



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
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## **PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT FOR ASSETS, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION**

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### **Summary Overview**

Shropshire Council has set an ambitious programme for economic growth and regeneration in the county and established a clear framework and objectives for asset management, commercial activity and investment that will enable the council to be more innovative and maintain a sustainable budget.

However, this is set against an economic climate that no-one could have predicted in 2020/21. With the impact of coronavirus pandemic, the focus has been on recovery and support to ensure that businesses survive, but furthermore are equipped to continue to develop and grow. Whilst we continue to deliver the council's Commercial Strategy and Economic Growth Strategy, we have tried to be responsive and supportive. Furthermore, we are also adjusting to the impact of Brexit and what this will mean for our economy.

Our collective strategy is focused on the following objectives in order to achieve increased economic productivity:

- supporting and growing existing businesses
- attracting new investment and development
- retaining and developing skills and talent

It should be noted that the Economic Growth Strategy will be refreshed in 2021/22.

This report will cover the following key headlines:

- Impact of coronavirus pandemic
- Brexit
- Economic opportunities
- Business support
- Improving and retaining skills and talent
- Commercial strategy
- Asset management

### **Impact of coronavirus pandemic**

This year has been unprecedented in terms of economic impact as a result of the pandemic. Whilst we recognise that the effect on our economy will take many years

to recover, Shropshire has stable foundations to build on and is an attractive place to do business. With the significant pace of change in flexible working arrangements, Shropshire is seeing an increase in people living and working here and this trend is expected to continue to rise. However, over this last year, the focus has been on business survival, and the council has played a significant part in ensuring that government financial support has reached businesses at pace. We have also recognised the need to support those leaving education, who will be searching for employment where levels of unemployment are at a record high.

The following provides the levels of financial support to businesses since the beginning of the pandemic, highlighting the complexity of the various grant streams:

#### Business Grant Support from March-August 2020

##### Small Business Grants (SBG)

- £10,000 grant for businesses with a Rateable Value of less than £15,000
- 5,224 businesses supported
- £52,240,000 paid out to businesses

##### Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants (RHL)

- £10,000 grant for businesses within this sector with Rateable Value of less than £15,000
- £25,000 grant for businesses within this sector with Rateable Value between £15,000-£51,000
- 1,709 businesses supported
- £29,645,000 paid out to businesses

##### Extension Grant (discretionary funding)

- Grants of between £2,500-£25,000 available to businesses
- Businesses supported included market traders, charities, shared working space, B&Bs (paying council tax), retail, hospitality and leisure supply chain, care businesses, and business enabling services
- 883 businesses supported alongside 17 market town projects
- £5,132,000 paid out

#### Business Grant Support from November 2020 - Present Time

\*Figures provided below are a snapshot as of 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and grant funding continues to be paid daily to eligible businesses.

##### Local Restrictions Support Grant (CA) (LRSG) - November National Lockdown

- Grants of £1,334, £2,000 or £3,000 dependant on rateable value
- Businesses supported included non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure charities, sports facilities and personal care
- To date, 2,578 businesses supported
- To date, £3,900,672 paid out

#### Discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant (DARG) - November National Lockdown

- Grants of £1,334, £2,000 or £3,000 dependant on rateable value. Home based businesses could apply but the value was capped at £1,334
- Open to all businesses able to show 30% losses due to impact of Covid-19
- To date, 451 businesses supported
- To date, £624,950 paid out

#### Local Restrictions Support Grant (open) (LRSG) - December Tier 2 Lockdown

- Grants of £467, £700 or £1,050 for each two-week tiered period dependant on rateable value
- Focused on businesses in leisure, hospitality and accommodation sectors but discretionary element recently launched to broaden support
- To date, 901 businesses supported
- To date, £1,009,148 paid out

#### Local Restrictions Support Grant (closed) (LRSG) - December Tier 2 Lockdown

- Grants of £667, £1,000 or £1,500 for each two-week tiered period dependant on rateable value
- Focused on businesses mandated to close, in Tier 2 this was only wet led pubs.
- To date, 104 businesses supported
- To date, £156,052 paid out

#### Local Restrictions Support Grant (closed) (LRSG) - Dec 31-Jan 4, Tier 3 Lockdown

- Payments to cover the five-day period before the January national lockdown are currently being worked up before being paid to eligible businesses

#### Local Restrictions Support Grant (sector) (LRSG) - December Tier 2/3 Lockdown

- 10 businesses identified as nightclubs, dance halls, hostess bars or sexual entertainment venues, all of whom could not reopen from March
- Each has been contacted and payments to support these periods are being actioned
- Values mirror those for LRSG (closed)

#### Local Restrictions Support Grant (CA) (LRSG) - January National Lockdown

- Grants of £2,001, £3,000 or £4,500 dependant on rateable value
- Businesses supported included non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure charities, sports facilities and personal care
- Aim to make payments to previously approved LRSG applicants by 22<sup>nd</sup> January. This would see 2,578 further grants paid
- Applications for businesses who have not previously been supported is open

#### Closed Business Lockdown Grant (CBLG) - January National Lockdown

- One off grants of £4,000, £6,000 or £9,000 dependant on rateable value
- Businesses supported included non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure charities, sports facilities and personal care

- Aim to make payments to previously approved LRSB applicants by 22<sup>nd</sup> January. This would see 2,578 further grants paid
- Applications open for businesses through the LRSB application form which is open

#### Discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant (DARG) - January National Lockdown

- Grants of £4,000 to non-business rate payers and £6,000 to business rate payers
- Again, we aim to process payments to previously approved DARG applicants, W/C 25<sup>th</sup> January. This would see 451 further grants paid
- Applications for businesses who have not previously been supported to open W/C 25<sup>th</sup> January

As part of the wider covid recovery work, support to our high streets has ensured that between lockdowns, our retailers have been able to trade in a covid safe environment for their staff and customers. The council has been:

- Supporting town centres and businesses:
- Implementing social distancing measures to comply with public health regulations and to safely manage the reopening of the high streets and town centres
- Installing temporary TROs interventions to additionally help with social distancing requirements
- Processing temporary pavement licencing applications to support Autumn and Winter trading. As at 30<sup>th</sup> September = 28 licences – 1 Ellesmere, 2 Ludlow, 1 Market Drayton, 2 Oswestry and 22 Shrewsbury (source Shropshire Council Trading Standards and Licensing Operations)
- Offering free car parking to encourage visitor and durations extensions
- Maintaining and managing accessible public open space/public realm to support business, residents and mental health initiatives
- Roll out Shropshire Council's 'shop local' campaign
- Support local marketing campaigns e.g. Oswestry and Shrewsbury BID's - 'Shrewsbury's Open' and 'Shrewsbury Open Online', 'Oswestry back open for business' and similar for other market towns to encourage shop local campaigns.

It is also important to highlight the role that digital infrastructure has played in supporting our business communities through the pandemic. From 2013, this has increased from 24% to 94% in 2020 as a direct result of £32.5m public investment into digital contracts. This is also resulted in many retailers jumping onto online platforms recognising that it is not on-line or in-store, but on-line and in-store, to respond to the increase of on-line shopping.

#### **Brexit**

As the deadline loomed for the end of the Transition period the Marches Growth Hub and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce developed a new programme of expert events to help businesses across Shropshire prepare for change following the UK's exit from the EU. It was a collaborative effort to support the county's business community as they faced wide-ranging changes in the business environment.

The EU Exit Programme featured a series of free online events giving expert advice on a wide range of issues relating to the end of the transition period on December 31, when the UK's current trading arrangements with the EU end. The programme commenced in November and ran over a period of two weeks, delivering events to a total of 259 local businesses.

Following the EU Exit programme, the BEIS Secretary of State explored what more could and should be done to reach businesses through more direct contact, in addition to passive communications activity, to increase the reach and intensity of information (including vulnerable sectors and regions), guidance and support. A proposal for additional funding for LEPs for their Growth Hubs to support this activity was developed, with input from the LEP Network and Growth Hubs Cluster Leads. It was confirmed that BEIS secured additional funding of up to £2.4m for LEPs for their Growth Hubs to be spent by 31 March 2021.

The Growth Hubs in Coventry and Warwickshire, Greater Birmingham and Solihull, the Black Country, Worcestershire, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire and The Marches joined forces to help businesses throughout the region understand the key areas of change and the challenges arising from the UK's new trading status. A new website was launched to provide impartial information to help businesses stay informed about the changes that affect them and take advantage of new opportunities arising.

### **Economic opportunities**

One of the major employment opportunities is the review of the Local Plan, which has made good progress during 2020, and most recently has been subject to its statutory Regulation 19 Pre-Submission consultation. The next step is for the Council to agree to submit the Plan for examination, currently scheduled for Spring 2021.

The emerging Local Plan reflects the Council's strategic economic objectives set out in the Economic Growth Strategy, balancing these against other sustainability considerations, and seeking to deliver around 300 hectares of employment land provision over the plan period to 2038. In doing so, the Plan provides for both new stand-alone strategic employment sites, whilst also providing suitable employment opportunities are for built into other mixed-use schemes, including new strategic sites at Clive Barracks and the former Ironbridge Power Station site.

The emerging Local Plan, which sets a housing requirement of around 1400 dwellings a year alongside other strategic policies, seeks to provide better opportunities for working age families to access the local housing market. The emerging Plan also provides policies to enable improvements to the county's infrastructure provision, in particular securing appropriate developer contributions, and a focus on improvements to sustainable transport options, wider communication provision, including broadband.

The Business Park Programme, which is a 15-year programme to invest £50 million in new and existing business parks across Shropshire will bring a huge boost to the local economy and market towns across the County. Business Park Programme

will support local businesses growth and encourage start-ups and inward investment. The work will be carried out in four phases and will support sustainable development by underpinning the role of market towns as key service

and employment sectors. The programme will kick-start with four sites already in council ownership identified for investment, where demand has been established and external funding over the next three years is available. Phase one development will create 25 acres of serviced land and create 270 jobs, while safeguarding a further 210. In total the programme will support up to 1,500 new jobs and safeguard a further 1,500. The Marches Growth Hub and the Economic Growth team receive around 140 queries annually, mostly from new start-ups and existing companies looking for new sites and grow-on space and this programme will help to support that need.

The Future Oswestry group continues to drive forward the growth and aspirations of the town including taking forward Heritage Action Zone Funding from Historic England to support the town with £1.8m secured. Master-planning and movement consultation and engagement commenced to help shape the future of the town.

Oswestry Growth Corridor has been allocated Housing Infrastructure funding and Local Enterprise Partnership funding which has helped to unlock the housing and employment land at Mile End to support new housing and employment land.

Significant progress is continuing with the River Severn Partnership, which is taking a strategic view of flood and water resource management along the River Severn. Government has made a commitment to support the programme and partnership and further proposals are currently being developed by the Environment Agency.

The Shrewsbury Big Town Plan (BTP) programme is moving towards the delivery of key projects for which the Masterplan Vision, Access and Movement Strategy has been commissioned and delivered by consultants. An extensive programme of stakeholder engagement through workshops (pre-Covid) and online webinars has identified the next Big Moves for the BTP, broadly focussing on connecting communities, quality of public space, celebrating heritage and economic growth.

The BTP and Master-planning Vision has received national recognition, including from the Institute for Place Management and the High Streets Task force, and continues to be cited as an example of best practice for contemporary place-making, especially in the advent of the Covid pandemic which has accelerated the significant shift in retail behaviour in town centres. The BTP Partnership continues to sponsor the BTP plan with pace and focus and the recent Festival has commenced a robust programme of consultation and engagement aimed at influencing and refining both the content of the vision, the priorities and next steps, that will be the basis for a detailed delivery programme for at least the next 5 years.

The Smithfield Riverside and Frankwell Strategic Development Framework (SDF) has been commissioned and is at an advanced stage. Focussing on delivery and design/layout principles, the SDF has already generated interest from potential developers and investors. The SDF principles provide a basis for the scale, massing, public realm and movement, infrastructure and contextual considerations relating to its prime location adjacent to the River Severn. The SDF will be finalised Spring 2021 pending final stakeholder engagement, including the Environment Agency. A procurement strategy and delivery plan will be developed to bring the Smithfield

development forward as well as a localised project to Frankwell quay. A phased demolition programme has been developed and preparation for Phase 1 has commenced with the intention of being on-site May/June 2021 (subject to surveys).

The plan to consolidate retail uses to the Darwin centre and the repurposing of Pride Hill is progressing well. This includes the option to re-locate the Council's civic offices with the potential of other partners being part of the re-location. £5m of 'Getting Building Funding' has been secured to support the repurposing project and we will be driving this forward in 2021/22.

The Council has installed new toilets and a Changing Places facility in the Darwin Shopping, alongside a brand-new family room, as part of a series of refurbishments to the mid-level of the Darwin Centre to support the retail and customer experience when visiting and using the centre. We have also created 'The Collective', bringing together independent retailers into a bespoke creative space.

### **Partnership working and business support**

Through partnership working, we established the Economic Task Force to connect with partners working with the business community, Business Improvement Districts, the Marches LEP, Government departments, stakeholders etc. to understand the requirements of businesses, respond to immediate needs and provide as much support as we can to help businesses and residents across Shropshire. A number of subgroups have been established to support key strands of work, which include:

1. Employment and Skills
2. Town Centre recovery
3. Sector focus

The Business Support and Growth team works with the Marches Growth Hub (GH) and a support through the Marches Growth Hub, which has been a lifeline and critical access point for general business support and COVID 19 information and financial support for the local business community. The GH have also connected and engaged with a vast number of businesses who were not aware of what the GH can offer.

GH funding has enabled the team to work with 14 self-employed business advisers/consultants, supporting local businesses who needed help in either setting up a new business or an existing business that was looking for growth and possible change of direction and ways of trading. 'Born out of COVID 19' or 'Grow your way out of COVID 19'. This funding enabled the businesses to have 12 hours intensive support and strengthened the Growth Hub's position in the arena of offering professional and longer-term support. The uptake of the support was so great in Shropshire, the Growth hub has secured extra funding from various underspends in other parts of The Marches area. This will allow the high level of support to continue until the end of the financial year.

Many of our businesses have been exceptionally creative and innovative in their approaches to COVID 19 and found new ways of working and doing business. It has forced businesses to take time out, reflect and review their business and make the necessary positive changes they have been considering, but never had the time to move forward. We have worked with many new Start-Ups and existing businesses who wish to diversify or launch new products and services or embrace new adaptive technologies. However, we have seen numerous casualties throughout Shropshire.

We have seen a good mix of sectors and combination of B2B and B2C engaging with the GH which is partly due to COVID 19. Retail – 40% Leisure and Tourism – 15% Food/Hospitality – 15%, Service – 10% Manufacturing – 10% Construction – 2% Engineering – 4% Social Enterprise – 4%. These figures have fluctuated throughout the year depending on what local grant programmes are available, relative to certain sectors and eligibility.

We have experienced a strong level of contact from pre-start and start-up businesses. We felt this was due to the following: furloughed employees who have previously thought about self-employment now have time to pursue this route as added security if they find at some point they are made redundant; individuals have been made redundant and are considering their options and appreciate it will be very hard to find future employment in Shropshire, as historically the county has had a low level of unemployment; taking control of their own futures whatever that may hold.

This was demonstrated in the strong level of bookings and attendance at '21 Days to Start a Business' programme which was launched in May and had 25 attendees per workshop. The GH ERDF Step Up for Business programme has succeeded the above and will be delivered over the next two years to both Start-Ups and Growth businesses. The GH has:

- During the sixth month period from April 1 to September 30 helped 13,853 businesses and 13,870 individuals access vital information and support.
- Delivered in-depth specialist advice and helped a further 85 businesses with a combined turnover of more than £26m and offered 'high intensity' support to a further 16 companies employing 80 people.
- Helped 238 people start up their own business in the same period and was given top marks for its work by more than 90 per cent of businesses in a satisfaction survey.
- From April 1 to the end of the year, we staged 141 separate events which were attended by 3,450 businesses and generated a total of 7,431 referrals to other programmes and schemes.

The GH also promotes, supports and administers the Shropshire Council Market Drayton Grant Scheme. Many of the grant awards have supported inward investment opportunities such as Valley Motorsport or aided businesses to expand and move onto the Tern Valley Business Park. The scheme has awarded grants in excess of £386K, creating 29 jobs and safeguarding a further 83. Please see below the current position of the scheme.

Digital connectivity is significantly important to businesses and economic growth. A summary of headlines and business implications are noted here:

- To date 68.5k premises have been given access to superfast broadband as a result of the partnership programme with Building Digital UK (BDUK)
- Availability of superfast broadband has risen in the Council area from 24% in 2013 to 94.1% (January 2021)
- Over 64% of premises have now upgraded to superfast broadband as a result of BT & Airband intervention contracts
- Funding has been secured from DCMS to connect 43 Shropshire schools as part of a national BDUK Local Full Fibre Networks initiative

- The Marches and Gloucestershire Business Grant scheme has continued to support ERDF eligible SME's with infrastructure grants of up to £25k to install improved broadband connectivity. 37 SME's have been supported with grants to a value of £618k being defrayed.
- The Government has now turned its digital policy attention to its Planning for Gigabit (PfG) programme with an aspiration to give all premises in the UK access to gigabit-capable broadband by 2033
- In September 2020, Shropshire Council added £1m to Top-Up the national Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme so vouchers for homes/businesses are now worth a maximum of £4K/£7K, respectively.
- Shropshire Council is part of the West Mercia Rural 5G project. This is a research project, and part of the Governments DCMS 5G Test and Trials Programme.

## **Improving and retaining skills and talent**

### Careers and Enterprise Advisor Network

- We currently have 20 senior business volunteers, acting as Business Enterprise Advisers to the schools and colleges.
- With March lockdown and school closures came cancellations of employer engagement events but also new opportunities. The Enterprise Advisers produced video interviews with business contacts for students to help with career insights and employability skills.
- This work is ongoing with Enterprise Advisers and employers creating virtual work experience tasks for young people to complete, such as a Maths challenges, fraud awareness and recruitment.
- The schools have put on live virtual employer encounters to stream a live careers insight talk to one or multiple classes.
- Meole Brace School had 9 employers delivering a talk, answering questions and setting tasks to year 11 students.
- Shrewsbury Colleges Group has invested in a Careers Fair app putting on multiple virtual events that have not only marketed Shrewsbury Colleges group but have supported young people in the schools across the county with their virtual subject tasters event and their post 16 providers event.
- In November 2020 The Marches LEP area became a Careers Hub and a Careers Hub lead has been appointed. This will be used to accelerate Gatsby Benchmark progress across the schools and colleges (the gold standard of Careers Guidance) with an aim to reach the standard across 8 Benchmarks.
- All of our schools have now upgraded to the new digital tool, Compass+. This will enable them to fully track pupils' careers & enterprise experiences against the Gatsby Benchmarks and be able to show more accountability to Ofsted on careers standards.

### General Skills Update

- Currently exploring opportunities with partners to develop a 'skills bootcamp'

- Continued to work with the Centre for Research in Environmental Science and Technology (CREST) by University Centre Shrewsbury
- The Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology (MCMT), is currently undergoing a transformation and we are working with stakeholders around the new model and future relocation to sites in Shrewsbury and Telford. Bridgnorth will remain in the short term.
- Apprenticeship Levy - EG involved as part of the Upskill Shropshire board and have been supporting to release part of the apprenticeship levy to potential SME businesses. Take up has been lower than hoped (potentially covid related) and engagement to support push with the business community. Take up of apprenticeship opportunities within the authority this year has been high.
- Kickstart Programme - 60 placements currently being offered in 2021 with 40 due to start in March and out for recruitment in mid-February.
- Shropshire Ladder - JV and KM attend monthly steering group. Focus around comms and case studies of success stories to be developed with partners.
- Opportunities to support broader skills and apprenticeship activity through the Additional Restrictions (ARG) funding from government. Engagement between departments around potential virtual careers event following the cancellation of the Employment and Skills Show (March).

## **Commercial Strategy**

A lot has been achieved over the last 12 months in terms of delivery of the commercial strategy despite the challenges of dealing with the pandemic. From a financial perspective the key success has been the over achievement of the commercial income target through commercial property acquisition and development in Shropshire. This has in turn helped to safeguard and secure jobs, regenerate local areas and strengthen the local economy.

Key acquisitions including the former Morrisons supermarket Oswestry and Castle View Oswestry, and the completion of the second and infill blocks at the Tannery in Shrewsbury has resulted in income generation of £0.69m, £0.14m over target.

A further pipeline of commercial projects are planned for financial year 2021/22 when the income target increases to over £2m. These will include further commercial property investment, investment in renewable energy projects, decarbonisation vehicle schemes and private power supply contracts for local businesses and homes in the county.

The council will also seek to reduce the number of buildings it uses which are cost and carbon inefficient and not required to deliver the future operating model. The aim being to spend at least £0.5m less on buildings per annum on property running and maintenance costs and invest more in people.

The commercial strategy, economic growth strategy and asset management strategies are closely aligned in respect of civic accommodation in terms of plans, agreed at council in July 2020, to move from the Shirehall and co locate with public sector partners in Shrewsbury town centre by 31 March 2023.

## Asset management

The unprecedented times experienced over the past 12 months has prompted an a huge response from the public sector. In terms of asset management this has covered a significant range of support activities including the following key areas:-

- Keeping back office accommodation open throughout the pandemic such as Shirehall, Mount McKinley and Cantern Brook. Creating a Covid safe and compliant environment for staff through effective facilities management, physical improvements to space configuration, ventilation and managing access to key facilities for essential workers keeping the Council operating.
- Deployment of buildings to support the response including converting facilities to store and distribute PPE, essential food packages, facilitating rent free accommodation for key charities who supporting the most vulnerable during the pandemic. Examples include the repurposing of the former courts space at Shirehall, repurposing Shropshire Food Enterprise Centre,
- Bringing forward sites and buildings to support the national testing programme across the Council's estate and working with partners to make venues available where the Council didn't have available property. Providing venues for the rapid flow testing programme including the Lantern, Oswestry former Morrisons Car Park and the Shirehall overspill car park to name but a few examples.
- Bringing forward sites for the vaccination programme utilising the Council assets including the planning and preparation for Sundorne Sports Village.
- Working alongside Economic Development to actively support the Council's tenants through incredibly difficult times including rent holidays and help and assistance.

Whilst the Asset management teams have responded to deploy resources, property and expertise to support in the Council's response, refocus, recovery and then back to response phases it is recognised the significant step change and opportunity that has presented to change the way in which the Council utilises its estate and property.

Like many other major organisations the Council has been fleet of foot to recognise the asset management opportunity in the face of the devastating pandemic. The forced acceleration in mobile and agile working supported by the ICT infrastructure has provided the blue print for a significant optimisation of the Council's administrative estate.

Asset management planning has led to the ability to potentially vacate the Council's biggest administrative base and home for over 50 years, the Shirehall. The planning around depersonalised and bookable work space for the staff has provided the confidence and platform to relinquish the reliance on the 'time expired asset' and has driven the planning for rationalisation and significant cost reduction for the administrative portfolio.

In line with the Council's Asset management strategy this has led to the development of plans to support 'set down' spaces around the County and the plan to deliver a massive culture change for the authority.

Work has been rapidly accelerated to launch a booking system, clear down and reconfigure space to create a new environment for the Shirehall for its remaining usable life and to develop the same plans for other venues across the County. The

planned disposal of the site will create much needed residential land and will save the significant maintenance burden towards the planned vacation in 2023. The planned utilisation of just the lower floors avoids costly fire improvement works and has been fully agreed with SFRS. Asset led transformation will deliver change across the administrative estate and free up funds to support the staff and customer facing delivery.

Asset led transformation is not just limited to the administrative estate with a huge emphasis on Service Asset Management Planning work well underway to drive the most efficient use of the Council's assets for service delivery. This provides the opportunity for services to transform and evolve to provide customer facing facilities in conjunction with partners.

Ultimately the estate will be rationalised with assets repurposed where appropriate to be self-sustaining or more importantly income generating. Those which are underperforming, surplus or do not support the Council's climate agenda will be disposed to support the capital programme with substantial programme planned for financial year 2021/22.

In terms of disposals, capital receipts totalling £3.555m have been generated to date in 2020/21 and a further £1.261m is currently projected to be achieved by the end of the financial year.

### **Commercial professional services**

Shire Services is the council's fully traded commercial service which provides catering, cleaning, facilities management and hospitality services to customers within Shropshire and further afield.

During financial year 2020/21 the focus has understandably been concerned with managing the pandemic response for the catering, cleaning, student accommodation and Facilities Management. Arrangements and procedures had to be put in place and communicated to customers and staff at speed to ensure covid secure arrangements were in place for schools, corporate buildings and in the student accommodation buildings. The fast pace of the changing guidance and advice has had to be absorbed, reviewed and implemented.

A dedicated Covid helpline has been set up staff and customers which operates 7 days per week, including Bank Holidays, to provide advice and support with covid related issues. This has enabled us to keep a close overview of staff who are unavailable for work due to self-isolating or other Covid related absences. Maintaining an appropriate level of staff in each site, when so many are absent due to general sickness and Covid related absences has been very challenging at times during the year.

Even with schools being partially closed at points through 2020 and 2021, the requirement for cleaning has increased, with many schools introducing additional day time cleaning to minimise the risk to staff and pupils.

During the first lockdown the service worked with the Community Resilience Team and our suppliers, to ensure food parcels were prepared and distributed to vulnerable people across the County, including parcels for vulnerable families during the school holidays.

The council's Property Services Group (PSG) provides a wide range of property professional services for the council, public sector partners, schools & colleges and housing companies in Shropshire. PSG provides property maintenance services for 113 schools, academies and education centres.

The team has delivered the Learning & Skills Capital Condition & Suitability Programme totalling £1.5m in 2020 along with the Corporate Landlord Capital Programme and the planned and reactive maintenance programme.

PSG has submitted approximately £0.4m of condition improvement bids for Shropshire schools and is leading two significant education projects being the Haughmond Federation Project, valued at £9m, and the Meole Brace secondary school five class extension project valued at £2.1m which will be the first Passivhaus building delivered by Shropshire Council and will provide genuine evidence of the Council's commitment to addressing climate change.

Further projects delivered include primary school boiler and electricity upgrades, repair work to our historic estate and management of the disabled facilities grant programme.

<p><b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b></p> <p>Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire 2017 – 21</p> <p>Shrewsbury Big Town Plan</p> <p>Updated Commercial Strategy 2020 to 2023</p> <p>Asset Management Strategy 2020 to 2025</p>
<p><b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b></p> <p>Councillor Steve Charmley, Portfolio Holder Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration</p>
<p><b>Local Member</b></p> <p>All Members</p>