

**Committee and Date**

Cabinet

19 November 2025

CABINET**Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2025**

**In The Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ
10.30 am – 12.10 pm**

Responsible Officer: Amanda Holyoak

Email: amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk

Cabinet Members Present:

Councillors Heather Kidd, Alex Wagner, Bernie Bentick, Roger Evans, Andy Hall, Ruth Houghton, James Owen, David Vasmer and David Walker

Other Members Present:

Group Leaders: Dawn Husemann (Reform UK), Dan Thomas (Conservative), Rosemary Dartnall (Labour), Duncan Kerr (Deputy Group Leader Green and Progressive Independent)

Councillor Ed Potter, Chair of Economy & Environment Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Samuel Walmsley, Chair of Highways Contract Task and Finish Group

49 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Rob Wilson.

50 Disclosable Interests

Councillor James Owen and Councillor David Walker both declared an interest in item 6a, Skateboard and BMX Pump Track Provision in Oswestry, as they were members of Oswestry Town Council.

51 Minutes**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September be confirmed as a correct record.

52 Public Question Time

Public questions were received from John Crowe in relation to the Guildhall and Shirehall and John Palmer in relation to the North West Relief Road.

The full questions and responses to them are available here: [Response to Public Questions - 15.10.2025.pdf](#)

53 Member Question Time

Councillor Chris Lemon had submitted a question in relation to bus services for Bowbrook Meadows and Darwin's Walk in Radbrook.

The full question and response to it is available from here: [Response to Member Questions - 15.10.2025.pdf](#)

54 Scrutiny Items

a Scrutiny Item - Skateboard & BMX Pump Track Provision in Oswestry

Cllrs James Owen and David Walker left the meeting for the duration of this item.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report and corrected the names of the local members as listed at the end of the report to Councillors James Owen, Duncan Kerr, Wendy Owen and Mark Owen. The Cabinet discussed work undertaken in looking at a transfer of land in Oswestry to Oswestry Town Council for a skatepark and BMX pump track, as recommended by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Portfolio Holder for Finance confirmed that Cabinet supported the need and benefits of such a facility and confirmed that he had instructed officers to complete an options appraisal of available sites, aiming for a recommendation at a future cabinet meeting.

Responding to a question about timescale he explained that Shropshire Council would be required to consult and complete an options appraisal before any transfer was made but proposed an additional recommendation that he instruct the Head of Property and Development that the work is to be undertaken rapidly with a report on the options appraisal brought back to the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2025. The additional recommendation was seconded.

RESOLVED:

3.1 that Cabinet accepts the need, demand and benefit of a skatepark and BMX Pump Track in Oswestry and will work to deliver a new facility in an appropriate location in partnership with Oswestry Town Council (contingent on the Town Council's support and funding.)

3.2 to instruct the Head of Property and Development to complete an options appraisal of available sites within the Council's ownership, considering the most appropriate and beneficial location, and bring back a report to a future Cabinet meeting with a final recommendation.

3.3 to instruct the Head of Property and Development that the work is to be undertaken rapidly with a report on the options appraisal brought back to the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2025.

b Scrutiny Item - Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group Briefing Paper

Councillor Dawn Husemann, Chair of the Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group provided an update on the work of the Group. She presented the initial findings and recommendations of the Group, which had conducted research and interviews to identify key factors for successful partnership working between Shropshire Council and Town & Parish Councils.

The update highlighted three critical areas:– communication; support and training; and provision of essential information, as foundational to the success of the partnership and specific actions needed in each area, such as improving communication channels, providing a single point of contact, and ensuring transparency about service transfers.

Next steps were outlined for exploring proposals for clustering arrangements, emphasising the importance of engaging volunteers and stakeholders, and the need for ongoing scrutiny to ensure the partnership foundations are robust and effective.

Cabinet welcomed the Task and Finish Group's report, thanking it for the valuable, well-researched body of work and recommendations informing decision making for partnership working and service transfers. The Deputy Leader emphasised the importance of the recommendations, and said the administration aimed to accept and implement them as much as possible, particularly recognising the need for culture change and improved communication with town and parish councils.

