st January and the 26th May (year to date), the amount of ASB recorded for each year has continued to reduce in Shrewsbury Town Centre:

- 2024 = 135 Incidents of ASB recorded
- 2025 = 126 Incidents of ASB recorded
- 2026 = 90 Incidents of ASB recorded (a reduction of 28.6% from same period in 2025)

In terms of totals recorded each year, then figures are:

- 2024 = 319 Incidents of ASB recorded
- 2025 = 285 Incidents of ASB recorded (a reduction of 10.7%)

From January 2026 to date Police have issued 37 notices of breaching the PSPO and there have been 4 arrests for breach of PSPO.

The PSPO has proven to be a valuable and proportionate tool in supporting both enforcement and prevention activity. Given the positive outcomes achieved, I support the renewal of the PSPO and believe it remains necessary to help maintain these improvements and ensure local communities continue to benefit from safer and more accessible public spaces.

Yours sincerely

Superintendent Edward Hancox

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PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER: SHREWSBURY TOWN CENTRE

EVALUATION REPORT: 01.04.2023 – 31.03.2026.

Overview

A Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) has been enforced in Shrewsbury Town Centre since 1st August 2017. Shropshire Council are currently seeking views and comments on extending the Order for a further 3 years from August 2026.

This report presents an analysis of anti-social behaviour data collected in Shrewsbury Town Centre between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2026. Data was gathered by Shrewsbury Town Council, through the multiagency operational group 'Team Shrewsbury'. The analysis focuses on behaviours and conditions specified within the PSPO.

In addition to 'Team Shrewsbury' data this report presents enforcement figures relating to the Shrewsbury Town Centre PSPO over the past three financial years, provided by Shropshire Council. West Mercia Police have offered additional insights by providing statistics acquired through searches of logs and reports using a range of search tools, as well as data concerning anti-social behaviour within Shrewsbury Town Centre for the period 2024 to 2026.

Data analysis is in line with the geographical boundary covered by the Public Spaces Protection Order.

Reporting categories

After evaluating the datasets compiled by Shropshire Council and its partner agencies regarding crime and anti-social behaviour, the following reporting categories were developed to facilitate monitoring of the order's impact. The categories were introduced as of 1st October 2016 and are aligned with the behaviours the PSPO aims to prohibit. Other categories relevant to wider ASB issues have continued to be recorded by a number of agencies; however, the categories detailed below have been developed to reflect the most problematic issues encountered within the town centre.

Alcohol Litter	**Dog fouling**	**Excrement/Urinating**
Alcohol Related Incidents	**Dog control**	**Fly tipping/Littering**
Aggressive Begging	**Damage/arson**	**Left belongings** (incident type not in use from July 2024 onwards)
Begging	**Drug Litter**	**Graffiti**
Nuisance Busking	**Drug Misuse**	**Suspicious behaviour**
Congregation	**Drug Dealing**	

Data constraints- Limitations of the report

Prior to 2023, West Mercia Police recorded all Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) Penalty Charge Receipts (PCRs) issued, including the specific enforcement reasons. After the 2023 PSPO renewal, Town Rangers and Quarry Security staff gained enforcement powers. This led to a shift: West Mercia Police reduced their data recording to only the number of PCRs, no longer documenting things such as enforcement grounds. The change aimed to avoid duplicating records, since Shropshire Council maintains a centralised register for all PCRs issued by authorised officers.

Since October 2021, Shropshire Council no longer routinely logs ASB incidents, except for statutory noise nuisance complaints managed by Environmental Health officers. The only consistently tracked PSPO-related ASB data concerns noise from busking, restricting the ability to analyse broader ASB trends connected to PSPO enforcement.

From July 2024 'Team Shrewsbury' did not use the incident type 'Left Belongings (removed)'. Therefore, comparisons over different periods should be made cautiously. The report uses multiple sources for balance, but some omissions remain due to inherent data limitations.

Analysis of Team Shrewsbury Data- PSPO conditions

a) No person shall urinate or defecate in a public area not being a facility intended for such use

Incident type:	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3 yr % change
Excrement/Urinating	135	72	70	**277**	48.1% reduction

b) No person shall, for any duration of time, leave unattended in a public area any personal effects or belongings or any other material or paraphernalia including anything that may be considered discarded or waste material.

Incident type:	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Left belongings (removed) *	6	0	N/A	**6**	100.0% reduction
Alcohol Litter	82	51	54	**187**	34.1% reduction
Drug litter	193	310	102	**605**	47.2% reduction
Fly tipping/Littering	245	181	148	**574**	39.6% reduction

*Incident type not in use from July 2024 onwards

c) No person shall refuse to stop drinking alcohol or hand over any containers (sealed or unsealed) which are believed to contain alcohol, when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or is likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

Incident Type	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Alcohol Related behaviour	536	307	290	**1133**	45.9% reduction
Alcohol Litter	82	61	54	**197**	34.1% reduction

d)No person, who is sitting or lying on any footpath or pedestrian area or in any fire escaper, stairway or other entrance or exit to any premises within the protected area, shall refuse to move when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

Incident Type	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Sitting on floor	166	138	25	**329**	84.9% reduction

e)No person shall refuse to leave a public toilet when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

Incident Type	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Refused to leave toilets	2	3	0	**5**	100% reduction

f)No person shall refuse to stop using a device intended to amplify sound when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided the officer has reason to believe that the person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

Incident Type	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Amplified Music	16	17	15	**48**	6.3% reduction
Busking- nuisance	23	3	2	**28**	91.3% reduction

g)No person shall refuse to disperse from a public area and not to return to that public area for 48 hours when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

All reporting categories can be considered relevant to this particular condition. However, it should be recognised that certain issues will potentially be dealt with via more appropriate and effective primary legislation.

Incident Type	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Alcohol Litter	82	51	54	187	34.1% reduction
Alcohol related	536	256	290	1082	45.9% reduction
Aggressive begging	5	3	0	8	100% reduction
Begging	68	12	4	84	94.1% reduction
Busking – nuisance	23	2	2	27	91.3% reduction
Congregation	588	88	21	697	96.4% reduction
Dog fouling	2	2	3	7	50% increase
Dog control	12	2	2	16	83.2% reduction
Damage/Arson	186	42	17	245	90.9% reduction
Drug litter	193	310	102	605	47.2% reduction
Drug misuse	372	176	40	588	89.2% reduction
Drug dealing	44	15	24	83	45.5% reduction
Excrement/ Urinating	135	55	70	260	48.1% reduction
Fly tipping/ Littering	245	181	148	574	39.6% reduction
Personal items left	109	111	188	408	72.5% increase
Graffiti	39	36	30	105	23.1% decrease
Suspicious individuals	123	55	60	238	51.2% decrease
Grand total	**2762**	**1397**	**1055**	**5214**	**61.8% decrease**

Other incident types recorded by 'Team Shrewsbury'

Incident Type	01/04/2023-31/03/2024	01/04/2024-31/03/2025	01/04/2025-31/03/2026	Total	3yr % change
Rough sleepers	1747	357	283	**2387**	83.8% reduction
River safety	32	29	15	**76**	53.1% reduction
VAWG incidents	129	39	8	**176**	93.8% reduction
Shoplifting	260	367	410	**1037**	57.7% increase
Returning within 48	13	2	0	**15**	100.0%

Supporting data: West Mercia Police

ASB incidents demand by year since 2024

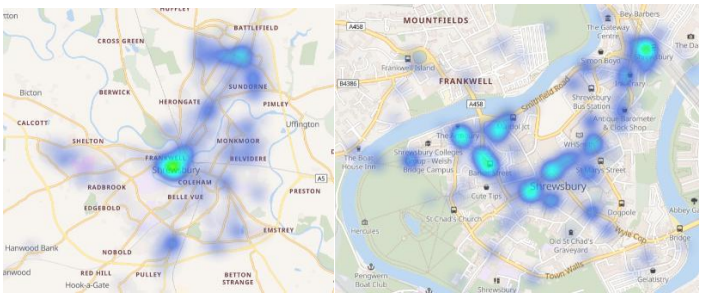
Demand by Year	
Year	**Incidents**
2024	319
2025	285
2026	90
Grand Total	**694**

ASB incidents, comparing 1st Jan to the 26th of May 2025 with same period in 2026

YTD 2025			YTD 2026		
Incident Type	**Totals**		**Incident Type**	**Totals**	Variation
AS-Nuisance	120		AS-Nuisance	86	Decrease of 28.3%
AS-Personal	4		AS-Personal	3	Decrease of 25.0%
AS-Environmental	2		AS-Environmental	1	Decrease of 50.0%
Grand Total	**126**		**Grand Total**	**90**	**Decrease of 28.6%**

This shows that there has been a reduction in ASB incidents of 28.6%

Heat maps looking at ASB in Shrewsbury for the last 12 months



These maps show the concentration of ASB incidents around the town centre area

Keyword searches conducted on incident reports recorded by West Mercia Police for the period 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2026 split up by incidents and crime.

Key word	2023/24 incidents	2024/25 incidents	2025/26 incidents
Alcohol/drinking/drunk	5	3	2
Drugs Cannabis	1	2	1
Dog	1	2	0
Damage	1	1	1
Litter/rubbish/vomit	1	1	0

Key word	2023/24 Crime data	2024/25 Crime data	2025/26 Crime data
Alcohol/drinking/drunk	63	38	32
Busking	1	0	1
Drugs Cannabis	41	31	37
Dog	9	7	1
Damage	80	55	51
Litter/rubbish/vomit	13	6	2
Graffiti	4	0	3
Urinating/Defecating	6	8	3

Below are the categories that did not have either any incident or crime data as specified.

- Begging- no incidents or crime
- Busking- no incidents
- Graffiti- no incidents
- Urinate and defecate- no incidents

The keywords are taken from the initial detail of the report made rather than the entire incident log, which may result in under-reporting however they do indicate potential data that could be considered in order to monitor the proposed additional categories. However, further incident detail would be required to establish whether reports refer to anti-social behaviour and specifically relate to the conditions detailed within the PSPO.

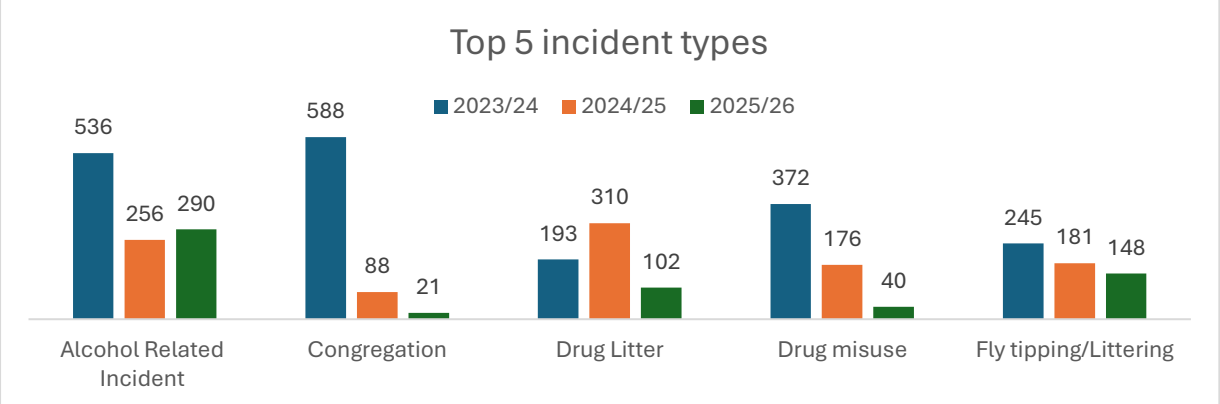
Supporting data: Shropshire Council

Enforcement data for the Shrewsbury Town Centre PSPO

Enforcement type	Apil 2023- March 2024	April 2024 – March 2025	April 2025 – March 2025
Written Warnings	2	4	3
FPNs	3 (1 paid, 2 unpaid)	2 (both paid)	2 (both unpaid)
Prosecutions Pursued (for unpaid FPNs).	2	N/A	2

Key findings

The graph below identifies the top 5 incident types generating the highest number of reports during the review period.



Headlines:

- Total recorded incidents fell by 61.8% over a three-year period. This indicates a strong positive impact the PSPO and multi-agency approach
- Major reductions across incidents such as aggressive begging, drug misuse and damage/arson
- Alcohol related incidents decreased by 45.9% but still represent one of the highest volume categories
- Enforcement activity remains relatively low, with small numbers of FPNs, warnings and prosecutions suggesting that the PSPO may be acting as a deterrent rather than relying heavily on formal enforcement

There are no proposed additions to the current PSPO to tackle ongoing issues linked to Anti-social behaviour in Shrewsbury Town Centre.

Conclusion

All incident types have continued to generate reports during the last 3 years. However, dog fouling, aggressive begging and dog control incidents have recorded significantly lower levels in comparison n to the remaining categories.

This report highlights that the PSPO has contributed to a significant and sustained reduction in anti-social behaviour in Shrewsbury Town centre with major decreases in high harm behaviours.

Shropshire Council
Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)
Stage One Screening Record 2026

Please note that part A and part B of this document should be completed.

A. Summary Sheet on Accountability and Actions

Name of proposed service change
Proposed extension of Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (No. 1) 2017

Name of the officer carrying out the screening
Lisa Gardner

Decision, review, and monitoring

Decision	**Yes**	**No**
Initial (Stage One) ESHIA Only?	X	
Proceed to Stage Two Full ESHIA or HIA (part two) Report?		x

If completion of a Stage One screening assessment is an appropriate and proportionate action at this stage, please use the boxes above, and complete both part A and part B of of this template. If a Full or Stage Two report is required, please move on to full report stage once you have completed this initial screening assessment as a record of the considerations which you have given to this matter.

Assessment of likely neutral, negative impact or positive impact of the service change in terms of equality and social inclusion considerations
The Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (No.1) 2017 ('the Order') has been in operation since 1 August 2017. It was determined in the original ESHIA that the implementation of the Order would be considered to have an overall 'low positive impact' for the community and for Protected Characteristic groupings. The requirement to extend the Order is a requirement within the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 ('the Act'), which specifies that an Order cannot last for more than three years unless it is extended by the Council. The Act is intended to benefit the community as a whole by providing a number of mechanisms to address anti-social behaviour (ASB) and to assist communities to find solutions to resolve issues quickly and efficiently. The proposed extension to the Order is one such mechanism and it will be of benefit to the community as a whole as well as the nine Protected Characteristic groupings as defined in the Equality Act 2010 plus the additional local groupings of consideration in Shropshire.

The Order, along with other initiatives, form part of the toolkit to tackle ASB challenges within Shrewsbury town centre and not extending the Order will remove a mechanism that has successfully addressed individual incidents of ASB in the town centre; this clearly benefits the majority of the community.

It is anticipated that the impact for the community and for and across Protected Characteristic groupings and local groupings, as a result of the proposed extension to the Order will remain 'low positive' as it is remaining the same. There is potential to move to medium positive for the groupings of Age, Disability, Carers, and Social Inclusion. This is in relation to those who are vulnerable or consider themselves vulnerable when out in the public realm. By way of example, consultation feedback was given by a parent in their caring role with an adult son who has learning disabilities, in regard to intimidation experienced. Further actions through the PSPO could minimise this for them and for other individuals, including those who may have neurodivergent conditions or those with caring responsibilities such as for carers of young children.

The likely positive impact of a renewal of the PSPO for those who are vulnerable by virtue of their circumstances, for example rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness, may also rise to medium positive. Here, the groupings of particular regard are Social Inclusion, and Veterans and Serving Members of the Armed Forces and their families, for whom we are required to show 'due regard' under the Armed Forces Act 2021.

An action to mitigate any perceived negative impact of the measures on vulnerable people, including rough sleepers, will be to advise and reinforce the message, both directly and through groups like 'Team Shrewsbury' and the Community Safety Partnership Safer Stronger Board that the Order is not a mechanism that sets out to punish poverty related issues; it is designed to punish unacceptable behaviours caused by individuals acting inappropriately, irrespective of status or wealth, and applies equally to a wide range of ASB commonly associated with the evening and night time economy and caused by a variety of groups of people.

There are many measures in place to help vulnerable people who are homeless and rough sleeping. This includes support from a variety of agencies including the Council, Shrewsbury Ark, Shropshire Recovery Partnership, RESET, Police and the medical profession, many of whom are represented on 'Team Shrewsbury' and the Safer Stronger Board. In addition the Council and 'Team Shrewsbury' support the secure cash donation boxes that are in three locations in Shrewsbury. This allows people to provide donations which are specifically used to assist homeless people.

Assessment of likely neutral, negative or positive impact of the service change in terms of health and wellbeing considerations
The proposal to extend the Order is anticipated to have a positive direct impact on health, mental health and physical wellbeing of those who are currently sleeping rough, when they are assisted to find accommodation.

It is also anticipated to have a positive impact on social, economic and environmental living conditions that would indirectly affect health, given that it relates to the built and green environment of Shrewsbury town centre. There is likely to be a cleaner and safer street scene, which brings broader health benefits for all who live, work and visit Shrewsbury, encouraging usage of public spaces and facilities, improving social inclusion and uptake of physical activity, particularly through usage of the Quarry park

There may be opportunities for individuals to improve their own health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to reducing drug use and alcohol consumption; however, to do so, individuals are likely to require support from other health and social care services, including housing services, mental health services and also from the Shropshire Recovery Partnership.

There was an anticipated positive environmental and public health impact associated with the original decision to implement the Order through a reduction in urinating/defecating in the street and the public not leaving their personal belongings in the town centre remains. The data available indicates there has been a 48.1% reduction in these behaviours (urinating/defecating), which will have had a positive impact on the environment, and this can be influenced if the Order remains in effect. A decrease in the usage of substances within the town centre will also lower the risk of environmental contamination caused by drug paraphernalia (such as syringes) littering the environment.

Actions to review and monitor the impact of the service change in terms of equality, social inclusion, and health considerations

The use of the Order continues to be strongly supported by West Mercia Police. The Shrewsbury Business Improvement District ('BID') remains committed and involved in the collation and sharing of data from the business community with 'Team Shrewsbury' to help capture intelligence and monitor impact. This multi-agency approach is key to addressing anti-social behaviour in the town centre as it is recognised that such behaviour will continue to be a significant challenge. The extended Order will be one part of a wider co-ordinated response to deal with the root causes of anti-social behaviour in Shrewsbury town centre.

The Order is intended to tackle low level ASB where the behaviour is having, or likely to have, a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality; be persistent or continuing in nature; and be unreasonable. The way that the Order has been used and will continue to be used is as a mechanism to stop lower level ASB without necessarily resorting to criminal action. It is reported by police and town rangers that the order has a deterrent effect on those whose behaviour requires challenge and this often mitigates the need for further action. Where further action is necessary the Council considers other sanctions including warnings and simple cautions as opposed to resorting straight to fixed penalties or legal proceedings.

Evidence of the issues affecting the town centre will continue to be gathered by the Police, Shrewsbury BID and the range of 'Team Shrewsbury' partners. This will be used to inform 'Team Shrewsbury' of the issues being experienced within the restricted area. The 'Team Shrewsbury' data is collated by Shrewsbury Town Council and, together with Council data reflecting the extent to which the Order has been used, is presented at each 'Team Shrewsbury' meeting. Representatives are able to review the data, raise issues and suggest actions for consideration that would benefit the community and the Protected Characteristic groupings.

The Order will only be valid until 27 July 2026, after which time it must be reviewed if it is proposed to extend the order. Also, if necessary, the Order can be amended, at any time within the period for which it is in force, to remove specific elements where the evidence demonstrates that the prohibitions/requirements have been sufficiently effective or indeed to include new prohibitions/requirements to tackle emerging problems. 'Team Shrewsbury', through the monitoring of the data collated and the data relating to the Order's use, are able to address whether any variations or extending the Order is considered appropriate. Extending or varying the order will need to be undertaken in accordance with legislative requirements and be undertaken by the Council having demonstrated the evidential need and having undertaken the appropriate consultation.

The Trading Standards and Licensing Service will continue to work with the Police where enforcement is required and will monitor any offences reported by the Police. Shropshire Council is the only Authority able to prosecute a case in the Court where a breach of the Order is identified. Any such case will be assessed in line with the Council Better Regulation and Enforcement Policy which can be found on the Shropshire Council website at: https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/media/wcyhsqq3/better-regulation-and-enforcement-policy.pdf This will ensure that any enforcement action undertaken in respect of the Order is consistent and in line with that of any other enforcement process undertaken by the Council.

Under the Act, an appeal to the High Court, by anyone who lives in, or regularly works in or visits the restricted area, could have been lodged in respect of the validity of the Order for a period of up to six weeks after the Order was brought into effect in 2017; no such challenge was received. Furthermore, in the six years the Order has been operating there have been no complaints or representations received by the Council in relation to the implementation or use of the Order. An appeal cannot be lodged when an Order is simply extended, which is the proposal in this case; however, if the extension was considered unreasonable or flawed, it can always be the subject of a Judicial Review.

Going forward, the Trading Standards and Parking Enforcement Team will consider and address any complaint or representation made to the Council in respect of the operation of the extended Order. This will also include any feedback from local members covering the geographical area for the Order along with the Portfolio holder, local MP and the Police and Crime Commissioner. It is anticipated that they will, therefore, be able to help to feedback on the

effectiveness and continued need or otherwise of the Order, along with ongoing liaison with Shrewsbury Town Council, local businesses and residents. This will help us to consider the ongoing impact on the local community as these are key engagement channels for the community alongside direct feedback to the service area.

Associated ESHIAs

Associated ESIIAs that demonstrate the timeline and ongoing approaches to continuous engagement with Protected Characteristic groupings in relation to the implementation and use of the Shrewsbury town centre PSPO are:

- Proposed Consultation on a Public Spaces Protection Order for Shrewsbury Town Centre (November 2016), considered by Cabinet on 21 December 2016.
  http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=3260&Ver=4

- Proposed Public Spaces Protection Order for Shrewsbury Town Centre (May 2017), considered by Cabinet on 21 June 2017.
  https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=3417&Ver=4

  Proposed Amendment and/or Extension of Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (No.1) 2017 considered by Cabinet on 19 August 2023.https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=1544

A related ESHIA that demonstrates the proposed extension to the PSPO fits into the policy approach of the Licensing Service is:

- Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy 2019 – 2024 and associated 'Premises Licence Applications – Completing the Operating Schedule and Plan of the Premises Guidance' (October/November 2018), considered by Council on 13 December 2018. http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=125&MId=3757&Ver=4.

Additionally, other related ESHIAs of particular relevance are those carried out in relation to Shrewsbury Town Centre regeneration and matters regarding safety and movement around the public realm for all members of the public, as well as those carried out in relation to the Council's policy approaches around rough sleeping, homelessness, and temporary accommodation.

Assessment of likely neutral, negative or positive impact, and actions to review and monitor overall impacts, with regard to climate change impacts and with regard to economic and societal impacts

Climate change

The Order, and any extension of it, will have no effect in respect of energy and fuel consumption, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting or mitigation or climate change adaptation.

Economic and societal/wider community

The feedback within the consultation report includes concerns expressed around safe access to and usage of Shrewsbury Library due to anti-social and intimidating behaviour of persons outside the Library. To not renew the PSPO could cause such issues to be exacerbated and lead to a decline in usage of the library, particularly by people who are either vulnerable, such as children and young people, or who consider themselves to be vulnerable. Further targeted action in this location through the PSPO if renewed, could minimise this current negative societal and cultural impact.

Shrewsbury town centre businesses and the Shrewsbury BID are represented on 'Team Shrewsbury' and are encouraged to report examples of ASB to 'Team Shrewsbury' to better inform the impact of the ASB on businesses' abilities to trade successfully, including any adverse impacts on their customers that may inhibit economic growth and prosperity.

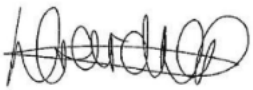
To help members of the public to more easily understand the overall strategic direction of the Council, the Council's Corporate Plan is a helpful guide to the Council's corporate approach towards prioritising and measuring overall economic, environment and community outcomes. The Plan can be found on the Council's website at
https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/media/k23l3w2w/corporate-plan-2026-2030.pdf

The Order, and any extension, has the potential to adversely impact human rights. However, Cabinet properly had regard to the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 during the process that led to the initial implementation of the existing Order.

The Council has not received any human rights challenges or complaints since the Order was brought into effect. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that the original decision to implement the Order has not led to adverse human rights breaches, and that an extension to the existing Order is also unlikely to be at variance with the Human Rights Act 1998 or result in any adverse human rights implications.

Scrutiny at Stage One screening stage

People involved	Signatures	Date

Lead officer for the proposed service change **Lisa Gardner**		12.06.2026
Officer carrying out the screening **As above**		
*External support** **Mrs Lois Dale** **Senior Insights and Research EDI Specialist** **Phillip Northfield** *Integration & Inequalities Officer – Public Health*		22.06.2026 22.06.2026

This refers to support external to the service and within the Council, e.g., the Senior Insights and Research EDI specialist, the Integration & Inequalities Officer – Public Health, other Insights and Research or Public Health colleagues, the Feedback and Insight Team, Climate Change specialists, etc.

Sign off at Stage One screening stage

Name	Signatures	Date
Lead officer's name **Lisa Gardner**		12.06.2026
Service manager's name **Rachel Robinson**		

This may either be the Head of Service or the lead officer

B. Detailed Screening Assessment

Aims of the service change and description
The Shrewsbury Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order (No.1) 2017 ('the Order') was implemented in accordance with the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 ('the Act') to help target anti-social behaviours (ASB) that were having a detrimental impact on the lives of individuals and businesses within the Shrewsbury town centre community. The Order was introduced to help improve the commercial nature of the town (including the evening and nighttime economy and visitor experience), whilst ensuring that public spaces are enjoyed by the majority and not spoiled by the actions of the minority; this remains the core purpose of the Order.

The Order can only remain in force for a maximum of three years after which time the Council must consider whether or not to extend the Order. The proposal is to now seek that extension on the basis that we are satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that doing so is necessary to prevent an occurrence or recurrence of the ASB identified in the Order and/or an increase in the frequency or seriousness of the ASB, after the date the Order would ordinarily cease to have effect. In seeking the extension, there are no proposed changes to be made to the Order itself or to the behaviours the Order is seeking to address. The provisions of the Order will remain the same and will simply be extended from 1st August 2026 for a period of up to three years.

Tackling ASB was and remains a Shropshire Council priority and is often linked with other core council services around social care, vulnerable adults, safeguarding, hate crime, highways and public health. The extension, as with the implementation of the Order, is seen as a measure to continue to help reduce ASB and to assist the Council to achieve its corporate aims in relation to this community issue.

The intention behind the Order continues to provide a mechanism to allow the Police and authorised officers of the Council to address behaviours that are causing concern. The Order does not target any particular group in the community and, in particular, does not target those that may be considered vulnerable or in need of help. The extension of the Order does not alter this position; the focus remains on targeting individuals whose behaviour is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to others in the community.

In extending the Order, the original prohibitions will remain unaltered:

a) No person shall urinate or defecate in a public area not being a facility intended for such use.
b) No person shall, for any duration of time, leave unattended in a public area any personal effects or belongings or any other material or paraphernalia including anything that may be considered discarded or waste material.
c) No person shall refuse to stop drinking alcohol or hand over any containers (sealed or unsealed) which are believed to contain alcohol, when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or is likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.
d) No person, who is sitting or lying on any footpath or pedestrian area or in any fire escaper, stairway or other entrance or exit to any premises within the protected area, shall refuse to move when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person
e) No person shall refuse to leave a public toilet when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person
f) No person shall refuse to stop using a device intended to amplify sound when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided the officer has

reason to believe that the person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person

g) No person shall refuse to disperse from a public area and not to return to that public area for 48 hours when required to do so by an authorised officer, provided that officer has reason to believe that that person is causing or likely to cause nuisance, alarm, harassment or distress to any other person.

The Order does not stop any activity, where that activity is being undertaken in an appropriate manner and does not criminalise specific activities (although some activities may already be a criminal act by virtue of other legislation) other than urinating and defecating and leaving belongings in a public place for which there are strong arguments to prohibit outright.

The Order was originally implemented to assist the Police and the Council to engage with individuals or groups who are committing anti-social behaviour in a public space where the behaviour is having, or likely to have, a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality; be persistent or continuing in nature; and be unreasonable. In accordance with the Council's Better Regulation and Enforcement Policy, the Order has primarily been used to effectively resolve anti-social behaviour issues by modifying or changing the behaviour of individuals using the lowest level of enforcement intervention, rather than seeking to criminalise those acting inappropriately. Extending the Order will provide for this approach to carry on and it will provide a practical tool that the Police and the Council can continue to use to help address ASB in Shrewsbury town centre as part of a partnership approach through the multi-agency group known as 'Team Shrewsbury'.

Whilst the Council is responsible for making, varying and extending PSPOs, they must do so in consultation with the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and other relevant community representatives and land owners who may be affected. A PSPO can be created to cover any public space within the Council's administrative boundary and this will include any place to which the public or any section of the public has access, on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission. The area covered by a PSPO is referred to as the 'restricted area'.

The restricted area in the Order covers the Shrewsbury town centre area within the river loop and a part of Mountfields, which includes Frankwell car park and the adjacent playing fields. A detailed map of the restricted area forms part of the Order.

Having established the Order, appropriate signs are already installed and displayed on entry points to the restricted area and within the said area in accordance with the requirements of the Act and regulations made thereunder. Further, the Order has been available to view on the Council's website since its implementation on 1 August 2017.

Enforcement of the Order can be undertaken by both the Police and authorised Council officers. However, when the Order was originally implemented, a

Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Council and the Police to agree that the main responsibility and resource for enforcement would rest with the Police. This Memorandum of Understanding is still in place but will be reviewed later this year.

A breach of a PSPO can be dealt with through the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) of up to £100, or a level 3 fine (max £1000) on prosecution. Prior to the Order coming into effect in 2017, Cabinet set the FPN level at £75, reduced to £50 if paid within 10 days. There are no proposals to amend the financial level of the FPN if the Order is extended.

Where a FPN is not considered appropriate or where a FPN is not paid then consideration is given to the commencement of legal proceedings. Only the Council may bring proceedings for a breach of the Order; the Police (Crown Prosecution Service) cannot do so even where enforcement is undertaken by police officers. Ultimately, the Council considers any such breaches and, where appropriate, having taken into account the Council's Better Regulation and Enforcement Policy, pursue matters through the Courts. Any costs associated with legal proceedings, which are not recovered, are borne by the Council.

Intended audiences and target groups for the service change

The intended audiences and target groups are considered to be:

- Residents of Shrewsbury town centre
- Visitors to Shrewsbury town centre
- Local businesses operating within Shrewsbury town centre
- Shrewsbury Town Council
- Shropshire Council
- Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police
- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
- Shrewsbury MP
- Shrewsbury BID
- Shrewsbury Colleges Group
- Shrewsbury Town Centre Residents Association
- The Ark (Outreach Service)
- Team Shrewsbury
- Street Pastors
- Accommodation providers
- Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Shropshire Tourism
- The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership
- Shropshire Community Health Trust
- Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust
- Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Voluntary Groups

This above list is not intended to be exhaustive or in order of priority

Evidence used for screening of the service change

Risk assessment and monitoring of the way in which the Order has been enforced has provided reassurance that the legal and financial risks to the Council associated with enforcing the Order have been extremely low, and whilst there is always a risk with any form of enforcement activity, the evidence strongly indicates that these risks will continue to be low and will be financially managed within existing service delivery budgets. In the last three years of the Order being in place 4 prosecutions have been pursued due to unpaid Fixed Penalty Notices and these costs have been borne by the Council within existing service budgets.

No complaints or representations have been received by the Council in relation to the implementation or use of the Order whilst it has been in operation since 1 August 2017.

An Evaluation report relating to ASB incidents recorded by 'Team Shrewsbury' (including Police data) covering the period from 1 March 2023 to 31 March 2026. Which includes enforcement actions taken under the Order for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026 has been compiled.

The full evaluation report and details of the enforcement actions referred to above, which were provided as part of the consultation package, can be found PSPO Evaluation Report 2026. A summary is provided below.

Evaluation Report

Between 1 March 2023 and the 31 March 2026, there were 10.407 ASB incidents reported by 'Team Shrewsbury' under 27 separate categories. Since 2020, the number of incident type categories has increased, making direct comparisons to figures from previous years unreliable.

The **top five** reported incident types were alcohol related behaviour, congregation, rough sleepers, shoplifting.

The incident types that have seen the most significant **decreases** in reporting related to aggressive begging, alcohol litter and dog control; the greatest **increases** were seen in respect of nuisance busking, urinating/defecating and graffiti.

Incident types – decrease in recorded incidents

Incident Type	Total reported (01.03.23 – 31.03.26)	3 year % change (decrease)

Alcohol Litter	**197**	34.1%
Alcohol related behaviour	**1133**	45.9%
Aggressive begging	**8**	100.0%
Begging	**84**	94.1%
Busking - nuisance	**28**	91.3%
Congregation	**703**	96.4%
Dog control	**16**	83.3%
Damage/Arson	**248**	90.9%
Drug Litter - Rubbish	**638**	47.2%
Drug misuse (needles)	**595**	89.2%
Drug dealing	**83**	45.5%
Excrement/Urinating	**277**	48.1%
Fly tipping/Littering	**590**	39.6%
Graffiti	**111**	23.1%
Rough Sleepers	**2387**	83.8%
Suspicious Individuals	**242**	51.2%
River Safety	**76**	53.1%
Left Belongings (was removed)	**6**	100.0%
VAWG Incidents	**176**	93.8%
Aggressive behaviour	**943**	45.6%
Refuse to leave toilets	**5**	100.0%
Amplified Music	**48**	6.3%
Returning within 48	**15**	100.0%
Sitting on Floor	**329**	84.9%

Incident types – <u>increase</u> in recorded incidents

Incident Type	Total reported (01.03.23 – 31.03.26)	3 year % change (increase)
Dog fouling	7	50%
Personal items left	425	72.5%
Shoplifting	1037	57.7%

Summary of enforcement action

Over the three-year period (2023-2026) reported enforcement statistics indicate that the Police and/or Authorised Council Officers took enforcement action to address breaches of the prohibitions set out in the Order. Follow up action over the three-year period included Police and Council issued 9 warnings, 7 fixed penalty notices were issued and the successful institution of legal proceedings through 5 prosecutions pursued for unpaid fixed penalty notices. In adopting this

approach, the Police and the Council have made best use of their resources to deal with lower-level anti-social behaviour.

Specific consultation and engagement with intended audiences and target groups for the service change

A public consultation was undertaken in accordance with the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 Statutory Guidance.

Shropshire Council sought the views and comments from the public on extending the Order for a further 3 years from August 2026. Anti-social behaviour data has been collected in Shrewsbury Town Centre between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2026 by Shrewsbury Town Council, through the multiagency operational group 'Team Shrewsbury'.

This consultation ran from 2nd June 2026 to 16th June 2026, which whilst is a short consultation period it gained 31 online responses and 1 email response. The survey was promoted weekly via Shropshire Council's Get Involved website and on social media channels, to ensure there was widespread visibility

Overall, the online respondent feedback indicates clear support for the continuation of the Shrewsbury Town Centre PSPO. Most respondents had read the accompanying Evaluation Report, and there was strong agreement that the purpose of the PSPO, the reasons for extension, and the consultation process were clearly explained. Respondents also showed strong support for the seven existing PSPO categories, with many reporting direct negative experiences linked to anti-social behaviour, particularly around safety concerns, drinking and drug use, urination and defecation, intimidation, littering, and groups congregating in public spaces.

Although many respondents felt that the PSPO has helped reduce anti-social behaviour and contributed to a safer and more pleasant town centre, the feedback also highlights continuing concerns about enforcement, reporting processes, displacement of issues to surrounding areas, and the need to consider vulnerable people, public toilet provision, seating and wider support services. The overall balance of feedback is that the PSPO is valued and should be extended, while also being reviewed and implemented in a way that is clear, proportionate, consistently enforced and linked to wider partnership responses.

Initial equality impact assessment by grouping (Initial health impact assessment is included below this table)

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have for a grouping, through stating this in the relevant column, including if it is anticipated to be neutral (no impact).

Please also record in here your headline rationale for the ratings you have given.

Protected Characteristic groupings and other groupings locally identified in Shropshire	**High negative impact** *Stage Two ESHIA required*	**High positive impact** *Stage One ESHIA required*	**Medium positive or negative impact** *Stage One ESHIA required*	**Low positive, negative, or neutral impact (please specify)** *Stage One ESHIA required*
Age (please include children, young people, young carers, young people leaving care, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group e.g., a child or young person for whom there are safeguarding concerns e.g., an older person with a disability)				Low to medium positive including those who are vulnerable or consider themselves vulnerable when out in the public realm
Disability (please include cancer; HIV/AIDS; learning disabilities; mental health conditions and syndromes; multiple sclerosis; neurodiverse conditions such as autism; hidden disabilities such as Crohn's disease; physical and/or sensory disabilities or impairments)				Low to medium positive including those who are vulnerable or consider themselves vulnerable when out in the public realm
Gender re-assignment (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Low to medium positive
Marriage and Civil Partnership (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Low to medium positive
Pregnancy and Maternity (please include associated aspects: safety, caring				Low to medium positive

responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
Race (please include ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller)				Low to medium positive
Religion or Belief (please include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Nonconformists; Rastafarianism; Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Veganism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)				Low to medium positive
Sex (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Low to medium positive
Sexual Orientation (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)				Low to medium positive
Other: Social Inclusion (please include households in poverty or on low incomes; people for whom there are safeguarding concerns; people you consider to be vulnerable; people with health inequalities; refugees and asylum seekers; rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness; and rural communities)				Low to medium positive including support to rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness
Other: Carers (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities)				Low to medium positive
Other: Veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families (as per Armed Forces Act 2023)				Low to medium positive including support to vulnerable individuals
Other: Young people leaving care				Low to medium positive

Initial health and wellbeing impact assessment by category

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have with regard to health and wellbeing, through stating this in the relevant column, including if it is anticipated to be neutral (no impact).
Please also record in here your headline rationale for the ratings you have given.

Health and wellbeing: individuals and communities in Shropshire	**High negative impact** *Part Two HIA required*	**High positive impact**	**Medium positive or negative impact**	**Low positive negative or neutral impact (please specify)**
Will the proposal have a *direct impact* on an individual's health, mental health and wellbeing? For example, would it cause ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation? .				Low to medium positive. Reduced potential for environmental contamination and associated health risks.
Will the proposal *indirectly impact* an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing? For example, will it affect their ability to be physically active, choose healthy food, reduce drinking and smoking? .				Low to medium positive
Will the policy have a *direct impact* on the community - social, economic and environmental living conditions that would impact health? For example, would it affect housing, transport, child development, education, employment opportunities, availability of green space or climate change mitigation? .				Low to medium positive. Cleaner, and perceived safer environments may lead to greater use of outdoor spaces.
Will there be a likely change in *demand* for or access to health and social care services? For example: Primary Care, Hospital Care, Community Services, Mental Health, Local Authority services including Social Services?				Neutral to low positive where admission to health care services are directed towards early

.				help minimising emergency admissions e.g. for drug and alcohol misuse

Initial health equity assessment	
For the following categories, please complete with the expected impacts of this service change on wider inequalities, not just those that are health-related (whether positive, negative, or neutral) – include any additional information you feel is pertinent or useful. **Consider and record which you can control, which you can influence, and which may be out of your control**.	
Which population groups/demographics will face health impacts as a result of this change (if any)? • Socio-Economically Deprived • Geographic Deprivation (inc. Rurality) – *if so, where?* • Inclusion Health & Vulnerable Groups[1] • Other	*In particular, people experiencing homelessness, individuals with substance dependency (including street drinkers), and those with mental health conditions may be adversely affected by restrictions on street presence, and the ability to remain in public spaces or store belongings.* *These measures lead to displacement from the town centre, which without careful mitigations can lead to reduced access to support services, and increased stress and marginalisation. Referrals onto appropriate support services are a crucial mitigation to avoid potential relocation of issues.*
What mitigations/enhancements are already in place, or what mitigations/enhancements do you plan to include for the foreseeable consequences of these changes?	*Council wide programmes across the organisation are moving towards early intervention and prevention and aim to identify at-risk groups and individuals before the need for enforcement action, ensuring that support is available without dispersing anti-social behaviour to harder to reach locations.*

1- *Inclusion health is an umbrella term used to describe people who are socially excluded, who typically experience multiple overlapping risk factors for poor health, such as poverty, violence, and complex trauma. This includes people who experience homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, vulnerable migrants, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, sex workers, people in contact with the justice system and victims of modern slavery. Health impacts for this wide grouping will therefore potentially be the same as those recorded under the Social Inclusion category in the equality impact table.*

Guidance Notes

1. Legal Context

It is a legal requirement for local authorities to assess the equality and human rights impact of changes proposed or made to services. It is up to us as an authority to decide what form our equality impact assessment may take. By way of illustration, some local authorities focus more overtly upon human rights; some include safeguarding. It is about what is considered to be needed in a local authority's area, in line with local factors such as demography and strategic objectives as well as with the national legislative imperatives.

Carrying out these impact assessments helps us as a public authority to ensure that, as far as possible, we are taking actions to meet the general equality duty placed on us by the Equality Act 2010, and to thus demonstrate that the three equality aims are integral to our decision-making processes. These are: eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations.

These screening assessments for any proposed service change go to Cabinet as part of the committee report, or occasionally direct to Full Council, unless they are ones to do with Licensing, in which case they go to Strategic Licensing Committee.

Service areas would ordinarily carry out a screening assessment, or Stage One equality impact assessment. This enables energies to be focussed on review and monitoring and ongoing evidence collection about the positive or negative impacts of a service change upon groupings in the community, and for any adjustments to be considered and made accordingly.

These screening assessments are recommended to be undertaken at timely points in the development and implementation of the proposed service change.

For example, a Stage One ESHIA would be a recommended course of action before a consultation. This would draw upon the evidence available at that time, and identify the target audiences, and assess at that initial stage what the likely impact of the service change could be across the national Protected Characteristic groupings and our additional local categories. This ESHIA would set out intended actions to engage with the groupings, particularly those who are historically less likely to engage in public consultation eg young people, as otherwise we would not know their specific needs.

A second Stage One ESHIA would then be carried out after the consultation, to say what the feedback was, to set out changes proposed as a result of the feedback, and to say where responses were low and what the plans are to engage with groupings who did not really respond. This ESHIA would also draw more upon actions to review impacts in order to mitigate the negative and accentuate the positive.

Meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty through carrying out these ESHIAs is very much about using them as an opportunity to demonstrate ongoing engagement across groupings and to thus visibly show we are taking what is called 'due regard' of the needs of people in Protected Characteristic groupings.

If the screening indicates that there are likely to be high negative impacts for groupings within the community, the service area would need to take advice on whether or not to carry out a full report, or Stage Two assessment. This is resource intensive but will enable more evidence to be collected that will help the service area to reach an informed opinion.

In practice, Stage Two or Full Screening Assessments have only been recommended twice since 2014, as the ongoing mitigation of negative equality impacts should serve to keep them below the threshold for triggering a Full Screening Assessment. The expectation is that Full Screening Assessments in regard to Health Impacts may occasionally need to be undertaken, but this would be very much the exception rather than the rule.

2. Council Wide and Service Area Policy and Practice on Equality, Social Inclusion and Health

This involves taking an equality and social inclusion approach in planning changes to services, policies, or procedures, including those that may be required by Government. The decisions that you make when you are planning a service change need to be recorded, to demonstrate that you have thought about the possible equality impacts on communities and to show openness and transparency in your decision-making processes.

This is where Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessments (ESHIAs) come in. Where you carry out an ESHIA in your service area~~,~~ this provides an opportunity to show:

- What evidence you have drawn upon to help you to recommend a strategy or policy or a course of action to Cabinet or to Strategic Licensing Committee.
- What target groups and audiences you have worked with to date.
- What actions will you take in order to mitigate any likely negative impact upon a group or groupings, and enhance any likely positive effects for a group or groupings; and
- What actions you are planning to monitor and review the impact of your planned service change.

The formal template is there not only to help the service area but also to act as a stand-alone for a member of the public to read. The approach helps to identify whether or not any new or significant changes to services, including policies, procedures, functions, or projects, may have an adverse impact on a particular group of people, and whether the human rights of individuals may be affected.

There are nine Protected Characteristic groupings defined in the Equality Act 2010. The full list of groupings is: Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion or Belief; Sex; and Sexual Orientation.

There is also intersectionality between these. Eg a young person with a disability would be in the groupings of Age and Disability, and if they described themselves as having a faith they would then also be in the grouping of Religion or Belief. We demonstrate equal treatment to people who are in these groups and to people who are not, through having what is termed 'due regard' to their needs and views when developing and implementing policy and strategy and when commissioning, procuring, arranging, or delivering services.

For the individuals and groupings who may be affected, ask yourself what impact do you think is likely and what actions will you currently anticipate taking, to mitigate or enhance likely impact of the service change? If you are reducing a service, for example, there may be further use you could make of awareness raising through social media and other channels to reach more people who may be affected.

Social inclusion is then a wider additional local category we use in Shropshire, in order to help us to go beyond the equality legislation in also considering impacts for individuals and households with regard to the circumstances in which they may find themselves across their life stages. This could be households on low incomes, or households facing challenges in accessing services, such as households in rural areas, or people that we might consider to be vulnerable, such as refugee families or rough sleepers.

Please note that veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families are a grouping to whom we are required to give due regard under Armed Forces legislation, although in practice we have been doing so for a number of years now.

We also identify two further distinct separate local groupings due to their circumstances: care leavers, as vulnerable individuals, and carers, due to the support they give and the support they need.

When you are not carrying out an ESHIA, you still need to demonstrate and record that you have considered equality in your decision-making processes. It is up to you what format you choose.-You could use a checklist, an explanatory note, or a document setting out our expectations of standards of behaviour, for contractors to read and sign. It may well not be something that is in the public domain like an ESHIA, but you should still be ready for it to be made available.

Both the approaches sit with a manager, and the manager has to make the call, and record the decision made on behalf of the Council.

Carry out an ESHIA:

- If you are building or reconfiguring a building.
- If you are planning to reduce or remove or reconfigure a service.
- If you are consulting on a policy or a strategy.
- If you are bringing in a change to a process or procedure that involves other stakeholders and the wider community as well as particular groupings

Carry out and record your equality and social inclusion approach:

- If you are setting out how you expect a contractor to behave with regard to equality, where you are commissioning a service or product from them.
- If you are setting out the standards of behaviour that we expect from people who work with vulnerable groupings, such as taxi drivers that we license.
- If you are planning consultation and engagement activity, where we need to collect equality data in ways that will be proportionate and non-intrusive as well as meaningful for the purposes of the consultation itself.
- If you are looking at services provided by others that help the community, we need to demonstrate a community leadership approach

3. Council wide and service area policy and practice on health and wellbeing

This is an area to record within our overall assessments of impacts, for which we ask service area leads to consider health and wellbeing impacts, and to look at these in the context of direct and indirect impacts for individuals and for communities.

A better understanding across the Council of these impacts will also better enable the Public Health colleagues to prioritise activities to reduce health inequalities in ways that are evidence based and that link effectively with equality impact considerations and climate change mitigation.

Health in All Policies – Health Impact Assessment

Health in All Policies is an upstream approach for health and wellbeing promotion and prevention, and to reduce health inequalities. The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is the supporting mechanism

- Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is the technical name for a process that considers the wider effects of local policies, strategies and initiatives and how they, in turn, may affect people's health and wellbeing.
- Health Impact Assessment is a means of assessing both the positive and negative health impacts of a policy. It is also a means of developing good evidence-based policy and strategy using a structured process to review the impact.
- A Health Impact Assessment seeks to determine how to maximise health benefits and reduce health inequalities. It identifies any unintended health consequences. These consequences may support policy and strategy or may lead to suggestions for improvements.
- An agreed framework will set out a clear pathway through which a policy or strategy can be assessed and impacts with outcomes identified. It also sets out the support mechanisms for maximising health benefits.

The embedding of a Health in All Policies approach will support Shropshire Council through evidence-based practice and a whole systems approach, in achieving our corporate and partnership strategic priorities. This will assist the Council and

partners in promoting, enabling and sustaining the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities whilst reducing health inequalities.

Individuals

Will the proposal have a *direct impact* on health, mental health and wellbeing?

For example, would it cause ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation?

Will the proposal directly affect an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing?

This could include the following: their ability to be physically active e.g., being able to use a cycle route; to access food more easily; to change lifestyle in ways that are of positive impact for their health.

Provision or change to a service that allows greater reach to those most in need, this can involve relocation, pooling of resource/efficiency changes, or digitisation of some provision. It may also involve greater opportunities for employment, decreasing socio-economic inequality. Physical alternatives to be made available (where practical) to be offered wherever possible to avoid digital exclusion and reduce social isolation. These changes can be either positive or negative depending on the proposal.

An example of this could be that you may be involved in proposals for the establishment of safer walking and cycling routes (e.g., green highways), and changes to public transport that could encourage people away from car usage. and increase the number of journeys that they make on public transport, by foot or on bicycle or scooter. This could improve lives. It could also involve virtual support sessions/appointments to avoid unnecessary travel and provide greater flexibility with individuals work schedules. It may involve greater internet connectivity, to improve remote working opportunities and air pollution concerns, or improved communications coverage through closer partnership working – targeting those most in need of specific information.

Will the proposal *indirectly impact* an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing?

This could include the following: their ability to access local facilities e.g., to access food more easily, or to access a means of mobility to local services and amenities? (e.g. change to bus route)

Similarly to the above, an example of this could be that you may be involved in proposals for the establishment of safer walking and cycling routes (e.g. pedestrianisation of town centres), and changes to public transport that could encourage people away from car usage, and increase the number of journeys that they make on public transport, by foot or on bicycle or scooter. This could improve their health and wellbeing.

Communities

Will the proposal directly or indirectly affect the physical health, mental health, and wellbeing of the wider community**?**

A *direct impact* could include either the causing of ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation, or the promotion of better health.

An example of this could be that safer walking and cycling routes could help the wider community, as more people across groupings may be encouraged to walk or engage in active travel. Increasing physical activity and minimising the time spent sitting down helps to maintain a healthy weight and reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and depression. The UK Chief Medical Officers recommend that adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity, each week. At a wider level, reductions in vehicular emission lead to better air quality, and a reduction in NO_2 in the atmosphere.

An *indirect impact* could mean that a service change could indirectly affect living and working conditions and therefore the health and wellbeing of the wider community.

An example of this could be: an increase in the availability of warm homes would improve the quality of the housing offer in Shropshire and reduce the costs for households of having a warm home in Shropshire. This can reduce the risks of cold related health effects, as well as reduce the financial burden on the population, whose ability to shoulder these costs can vary. Often a health promoting approach also supports our agenda to reduce the level of Carbon Dioxide emissions and to reduce the impact of climate change.

Please record whether at this stage you consider the proposed service change to have a direct or an indirect impact upon communities.

Demand

Will there be a change in demand for or access to health, local authority and social care services?

For example: Primary Care, Hospital Care, Community Services, Mental Health and Social Services?

An example of this could be: a new housing development in an area would affect demand for primary care and local authority facilities and services in that location and surrounding areas. If the housing development does not factor in consideration of availability of green space and safety within the public realm, further down the line there could be an increased demand upon health and social care services as a result of the lack of opportunities for physical recreation, and reluctance of some groupings to venture outside if they do not perceive it to be safe.

For further advice: please contact

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