Cabinet acknowledged the challenges ahead, especially the diversity among town and parish councils and reaffirmed its commitment to ongoing scrutiny and further work utilising the Group's findings.

55 CPC Action Plan

The Leader introduced the report explaining that the action plan was based on 10 recommendations for improvement set out in the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge report. The plan was being integrated into the Council's Improvement Board which would be chaired by an independent chair and include group leaders and mentors. The LGA had provided funding and additional support to help implement the action plan, recognising the council's significant financial stress and limited internal capacity.

The action plan addressed both financial and cultural change with a focus on valuing staff, improving recruitment and retention and supporting residents.

There was cross-party support for the plan, with an emphasis on need for fundamental cultural change and readiness to support the Improvement Board.

RESOLVED:

To agree the CPC action plan and the plan's integration into the overarching improvement plan as the first section of the Council's Strategic Plan.

56 Financial Monitoring Period 5

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the period 5 report which showed the council's financial position at the end of August, with a worsening forecast and a predicted overspend of £1.251 million if no further reductions or income increases occurred. The budget and savings target for the year was set by the previous administration, requiring £41m in savings not previously achieved, plus another £19 million for the current year totalling £60 million. Of this there were no concrete plans in place to save over £28 million. Net expenditure was predicted to increase by £35.5 million, and even after using all general reserves, an overspend would remain.

The Portfolio Holder said that the emergency measures implemented in September, including spend control boards and a focus on reducing spend and delivering savings should be reflected in improvement in the period 6 report.

Discussion covered how central government funding formulas did not recognise the cost of delivery of rural services and disadvantaged rural councils like Shropshire. The removal of the Rural Services Delivery Grant, and statutory service pressures (especially adult and children's social care) were driving overspends. Efficiency savings alone would not be enough, and difficult decisions on service changes would be needed. The Leader reiterated that the Administration was committed to transparency and consultation with councillors and the public on proposals.

RESOLVED:

that Cabinet Members:

A. Ensure emergency action is continued by all Officers between October and March to improve the forecast position (currently a projected spend over budget at Period 5 of £35.531m). Such action should predominantly focus on reducing spend, increasing income, delivering remaining savings and significant mitigating actions to control in-year spending pressures.

B. Note that Operations Boards, which have been in place from August 2025, continue to challenge all in-year spending.

C. Note that the Period 5 position (as at the end of August) forecasts indicative level of savings delivery of £33.981m (57%),

D. Note the projected General Fund Balance is now negative (£1.251m), indicating a potentially illegal financial position by the end of the financial year if proposed action does not improve this position.

E. Note that, in light of the Council's current financial position and ongoing engagement with MHCLG, active discussions regarding Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) have commenced

57 Draft Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2030/31

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the first MTFS under the new administration, covering the latest forecast for 2025/26, an early draft for 2026/27, and indicative figures for subsequent years.

Despite current financial measures, a savings shortfall of approximately £26 million remained, with further mitigating actions to be reflected in the December update. A potential funding gap of £81.7 million for the next financial year was reported, alongside a cumulative gap of £139 million over five years. Exceptional Financial Support from government was expected to be required, and discussions were ongoing. The Portfolio Holder highlighted depleted reserves and worsening projections compared to the previous year.

Significant pressures on adult and children's social care were identified as major cost drivers, with growth assumptions of 6.5% for adults and 12% for children in 2026/27. The robustness of these projections were discussed and the importance of detailed analysis to ensure efficiency and accuracy. During discussion, members noted demographic challenges, complexity of social care cases, and high referral rates, particularly in domestic abuse cases. Initiatives such as the Stepping Stones project aimed to reduce demand, but progress would take time. Responding to a question, the Portfolio Holder for Social Care reported that benchmarking showed Shropshire's placement costs remain mid to low compared to neighbouring authorities, and the Local Government Association would support transformation in adult social care.

The Leader emphasised the need for transparency and early communication of difficult decisions to residents. Consultations on the budget would begin in December, with urgent proposals brought forward to inform towns and parishes as they prepared precepts for January and February. A Budget Forum would precede formal meetings, and the aim to become an enabling authority, allowing local councils to take on services where appropriate was emphasised. Members stressed the importance of giving residents time to plan for the impact of these decisions.

The Portfolio Holder noted that Shropshire was not alone in facing these challenges, with many shire authorities in similar positions. Lobbying through the County Councils Network (CCN) and support from the LGA were ongoing to secure government assistance and address the financial emergency. The MTFS sets out the scale of the challenge and the urgent need for collaborative action to deliver a sustainable financial position.

RESOLVED:

3.1 That Cabinet discuss the emerging pressures for the coming year and in the context of the new direction for Shropshire Council work alongside officers to identify and agree the decisions necessary to achieve a legal budget for 2026/27 and a balanced financial position across the medium term.

3.2. That Cabinet requires Officers to continue work to; • Reduce all non-essential spend for 2025/26 and review identified pressures • Prepare savings options for the coming year,

to secure a balanced budget for approval by Council in February 2026. • Work with MHCLG to actively pursue options for Exceptional Financial Support over the MTFS Period

58 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

The Deputy Leader explained that the Ombudsman has introduced a new complaints handling code for councils, with much more stringent recommendations. While not a legal requirement, councils were being strongly advised to have it in place by March 2026 and to start self-assessing against it from next year. The new code set tougher targets, such as a 10-day response time for stage 1 complaints (with an additional 10 days for extensions), compared to the council's current 30-day target. The council's average was below 20 days, but the new code would require faster responses.

The Deputy Leader acknowledged that meeting the new standards would require significantly more resources. Given current financial constraints, the council could not commit extra resources to complaint handling, any additional resources would be better used to improve services and reduce complaints in the first place.

A “best endeavours” approach was proposed —self-assessing against the Ombudsman's code and aiming to meet the new requirements as far as possible, while being honest about limitations due to lack of resources.

He reported that a self-assessment had found that the council fully complied with 27 elements of the code, partly complied with 23, and did not comply with 16. The council did not currently have a “positive complaint handling culture” and needed to improve in this area. He emphasised the need for a culture change - seeing complaints as opportunities to learn and improve, and treating complainants with respect and positivity.

The Deputy Leader said the council would be transparent with members and the public about the challenges in meeting the new code. He reiterated that the aim was to improve complaint handling holistically, as part of a broader push to be a more open and customer-friendly council.

RESOLVED:

3.1 That Cabinet support the application of the Code from 1st April 2026, focusing on compliance whilst acknowledging that resource challenges may lead to some practical challenges and delays and noting that action may be taken by the Ombudsman in respect of any failures to implement the Code in full from the new financial year.

3.2 That Cabinet acknowledges that collective effort will be required across the Council to ensure that complaints are prioritised appropriately.

3.3 That Cabinet support the requirement within the Code for Oversight and Scrutiny of the complaints handling processes and annual reporting to Elected Members (to include the Ombudsman's annual letter and performance data).

59 Highways Future Operating Model

Ahead of the resolution to exclude press and public due to the need to discuss exempt information, the Leader invited the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Environment to speak so that he was able to reiterate that the Administration recognised highways are critically important for residents and was one of its key priorities.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Environment explained that the new administration wished to see greater control of core highway services with high level of collaboration with local providers, town and parish councils. He thanked the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group for the work they had done and extremely useful recommendations helping to shape the process going forwards. A contract extension of one year with Kier was proposed which would allow the council to continue to develop a future service model that aligned with its vision.

The Chair of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee said cross party working had been essential in evaluating and informing the proposals recommended to Cabinet. The Task and Finish Group had worked closely with council officers and gained valuable insights and understanding of highways services, especially in relation to the Kier contract. Additionally, the Scrutiny Committee recognised that more time was needed to shape new ways of working for the future, especially taking into account the roles that town and parishes can play in the future service model, and the work of the Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group

60 Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED:

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

61 Scrutiny Item - EXEMPT Report of the Highways Contract Review Task and Finish Group

RESOLVED:

To consider and take into account the recommendations set out in the report to inform decisions regarding the highways future operating model.

62 Highways Future Operating Model Report

RESOLVED:

To approve the recommendations set out in the report.

63 Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 3 December 2025 at 10.30 am.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: