

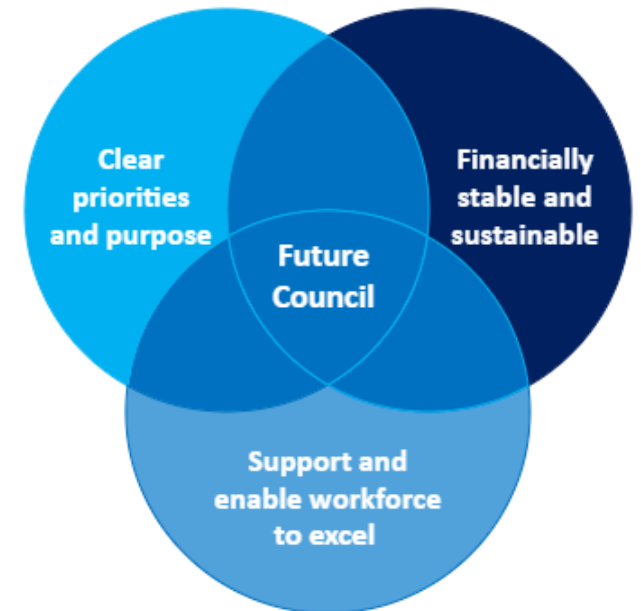
Draft for consideration
by Cabinet 03/12/25

Improvement Plan

Our Plan to become a financially sustainable council with clear priorities and a high performing workforce for the benefit of Shropshire and its residents

November 2025

Draft



The Council needs to improve. And we need to demonstrate to our residents, partners, and the Government that we are doing so with urgency.

To deliver, enable and influence for the county, the Council needs to quickly get better at managing its finances, be clearer on its priorities, and continue to support our workforce to excel. This Plan sets out how we will do that.

It shows our commitment to address immediate challenges, while ensuring a focus on the future and how the Council will need to look, feel, and operate to best serve the needs of the county and its residents, and being aware of changes in national policy.

We have a serious financial position to address. There is an immediate focus on that. But improvement is not just about fixing problems; it is about creating opportunities. Through this Plan, we will also strengthen our culture, invest in our people, and embed practices that drive continuous improvement. In doing so we will be better equipped to deliver our commitments to residents.

Our ambition is to be a council that is modern, efficient and sustainable —one that operates effectively, works in partnership, stays focused on residents, and is clear on its role and purpose. This Plan provides the framework for achieving that ambition. It outlines the priorities we will focus on, the changes we need to make, and the governance and assurance arrangements that will keep us on track.

We will measure progress transparently, manage risks proactively, and ensure resources are aligned to deliver the outcomes our communities need and expect. An Improvement Board, supported by the Local Government Association (LGA), will provide expert peer challenge and support, while holding us to account for delivery of the Plan.

Delivering the Plan will be a collective effort. Success will depend on collaboration across teams and with partners, strong leadership, and a shared determination to make a positive difference. Together we will build a council that is not only better than today but ready for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

Sitting alongside a new Corporate Plan 2026-30, Shropshire 2050 Plan, and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, it forms part of our overall Shropshire Plan that sets out the strategic priorities and purpose of the Council, and the improvement and resources needed to achieve those.

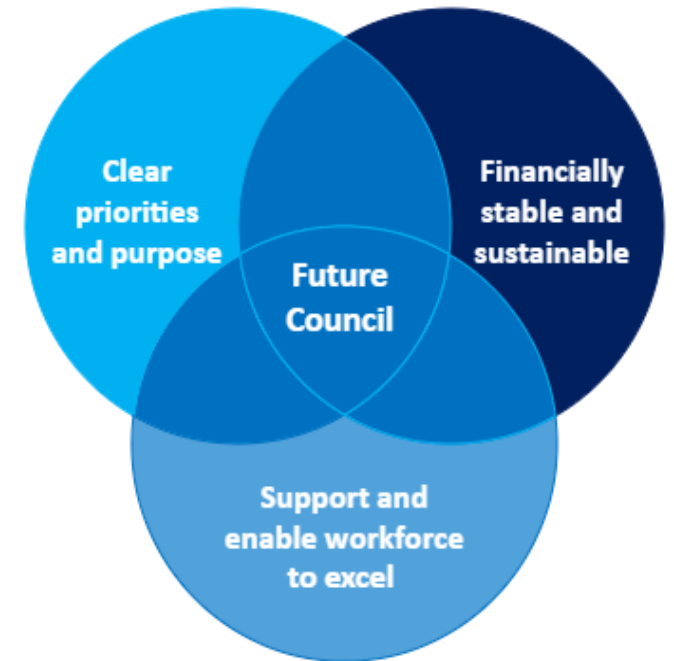
Councillor Heather Kidd
Leader of Shropshire Council

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Section 1

Introduction



Purpose of this Plan

This Improvement Plan sets out how Shropshire Council will improve. Its aim is to equip the Council to be a 'best value' authority that delivers, enables, and influences for Shropshire and its residents by:

- **Being financially stable and sustainable**
- **Having clear priorities and purpose**
- **Supporting and enabling our workforce to excel**

The Plan is not a detailed delivery plan. It is a document that provides an overarching framework for our improvement activity. It sets out the aims and priorities that will address the immediate challenges we face, while we work towards longer term change.

Delivering the priorities in the Improvement Plan will provide assurance to residents, councillors, officers, and partners that we are improving how we operate and perform so that we deliver, enable, and influence outcomes for the county and its residents in the most effective, efficient and economical way.

The priority programmes of action referred to in the Plan, provide the basis for our improvement over the next 18 months. The aims will remain as the overall ambitions for our continuous improvement. But the priorities we focus on to achieve them will evolve over time to reflect progress and respond to changing circumstances, policy direction, and pressures.

The need for change

The Improvement Plan has been developed as a response to several events, external reports and recommendations:

- A Financial emergency was declared by the Cabinet on 10th September 2025, after monitoring revealed a significant forecasted year-end overspend that cannot be mitigated by the Council's current resources. Immediate action is required, and a plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability beyond that is needed.
- A Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge delivered in July 2025, and reported to Full Council on 25th September 2025, provided observations and recommendations for improvement, including addressing the financial position and other areas of how the Council operates.
- An External Auditor letter and subsequent Statutory Recommendation 2025 identified that the Council must take steps to mitigate the forecasted end of year overspend and subsequent impacts, review service delivery, improve robustness of savings plans and prevent reliance on Exceptional Financial Support.
- External inspections carried out by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for Adult Social Care - rated as 'Good' (Feb 2025), and Ofsted for Children's Social Care rated as 'Outstanding' (August 2025). Both inspections identified improvement opportunities and priorities.

- Best Value Duty and Standards. The Statutory Guidance for Best Value Authorities provides the characteristics of a well-functioning authority. We know there are areas to improve on before we can confidently demonstrate excellence against all characteristics.

Immediate action

We have not waited for the development of this Plan to address the challenges. Immediate action has been taken to respond to the financial emergency, including spend control measures and increased monitoring. A draft Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2030/31 was presented to Cabinet on 15th October 2025, updating the base position to inform the plan to achieve a stable and sustainable financial position over the medium term.

An [Action Plan](#) including initial activity against the recommendations made by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge was reported to the Cabinet on 15th October 2025. Those actions are included in this Plan.

The Council's Audit and Governance Committee will consider the External Auditor Annual Report and its recommendations at its meeting on 27th November 2025.

Improvement Board

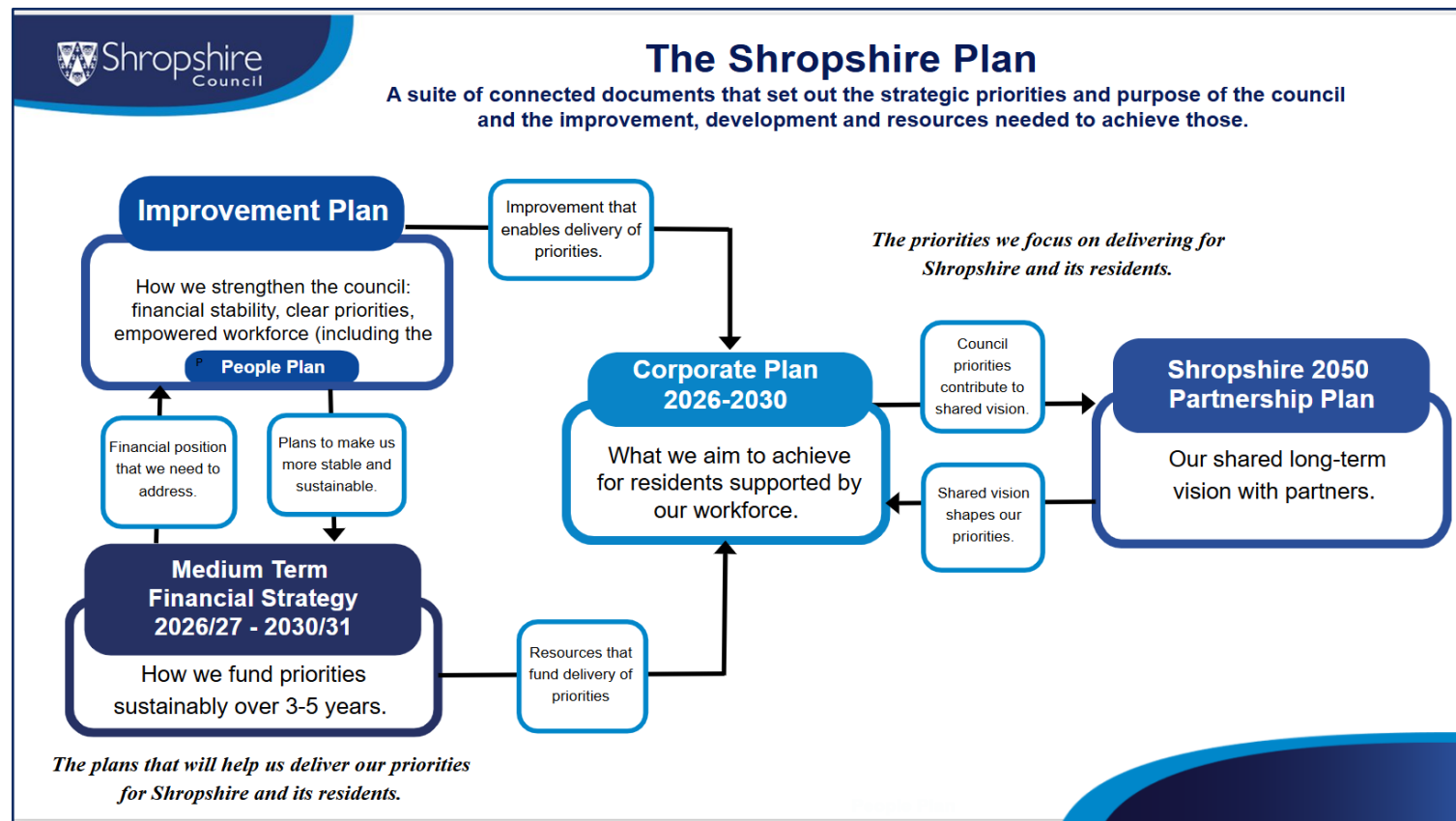
One of the key recommendations from the LGA Peer Challenge was to establish an independently chaired **Improvement Board**. The Board met for its first meeting on 10th November 2025 and will continue to provide external advice, challenge, and expertise to the Council in driving forward the delivery of this Improvement Plan.

Relationship with other strategic plans

This Improvement Plan sits alongside other plans (see Figure 1) to provide an overall framework for the continued improvement of the Council. Together they provide the key components of the **Shropshire Plan**, setting out the strategic priorities and purpose of the Council and the improvement, change and resources needed to achieve those:

- **The Improvement Plan** Sets out our priorities for improving the Council and summarises the plans for achieving financial stability, developing clear priorities, and supporting a workforce that excels (through a People Plan)
- **The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27-2030/31** Summarises the Council's overall financial position, including forecasts, pressures and risks, over the medium-term, and how we will fund priorities.

Figure 1: Shropshire Plan



- **The Corporate Plan 2026-2030:** Informed by the 'New Direction' ambitions, the plan will set out the priorities the Council will focus on to deliver, enable, and influence better outcomes for Shropshire and its residents.
- **The Shropshire 2050 Plan:** Sets out the longer-term shared vision and priorities for the county (as a place) that the council will agree and work with partners on.

Continuous Improvement

Our improvement journey is already underway. It does not start or finish with this Plan. It is a continuous journey, and this Plan builds on and enhances existing improvement work, as well as initiating new priorities and action. It refers to current programmes and projects that support the improvement aims, and new programmes and projects where activity and plans will need to be further developed.

There are a range of recent improvements that have been delivered over the past few months that demonstrate the Council's commitment to, and delivery of, continuous improvement, including:

Strengthening our corporate governance

We have made several changes to our corporate governance arrangements, including:

- The establishment of a Statutory Officers Board in October 2025 that considers significant governance issues and tracks key actions across the Council including monitoring the implementation of Internal Audit recommendations to improve overall compliance.
- An Internal Audit Business Partnering model has been introduced which includes the development of a dashboard to give Service Directors oversight of recommendations made in their areas.

- Strengthening of the Audit & Governance Committee by increasing its membership from 5 to 9 members covering all political parties. There is greater joined up working between Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees supported by a joint chairs meetings and a protocol defining roles and responsibilities. All Internal Audit reports are now shared with Committee members, so they have access to detail to enhance oversight.
- Focussed monitoring of compliance in relation to the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests through the Statutory Officers Board and Information Governance Oversight Group (IGLOO).
- Plans to implement the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaint handling code from April 2026.

Organisational change and improvement

The Council is focussed on delivering improvement across a range of areas, driven by a corporately supported and resourced transformation programme. This includes projects focussed on operational efficiency and financial savings such as:

- Improving enabling and support services (e.g. HR, Payroll, Legal services and Programme Management Office) as part of the 'New Ways of Working' programme.
- Rebuilding the intranet to deliver visible and impactful change, with a focus on search functionality and content, to support and empower staff.

- A 'Third Party Spend' Programme that has centralised/consolidated the Commissioning function and focussed on delivering cross-council transformation on processes involving external spending, achieving financial savings, and implementing robust contract management and procurement practices.

Much of the above will continue as part of the Improvement Plan and its programmes of action. A review of current transformation activity will be undertaken so it is aligned to the aims and priorities of this Plan and the plans being developed to achieve financial stability.

LGA supported improvement

A range of activity has been provided by the LGA to support learning and improvement. This has included opportunities for elected members and officers to learn from peers in other councils.

Improvements in Housing

We have maintained a focus on reducing the use of B&B accommodations and our plan aims to eliminate the remaining use by 2026, alongside intensifying prevention efforts to reduce the overall need for temporary housing.

Improvement in Children's Services

Following a targeted Ofsted inspection in November 2023, Shropshire Council recognised the urgent need to strengthen its Children's Social Care services. The inspection identified critical areas for improvement, particularly around safeguarding, case management, and oversight. In response, the Council swiftly established the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) which oversaw the development and delivery of a robust improvement plan.

The Council has now transitioned from the CIB to the Children and Families Ambitions Board, reflecting a shift from reactive improvement to strategic ambition and continuous improvement. This was underpinned by strong performance data and positive feedback from external partners.

The journey culminated in the 2025 Ofsted inspection, which awarded Shropshire Council an 'outstanding' judgement. This outcome marked a significant milestone in the Council's improvement journey.

Improvement in Adult Social Care

The improvement journey for adult social care has been shaped by the recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection, which rated the service as 'Good' under the new assessment framework.

Areas for improvement by the inspection, many of which were already recognised by the Council and had been incorporated into existing improvement plans. As part of its ongoing commitment to improvement, the Council has established a Continuous Improvement Group to oversee progress, and we are now building a plan for continuous improvement over the next 3-4 years.

Responding to the financial emergency

A range of immediate and in-year actions, measures and arrangements have been put in place to contain expenditure in-year, and the projected year-end overspend, including:

- Budget Oversight and Spend Strategy (BOSS) meetings with all Service Directors to ensure an accurate and up to date understanding of actual and forecasted spend, and savings position, enabling a deep dive reset of the in-year position.
- The establishment and implementation of arrangements to ensure stringent financial management, including boards that provide strict oversight of discretionary spending (spend control, workforce review, technical boards).
- Clear and regular communication to elected members, senior managers and all staff about the position, and measures to address it so there is an understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Work will continue to develop and deliver a balanced budget year-end position for 2025/26 including in year Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and recognition of all financial risks.

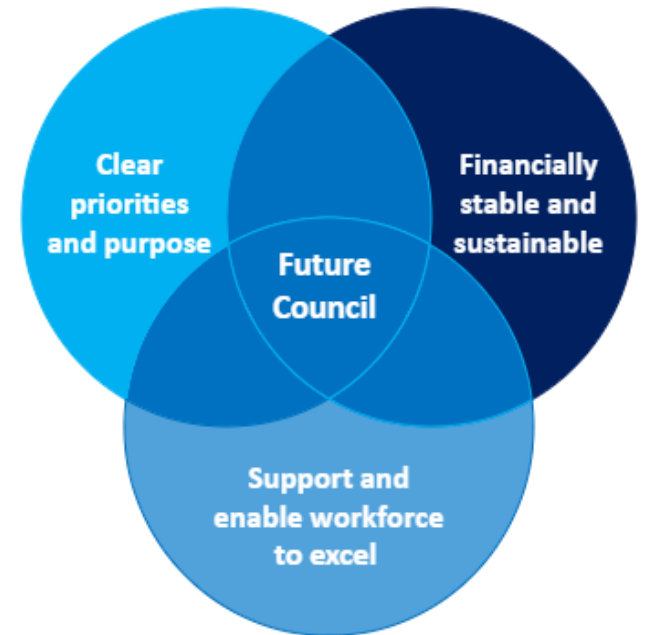
Planning for financial stability

The Council has been undertaking work to develop proposals and plans for budget stability aligned to the 'New Direction' report approved by Council (25th September), including:

- The identification and exploration of priority areas for review and associated savings strategies to bring budget stability and realign the transformation programme to achieve service change, cost reduction, savings and income.
- The development of other short to medium term initiatives including a pre-budget report in December to rebuild the foundations for the Council's budget and align finance strategies to financial stability e.g. a new reserves strategy, fees and charges pricing policy.
- This will be taken forward as part of a Financial Stability programme within this Plan.

Section 2

Our Future Council



Our future council

Our improvement needs to include an immediate response to the financial emergency (declared by Cabinet on 10th September 2025), the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations, and other external review and inspections. But that response needs to be developed and delivered in the context of our future ambitions as a council – both in terms of what we want to deliver, enable and influence for the residents of Shropshire, and how the council will look, feel and operate to do that.

A New Direction

The local elections in May 2025 brought a change in the Council's administration, with the Liberal Democrat Group taking overall control of the Council. A report - ['A New Direction'](#) was presented to the Council meeting on 25th September 2025, outlining the strategic direction proposed by the new administration, intended as a precursor to the development of a new Corporate Plan.

The report proposes a focus across three key priorities: (i) financial recovery and stability, (ii) contract reform and value for money, and (iii) people including community empowerment and partnership, becoming a 'can do' enabling council. Key initiatives include developing a new highways contract, launching the Shropshire Partnership, and supporting community-led initiatives.

The report also proposes a focus on improved customer care, inclusive planning and housing policies, expanded youth and SEND services, climate-conscious infrastructure, and transparent governance.

New ways of working

We know that new ways of working will be required to deliver those priorities while being a financially sustainable organisation. We have started to set out how we will look, feel and operate through:

- A report ('Shropshire Council Strategic Operating Model') presented to the Cabinet on 17th July 2024 that set out the foundations for a future way of working that provides a more efficient way of interacting with customers, a focus on early help and prevention, and working alongside our partners to make sure our residents are connected to support in their communities to stay healthy and well.
- A report ('Shropshire Council Strategic Operating Model') presented to the Council meeting on 27th February 2025 that set out a new operating model and revised structure for the Council. Following the Peer Challenge report and financial emergency, interim arrangements have been put in place to support the new ways of working.

The model is intended to deliver the requirements and associated benefits of a more efficient (reduced cost) and more effective (improved delivery of duties and services) Council, agile enough to respond to the future national and local requirements for local government and delivering financial savings and statutory responsibilities.

It describes how the Council of the future will look and operate, beyond the immediate priority of financial stability. Together with the direction set out in '**New Direction**', it suggests key principles that should guide how the Council will operate to realise the priorities of the Shropshire Plan.

Our changing role and purpose

We will need to be clear about the role and purpose of the Council in achieving our priorities – whether that is delivering services, or enabling, supporting, or influencing others to deliver outcomes. Our focus will increasingly be on working with partners, town and parish councils, and our communities, and on earlier intervention and support that prevents demand for services. This will help us utilise our resources in the most productive way and achieve 'best value'.

Whether our role as a Council is delivering, enabling or influencing outcomes, we will be committed to creating a focused, energised and ‘can do’ organisation that:

- Provides *clear and visible leadership* from our officer Leadership Board and Cabinet to make our priorities for delivery and change clear for everyone.
- Adopts a ‘*One Council*’ approach, prioritising joined up working internally and externally.
- Ensures *our workforce is supported and enabled to excel and* has a relentless focus on *performance and continuous improvement* (enabled through our People Plan).
- Operates *good governance* to ensure compliance with statutory standards and requirements.
- Delivers *value for money* through high standards of financial discipline and management, and a commercial mindset to make every pound count and every minute matter.
- Provides *good customer service* that gives people a consistent and positive experience when they contact and interact with the Council.
- Continues to *engage with our residents* about the changes we need to make – and ensure our priorities are informed by what is most important to them.
- Is a *learning council* that regularly asks for feedback, learns from complaints, and seeks external challenge and review. We will learn from other councils about what they do differently and how they have improved.

Transforming into the council we want to be

It is critical that the Council has a clear direction for its further improvement, financial stability and delivery of policy priorities. The principles in figure 2 (below) will guide how we work and provide a basis for our continued improvement and development into a council that is financially sustainable and equipped to deliver, enable, and influence for Shropshire and its residents in the most effective, efficient and economical way:



Figure 2: principles that guide our we will operate, improve and transform

A clear direction

A key aim of this Improvement Plan is to ensure the Council has a clear purpose for its transformation. That needs to align with our vision for the future and be driven by our financial stability and sustainability plans, and the wider organisation wide improvement needed.

We will review, refresh and re-align our transformation programme so it helps us achieve financial stability and culture change across the organisation. We will also:

- Continue to develop our new ways of working as a council – including further defining our approach to partnership working and working with town and parish councils.
- Further consider and develop our role and purpose in place shaping and the longer-term economic growth of the county.
- Embed the principles in figure 2 across the organisation so that managers and their teams understand what they mean in terms of guiding day-to-day service management and improvement.

National policy context

Our improvement must also be undertaken in the context of national policy and likely changes and developments. For example:

- Devolution: The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (July 2025): proposes a major shift of powers to local areas through devolution to Strategic Authorities which will have powers over transport, housing, skills, and economic development. The Neighbourhood Governance Review contained in this includes local authorities working with local people.
- Families First Partnership Programme (FFP): A major national reform in children's social care which aims to shift the system toward earlier intervention and family-led solutions, reducing the need for children to enter care and improving outcomes for families.
- National Missions and Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF): From April 2026, there will be a new set of priority outcomes that councils will report performance against, expected to cover areas including housing, homelessness, climate and environment, health and wellbeing, children and families.
- Housing policy is increasingly shaped by a strong emphasis on regulatory oversight, ambitious affordable housing delivery, and reforms to renters' rights. The Regulator of Social Housing has reinstated proactive inspections—covering consumer and economic standards for large landlords.
- The Council is taking part in national pilot and pathfinder projects including the National Referral Mechanism, the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Programme, and the Local Youth Transformation Fund.

Culture change

Achieving our aims will require changes in our organisational culture, as well as improvements in policy, practice and statutory compliance. The Council needs a positive and inclusive culture, where there are clear roles, responsibilities and expectations of elected members and staff. This will be critical to the Council being member-led, officer-run and resident focused.

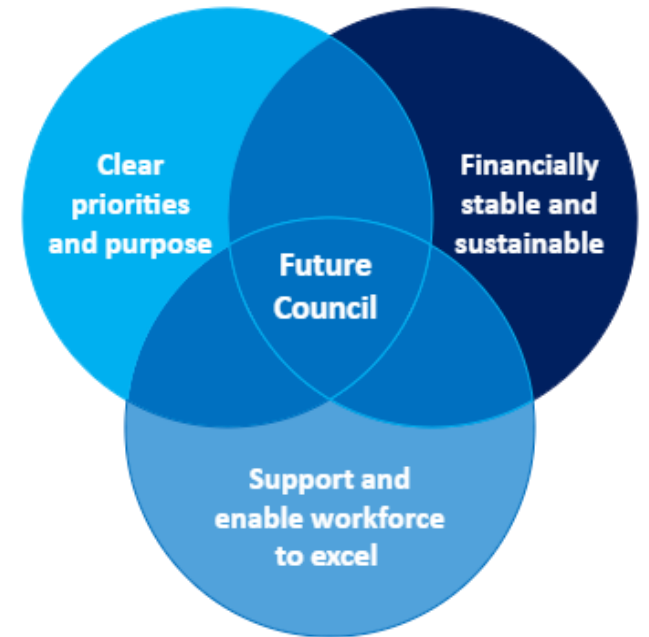
Many of the priority programmes of action will support and enable culture change – particularly those that are focused on supporting and enabling our workforce to excel. This is brought together in our People Plan and Digital Programme.

We will further develop how people are engaged and involved in developing policies and improving services, ensuring that there are more opportunities to inform and shape how we do, and improve, things.

The Plan also focusses on further improving our corporate governance and a culture of compliance, and how some of our internal services and systems can better support people to do their jobs, so we operate more efficiently and effectively, and barriers and constraints to a high-performing culture are removed.

Section 3

Our Improvement Aims & Priorities



Our improvement aims

This Improvement Plan sets out how we will address immediate challenges, such as measures to respond to the financial emergency, while ensuring a focus on the future and how the Council will need to look, feel and operate to best serve the needs of the county and its residents.

We want to be a 'best value' authority that **delivers, enables, and influences for Shropshire and its residents**. To achieve this, we need to be:

A Council that is financially stable and sustainable:

The Council needs to 'live within its means', deliver a balanced budget for 2026/27 and develop a **plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability** beyond that. This will be achieved through immediate spend controls and stronger fiscal discipline, changes to how we do things to deliver further savings or income, ensuring resources align with priorities, securing Exceptional Financial Support, and strengthening our financial planning and management practices.



A Council that has clear priorities and purpose:

The Council needs to be clear on its ambitions and 'new direction' through a **Corporate Plan** that summarises priorities and outcomes which reflect resources available and is clear on our role of enabling and influencing others to deliver. This will include empowering communities and strengthening our partnership working as means to achieving outcomes, and continuing our transformation to a 'can do' organisation that looks, feels and operates differently.



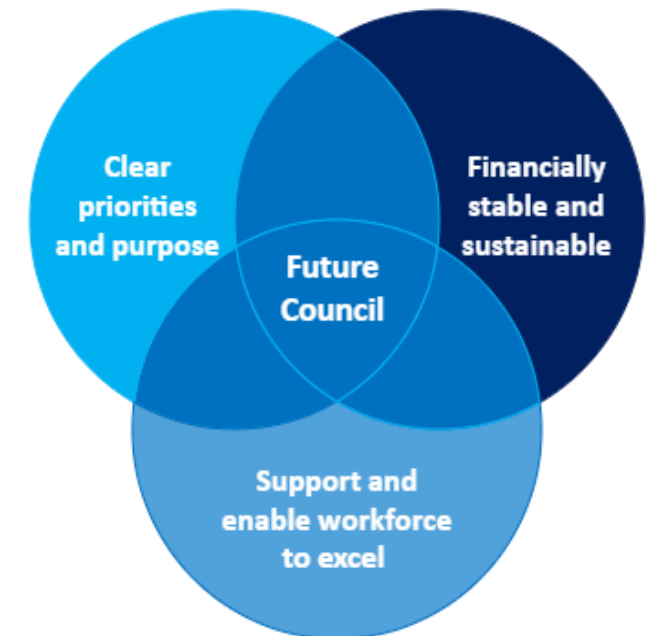
A Council that supports and enables our workforce to excel:

The Council needs to become a modern, customer focussed organisation operating efficiently, effectively and ethically by increasingly focussing on our performance, productivity and value for money. This will be achieved through a **People Plan** that empowers and supports an engaged, diverse and collaborative workforce who understand their roles, are accountable for their responsibilities, and are supported by clear priorities, standards, and governance.



Our Improvement Aims & Priorities

These aims are interdependent. All are critical to our improvement and development towards the council we want to become.



Improvement priorities and programmes

To achieve these aims, the Improvement Plan is focused on an initial set of 9 *Priority Programmes of Action* (see **figure 3**).

It is likely these programmes and projects will change over time. Programmes vary in size and scale. Some will be standalone programmes with their own programme structures and governance, while others comprise several workstreams or projects, or a set of related activities.

Programmes and projects are aligned to a single Improvement Plan aim for governance purposes, but most are interdependent, and the outcomes will be cross-cutting and contribute to all three Improvement Plan aims. All programmes of action aim to make the Council more financially and operationally sustainable.

Some programmes are a continuation of current and planned work (e.g. future council, new ways of working, People Plan), while others need to be fully scoped and their activities defined. For example, a review, refresh and realignment of the transformation programme is likely to result in new projects and activity that are driven by our financial stability plans.

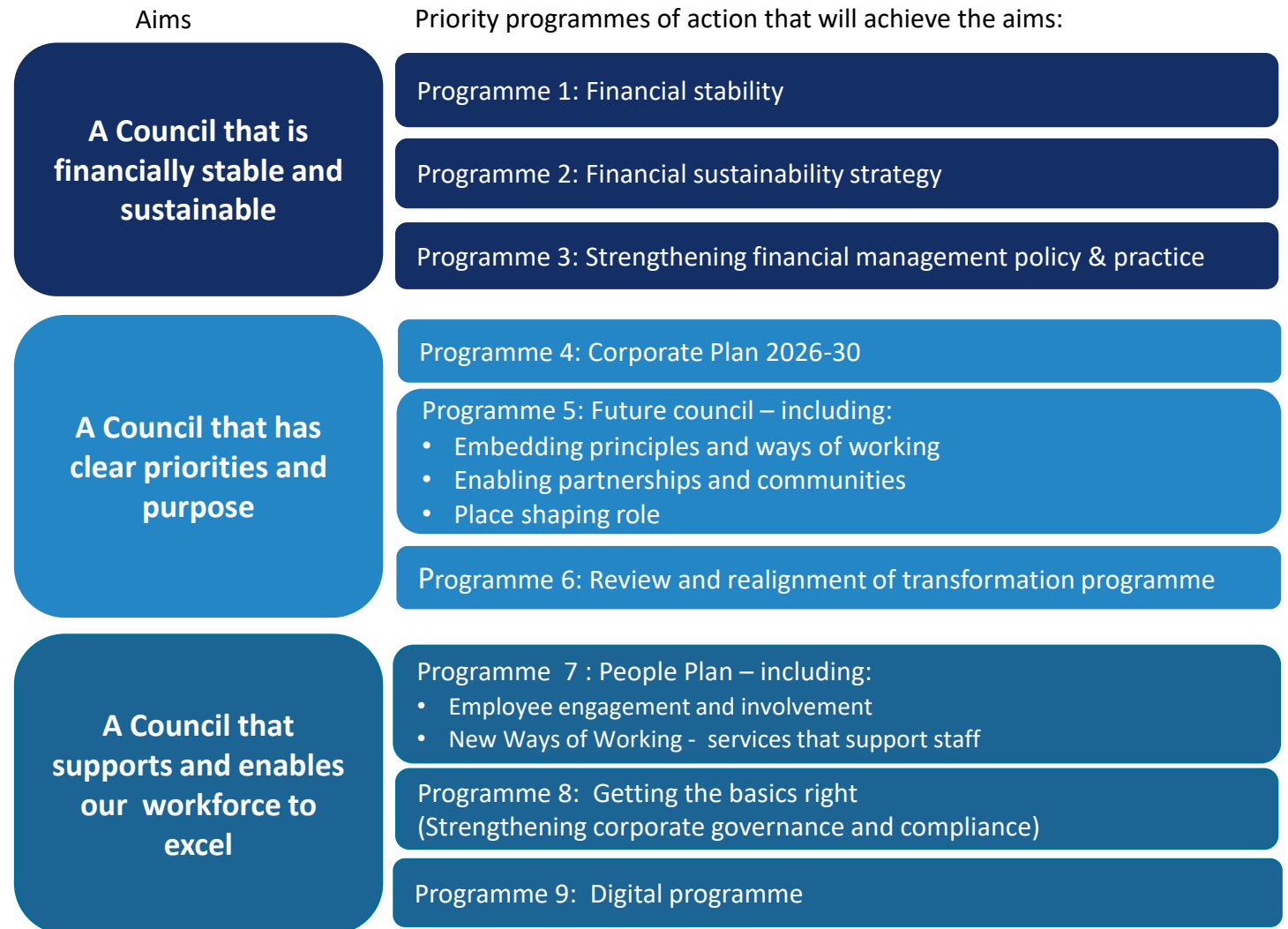


Figure 3: list of improvement priority programmes of activity

Aim: A Council that is financially stable and sustainable

The Council needs to address the current financial emergency and position through actions to secure immediate survival, a plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability beyond that so it can 'live within its means'.

The focus of this aim is:

Immediate controls and fiscal discipline, a plan for financial stability including a balanced budget for 2026/27, and a longer-term strategy for financial sustainability. All underpinned by actions to strengthen financial planning and management policy and practice.

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- A balanced budget for 2026/27
- Improved delivery of savings and income through more robust plans
- Transformation proposals that will deliver financial stability and sustainability
- Robust financial monitoring, management and accountability
- A sustainable financial strategy aligning revised service delivery to available financial resources
- Strengthened procurement and contract management practices

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme	Description and Purpose
Financial Stability	A range of immediate and actions, measures and arrangements put in place to contain expenditure in-year to reduce and minimise the projected year-end overspend, improve financial monitoring and future budget setting through Budget Spend Control and BOSS (Budget Oversight and Spend Strategy) meetings. The programme is also focussed on the development of the council's approach and route to financial stability (including revised service delivery, strong plans for reducing expenditure and increasing income through transformation, asset management, reviewing our capital programme, and Exceptional Financial Support) and the development of a proposed balanced budget for 2026/27.
Financial Sustainability Strategy	The development of an approach and strategy that outlines how the longer-term goal of financial sustainability will be achieved ensuring the Council 'lives within its means' and does not become reliant on Exceptional Financial Support.
Strengthening financial management practice and policy	A programme of actions to strengthen financial literacy and discipline across the organisation, including significantly strengthening the internal control environment in response to the opinion of the Chief Audit Executive, and responding to the External Auditor recommendations. The programme will ensure there is improved financial compliance across the organisation by strengthening procurement and contract management practices, budget monitoring and forecasting, income collection and debt recovery.

Aim: A Council that has clear priorities and purpose

The Council needs to be clear on its ambitions and 'new direction' through a Corporate Plan that summarises priorities and outcomes which reflect resources available and is clear on our role of enabling and influencing others to deliver – including empowering communities and strengthening our partnerships.

The focus of this aim is:

Creating and communicating the Council's priorities and its role in delivering them so it can work more effectively, efficiently and economically with others to achieve outcomes, and be clear on how the organisation needs to change and transform to do that while becoming financially stable and sustainable.

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- New plans approved - Corporate Plan 2026-30 and 2050 partnership vision and plan
- Increased employee understanding of council priorities and their roles in delivering them
- Transformation programme aligned with corporate plan, improvement plan and financial stability plan
- More transformation projects delivered on time and within budget
- Future Council principles embedded and guiding delivery, transformation and continuous improvement
- More collaboration with partners and communities
- Increased stakeholder confidence and satisfaction

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme	Description and Purpose
Corporate Plan 2026-30	The development of a new Corporate Plan informed by political ambitions set out in the 'New Direction' and financial position. The programme will also include activity to ensure the corporate performance framework and business planning are aligned to the Plan.
Future Council	Continuing the work to develop how the council supports, enables, empowers and influences others to deliver priority outcomes, including: • Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate and provide a basis for its continued improvement and transformation. • A focus on developing an approach to working with town and parish councils. • Place shaping – the role and purpose of the Council and development of a long-term vision, economic growth strategy, and outcomes for the county.
Review and Realignment of Transformation Programme	A review of current transformation programme to ensure it is aligned with the future ways of working, national policy context, and the need to deliver financial stability and sustainability. The programme will also ensure there are robust programme management, support and assurance arrangements in place.

Aim: A Council that supports and enables its workforce to excel

The Council needs to become a modern, customer focussed organisation operating efficiently, effectively and ethically by increasingly focussing on our performance, productivity and value for money.

The focus of this aim is:

The development and implementation of a **People Plan** that empowers an engaged, diverse and collaborative workforce who understand their roles, are accountable for their responsibilities, and are supported by clear priorities and standards, and strengthened governance and compliance.

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

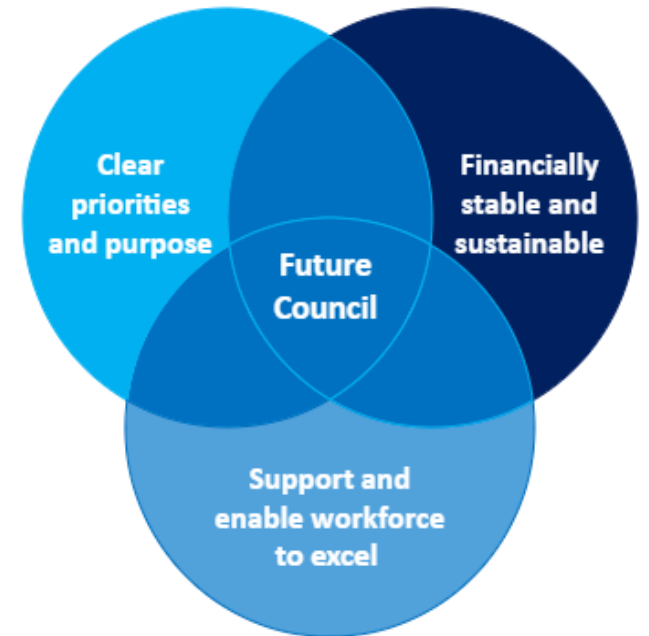
- Increased levels of staff satisfaction and engagement
- Reduced levels of staff absence
- Less turnover of staff
- Increased numbers of PDPs completed
- Increased levels of mandatory training completed
- Increased performance for FOI and complaints handling

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme	Description and Purpose
People Plan	A Plan and programme of activity to become an organisation where people are proud to work for, feel valued, and can thrive with the right support and development that enables them to perform to their best. There will be an initial focus on: • Engaging and Empowering Employees: Further development of staff engagement and involvement, including activity to improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders, and evolving and embedding existing channels and mechanisms that facilitate a dialogue, and support and inform change across the organisation. • Improving support services: Continuing the programme of activity to implement the New Ways of Working for Enabling Services and Processes, including an initial focus on Information Governance and HR & Payroll.
Getting the basics right (Strengthening governance and compliance)	A programme of actions and activity focussed on strengthening overall corporate governance and ethical standards, by improving awareness, understanding of, and compliance with, the constitution and key operating policies, processes, procedure rules and customer standards (e.g. finance, procurement, information management, data protection, complaints, FOI). Alongside the programme focussed on 'strengthening financial management' it will ensure the Council has a tighter grip on its delivery, performance and risk management.
Digital programme	A programme of initiatives and developments to modernise our services, improve operational efficiency, and better serve our residents and stakeholders, building on the Digital Customer programme, reviewing and reprioritising planned initiatives, and the implementation of a new intranet. At the heart of the programme is an ambition to provide simpler, efficient, secure, predictive, data-led services, that cost less to deliver.

Section 4

Making sure we deliver



Making sure we deliver the Plan

There are three key things we will do to make sure we deliver the Improvement Plan:

1. *Governance and Assurance:* We will put in place governance and assurance arrangements based on agreed principles (see **figure 4**), including clear accountability, responsibility and transparency. There will be relevant risk management and delivery monitoring, facilitated by a Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO) ensuring independence and integrity. These arrangements will help ensure the Improvement Plan is delivered and achieves the required progress and impacts.
2. *Supporting delivery:* Significant and sustained investment is required to deliver the scale and pace of change required. We will ensure the Plan and its programmes are supported through relevant resources and support. New programmes of action will need to be resourced, which may mean reviewing and deciding on where business as usual activity can be reprioritised and capacity redeployed, or assessing and identifying where there are additional resource requirements.
3. *Engagement, Involvement and Communications:* Engagement has taken place at different levels and through different forums throughout the process of developing the Improvement Plan and will continue as the Plan is delivered.

This has ensured understanding of the Plan, the context it is responding to and the aims we are pursuing. It has also ensured it has been developed collaboratively and that priorities have been continuously iterated using internal peer review, challenge and feedback (via Senior Leaders Forum).

Corporate Strategy & Change function

Led by the Service Director (Strategy & Change) and comprising strategic support and enabling functions – including the programme management office, policy, strategy, performance, and communications teams – the function will provide both advisory (guidance, advice, standards) and delivery capacity to support change and improvement across the organisation.

Risk management

Risks and interdependencies between programmes and projects will be set out and managed for each one. There are also overarching risks and dependencies across the whole Improvement Plan which are set out in **Appendix 2**.

Risks will be reviewed regularly and will change e.g. with new risks being included as and when they are identified. The table of risks is not an exhaustive list, and both the risks and mitigations will be kept under review.

Improvement Plan Performance Framework

The priority programmes of action contribute to defined outcomes. Those are underpinned by key performance indicators (KPIs) – listed at **Appendix 3** – that will enable progress to be demonstrated. Reporting on delivery will use a combination of delivery milestones and KPIs.

Reporting progress

Regular reporting to the Cabinet, Audit Committee and Transformation & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take place for the duration of the Plan. This will provide assurance to elected members and residents we are making progress towards the commitments we have made

Assessing and managing impacts

Unplanned consequences and negative impacts of changes the Council is making will continue to be a key consideration through wider governance and assurance. In particular, the impact on residents of further budget savings and how they are delivered. This will be captured and managed through completing Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) for all new policy/strategy development and major changes to service delivery, and consultation (where relevant and required), to ensure the implications of our decisions on our residents are understood and considered.

Governance and Assurance

Our governance, monitoring and assurance arrangements will provide a clear framework to ensure the Improvement Plan is delivered and achieves the required progress and impacts. The principles that underpin this are set out in the **figure 4** below:

Principle	Arrangements
Accountability and responsibility for delivery	Senior Accountable Officer (SAO): Each Improvement Plan Aim has an SAO, accountable for ensuring the outcomes of the programmes within their aim are achieved. This will include effective and timely engagement with stakeholders such as elected members. The SAO will chair a Portfolio Board for the Aim they are accountable for. Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL): Responsibility for ensuring day-to-day delivery of programmes and projects. RDL activities might include ensuring the setting up of project teams, steering groups, arrangements and processes to progress delivery, and escalating key risks and blockages not resolved in the project.
Seeking external challenge and learning	We are committed to seeking external challenge and learning from other councils, organisations and experts to contribute to the development and delivery of the improvement plan. An externally chaired Improvement Board is a significant component of this principle, where the Board will provide challenge and ideas, and the Council will be sharing evidence of assurance and progress.
Governance structures	The Council's existing governance structures maintain a core role in the governance for the improvement plan - Member-led Governance - Council and Cabinet provide the political decision making, and Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Audit and Governance Committee provide the oversight and assurance. - Officer-led governance – the Leadership Board has a role in direction setting, operating as a Transformation and Change Board, holding SAOs and RDLs to account and being a forum for escalation, receiving significant change requests, resource allocation, and oversight of interdependencies between programmes and projects.
Monitoring and assurance	Impact and progress assurance reporting will be carried out each month (initially) to ensure a timely, consistent and accurate view of delivery against the Plan. It will be important to ensure a clear picture of each programme and project is maintained, as appropriate. A deeper dive review will be completed periodically on delivery to help confirm the scope, resourcing and timeframe of each programme/project. This will also provide the evidence to stop, change or continue.
Transparency	There will be one view of progress and impact through the progress assurance reporting. This will provide assurance on the progress being made. Monthly reporting will be through the Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO) to the Transformation and Change Board [Leadership Board] and to the Improvement Board.
Member scrutiny	Executive members will provide oversight and challenge on the programmes and projects aligned to their portfolios. Group leaders are members of the Improvement Board and Portfolio Holders (or their deputies) will be invited to attend as required. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will take a view of the progress and impact of delivering the improvement plan in their remits and the Audit and Governance Committee will maintain their role looking at improvement plan risk management and controls.

Figure 4: Governance principles

The role of the Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO)

The Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO) will play a key role in the supporting the delivery of the improvement plan – ensuring we have both ‘grip’ and ‘drive’. The PMO will fulfil three functions:

- *Monitoring and assurance:* ensuring progress monitoring happens, that outputs are reviewed and challenged each month, and providing the analysis required by the Transformation and Change Board (Leadership Board) and Improvement Board.
- *Supporting delivery:* providing project management, business analyst and change consultant capability to support the delivery of the Council’s transformation activity to achieve its improvement aims. The PMO will also maintain an overview of the transformation requirements for the whole council which will inform resourcing decisions.
- *Setting the standards:* providing guidance, toolkits and templates to support consistent project and programme management standards and best practice across the organisation.

Making sure we deliver: governance and assurance

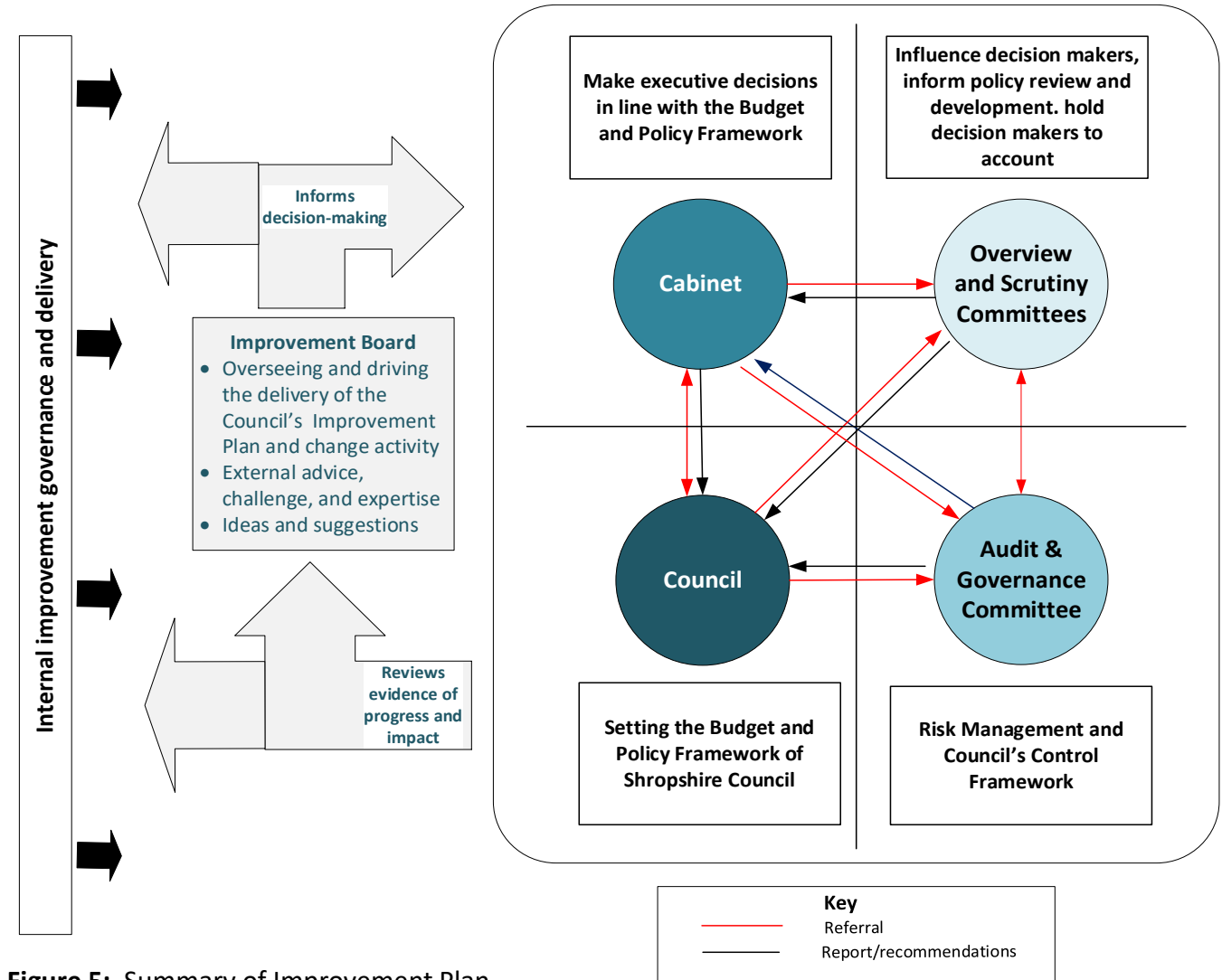


Figure 5: Summary of Improvement Plan governance structures

Resourcing the Plan

The Plan incorporates existing programmes together with newer and emerging projects. As such there are already some resources in place and deployed in these areas with work established and underway. Additional budget provision, reliant on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), will need to be aligned to new activity.

The further scoping of these programmes of work will define further resourcing requirements. The SAOs and the RDLs will work together to consider how the programmes and projects they are accountable and responsible for will be resourced. Our resourcing approach is summarised in **figure 6** below.

External support

The Council has been supported by the Local Government Association (LGA) in developing its improvement response and will continue to work closely with them and others including the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). Further support may include bringing in independent external expertise and perspectives to provide challenge to major change and improvement activity to identify where there is potential to do more or identify further opportunities.

Component	Approach
Internal Council resource	A refocussing of internal resources to support the development and delivery of transformation and budget savings proposals. Identification of capacity from across the organisation that can potentially be redirected and/or deployed to support Improvement Plan delivery
Interim additional capacity	Short-term capacity and technical expertise that will work in a blended way with and within internal teams to support development and delivery of improvement and change proposals.
Transformation support	Engagement of external partners where necessary to support the delivery of major change proposals and projects

Figure 6: Resourcing approach

Making sure we deliver: Enabling and supporting delivery

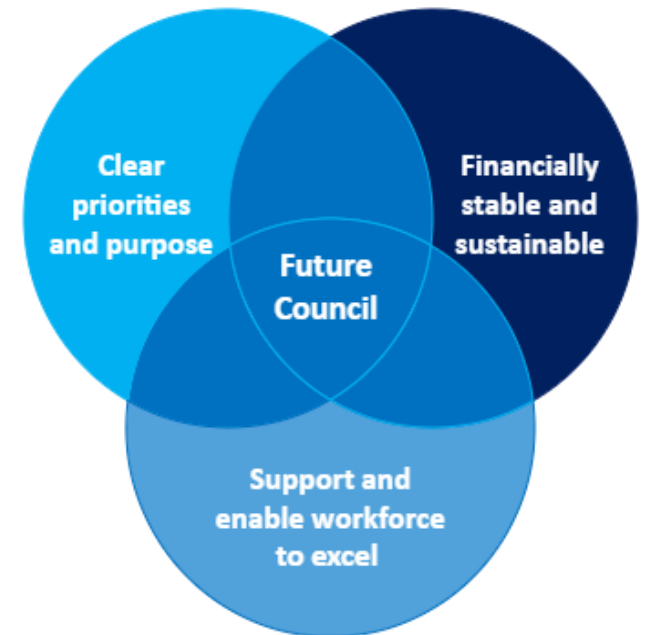
Engagement and involvement

We have engaged through the following activity to inform the development of the Plan:

Mechanism / Activity	Purpose /Description	Audience / Stakeholders
Weekly CEX email bulletin to all staff	Regular and frequent update on the Plan development, and promotion of engagement opportunities	Staff
Senior Leadership Forum (SLF)	Updates on Plan development, and engagement to inform priorities and activity to deliver those	Top 3 tiers of managers
Staff Engagement Hub	Engagement Form to suggest ideas for improvements in policy and practice	Staff
Leader/Deputy Leader	Updates on the development of the Improvement Plan and seek steer on key issues	Leader and Deputy Leader
Executive Directors and Cabinet Members	Updates on the development of the Improvement Plan to test key aims and priorities	Executive Members/Leadership Board
Transformation & Improvement Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Share thinking and proposed aims and priorities for feedback. A run through draft Plan for feedback.	O&S Committee Members
All member briefing	To update members on the Improvement Plan and explain its purpose and priorities	All members
Budget Forum	To engage group leaders on the development of the Plan (finance stability elements)	Group Leaders
Improvement Board	To present elements of the draft Plan for review and feedback	Improvement Board (includes Group Leaders)

As the Council's improvement journey continues, we will continue to engage and communicate on our plans and progress to our residents, elected members, staff, partners, and other stakeholders. We will listen and learn from them and adjust and update the Plan in line with new and emerging priorities.

Appendix 1: Priority Programmes of Action - Summaries



Financial Stability

A range of immediate and in-year actions, measures and arrangements put in place to contain expenditure in-year to reduce and minimise the projected year-end overspend. The development of a plan detailing the council's approach and route to financial and operational stability – including opportunities for reducing expenditure and increasing income

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)

Executive Director (S151 Officer)

Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):

Deputy S151 Officer

Executive Member:

Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:
Start
End

Declare a financial emergency and agree immediate emergency measures to reduce all non-essential spending between September 2025 and March 2026

Sept 2025

Sept 2025

Establish and implement arrangements to ensure stringent financial management – including boards that provide strict oversight of discretionary spending

Sept 2025

Mar 2026

Undertake a deep dive reset of the in-year position (including learning from the Internal Audit Outturn review) – through BOSS (Budget Oversight and Spend Strategy) meetings with all Service Directors to ensure accurate and up to date actual and forecasted spend, and savings position in year, to inform an in-year EFS application

Oct 2025

Dec 2025

Develop and deliver a balanced budget year-end position for 2025/26 including in-year Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and recognition of all financial risks (including NWRR write off, transformation funding, unachieved savings and spending pressures)

Oct 2025

June 2026

Implement plans for all recommendations and lessons learnt from internal and external reviews and support including the Statutory Recommendation from External Audit

Nov 2025

Mar 2026

Develop a proposed balanced budget for 2026/27 for Council approval, utilising:

- BOSS meetings to ensure 2026/27 Budget takes account of existing service delivery, appropriate workforce needs, investment requirements linked to change programmes, and robust saving plans to deliver cost reductions and increased income
- Short term initiatives including a Pre-Budget report to rebuild the foundations for the Council's 2026/27 budget and align finance strategies to future financial stability e.g. a new fees and charges pricing policy, and reserves strategy
- Continued liaison with MHCLG including an application for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) 2026/27
- Public consultation on 2026/27 Budget setting the scene for the MTFS to 2030/31 and implications for service delivery both internally and with residents

Oct 2025

Feb 2026

Identify and develop a revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) aligned to the Improvement Plan, including:

- Further BOSS meetings with all Service Directors to set robust foundations for stable budgets over the MTFS period aligning to key themes from the New Direction report approved by Council, plans and requirements for growth and investment that bring stability
- Plans for review of all services to identify the cost of minimum viable service provision, priority areas and opportunities for transformation activity through a funded change programme over the medium term, with robust plans for savings delivery and income generation
- Revised and affordable Capital Programme reviewing all funding including developer contributions, external funding and asset rationalisation to deliver capital receipts
- A clear plan over the MTFS period to provide a stable foundation for systemic transformation of the council while able to deliver safe and reliable services at all levels
- An EFS strategy over later years of the MTFS including a clear exit plan from the temporary use of EFS

Oct 2025

Feb 2026

Financial Sustainability Strategy

The development of an approach that outlines how the longer-term goal of financial sustainability will be achieved

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (S151 Officer)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Deputy S151 Officer
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Through a revised focus considering the next five financial years, complete the planning to deliver a sustainable financial position for Shropshire Council over the medium term through a revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by Council reflective of the Council's Improvement Plan and ultimately new Corporate Plan.	Dec 2025	Mar 2026
Deliver a robust Section 25 Statement to Council providing assurance to Members on the robustness of estimates used to define costs and available resources over the medium term, and the adequacy of reserves and General Fund Balances to provide a stable route to financial sustainability.	Feb 2026	Feb 2026
Develop, demonstrate and agree a pathway to reducing reliance on EFS over the MTFS period with reducing requirements and a clear exit plan from EFS at an agreed point in the future.	Dec 2025	Mar 2027
Work with the Improvement Board and partners across the region and nationally to influence funding and spend models to deliver a sustainable route away from the structural funding deficit for Shropshire Council.	Dec 2025	Mar 2027
Build on the recommendations contained in the external audit Statutory recommendation, key and improvement recommendations to ensure robust planning is in place to deliver a strong Value for Money opinion in future years.	Jan 2026	Jul 2027
Develop and deliver a suite of updated plans and strategies to align around the Council's future sustainability aim, moving the Council from financial stability to the long-term aim of financial sustainability. These include: - Financial Strategy - Capital Strategy - Treasury Strategy - Reserves Strategy - EFS Strategy - DSG Deficit Recovery Strategy	Apr 2026	Mar 2027

Strengthening financial management practice and policy

The programme will ensure there is improved financial compliance across the organisation by strengthening policy, practice and approaches to budget monitoring, controls and forecasting, income and debt collection, procurement practices and contract management

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (S151 Officer)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Strategic Director - Commissioning
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Develop and deliver an action plan to strengthen the Internal Control Environment in response to the Limited Assurance opinion of the Chief Audit Executive - Develop and agree the action plan - Deliver the action plan	Oct 2025 April 2026	March 2026 June 2027
Consider and agree further responses to External Auditor Annual Report and statutory recommendation (as directed by Audit & Governance Committee and Council)	Nov 2025	Jan 2026
Financial literacy training to create strong financial literacy skills across the organisation to develop skills and discipline - including: - Develop clear training plans for budget holders - Deliver training and set a clear expectation for all budget holders to be fully accountable for delivery within agreed budgets	Nov 2025 Feb 2026	Feb 2026 Jun 2026
Improve financial management practices - including: - Simplify budget lines/codes and cost centres - Improved controls and processes for moving budgets/savings/funds between codes (e.g. internal transfers) - Better communications around year-end adjustments - An accountability framework – with clear budget holder responsibilities	Feb 2026	Jul 2026
Improve procurement and contract management function and practice – including: - Implement new structure for procurement and contracts team - Look at income for efficiencies - Commission new contracts and procurement system - A review of Third party spend - Development and roll out of a Contracts Resource Toolkit	Oct 2025 Oct 2025 Jun 2025 Oct 2025 Jan 2026	May 2026 Mar 2026 Mar 2026 Apr 2026/ongoing Sept 2026
Development of new strategy: - Procurement - Commissioning	Nov 2025 Dec 2025	May 2026 May 2026
Continue to embed new governance for commissioning, contract management and procurement (e.g. commercial and commissioning delivery group, joint commissioning delivery group, commissioning, procurement and contracts performance board)	Aug 2025	Dec 2026/ongoing
Review and refresh the approach to income collection and debt recovery to improve collection performance	Jun 2026	Dec 2026

Corporate Plan 2026-30

The development of a new **Corporate Plan** that is informed by political ambitions set out in the 'New Direction' and financial position. The programme will also include activity to ensure a corporate performance framework is aligned to the Plan.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Strategy & Change
Executive Member:	Leader & Deputy Leader

Activity:	Start	End
Agreement of 'New Direction' at Full Council	Sept 2025	Sept 2025
Establish with Members a clear framework for the different phases of activity to realise financial stability, and the plans to achieve the outcomes of the council. Confirmation of the outcomes and priorities of the administration	Nov 2025	Dec 2025
Carry out Shropshire 2050 workshop sessions with stakeholders to establish the long-term vision that the corporate plan fits in, incorporating the outcomes and priorities of the administration	Jan 2026	Feb 2026
Deliver a programme of engagement with all members, staff, partners and communities/ residents on the outcomes and priorities for the plan based on what we want Shropshire 2050 to be. Bring together the feedback to inform the development of the plan and the actions to be taken over the plan period.	Jan 2026	Mar 2026
Co-produce the cross-cutting delivery plans to deliver the outcomes and priorities of the plan and confirm the 'grip' support, and governance arrangements, including the KPIs and milestones that will demonstrate progress and impact.	Mar 2026	Apr 2026
Corporate Plan 2026-30 agreed and adopted	May 2026	Ongoing
Review and update the Performance Management Framework, dashboards and reporting, performance monitoring and management requirements to align with the new Corporate Plan	July 2026	Sept 2026

Future Council (1)

Continuing the work to develop how the Council supports, enables, and influences others to deliver priority outcomes, including an initial focus on:

- I. Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate, improve and transform
- II. Developing our partnerships with town and parish councils
- III. Developing our Place Shaping role and purpose of the Council and development of a long-term vision, economic growth strategy and outcomes for the county, co-created with partners and communities

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Director of Children's Services (i) Service Director – Communities (ii)
Executive Members:	Leader and Deputy Leader (i) & (ii)

Activity:
Start
End
(i) Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate, improve and transform:

Introduce and hold Regular Senior Leadership Forums for engagement between Leadership Board and their direct reports.

Sept 2025

On-going

Develop a 'Future Council' framework that translates the future Council operating principles into good practice characteristics of service leadership, management and delivery, including:

Dec 2025

May 2026

1. Establish a steering group of SLF members to provide leadership, challenge and input
2. Co-production of a framework through the steering group and reality checking via a sounding board of staff
3. Embed the vision, operating principles and Future Council framework into service planning guidance (for 2027/28)
4. Develop proposals for embedding the framework as a basis for wider improvement activity
5. Identify and/or build organisational capacity, guidance, support for each of the elements of the Future Council framework
6. Embed the Framework into a Role of the Manager (part of the People Plan programme)

(ii) Developing our partnerships with town and parish Councils:

Carryout Overview and Scrutiny review into the opportunities and arrangements for local partnership working across three phases of work

1. The delegation of functions to Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs)
2. Potential groupings of local councils to deliver local priorities and outcomes
3. Options for local partnership working governance structures and arrangements

 Aug 2025
Nov 2025
Feb 2025

 Mar 2026
Mar 2026
Sep 2026

Identify and quantify potential initial opportunities for the delegation of functions to town and parish Council

Oct 2025

Dec 2025

Roll out programme of developing further opportunities and partnerships with town and parish councils (T&PCs)

Dec 2025

Ongoing

Future Council (2)

Continuing the work to develop how the Council supports, enables, and influences others to deliver priority outcomes, including an initial focus on:

- I. Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate, improve and transform
- II. Developing our approach to working with town and parish councils
- III. Developing our place shaping role and purpose of the Council and development of a long-term vision, economic growth strategy and outcomes for the county, co-created with partners and communities

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Place Shaping (iii) Service Director – Infrastructure (iii)
Executive Member:	Transport & Economic Growth Portfolio Holder (iii)

Activity:	Start	End
(iii) Developing our place shaping role, purpose and strategy:		
Recruitment of Service Director (Place Shaping)	Nov 2025	Dec 2025
Position the Council regionally, working proactively to formalise the delivery plan for the Marches Forward Partnership	Nov 2025	March 2026
Utilise the Council's place leadership role to convene strategic partnership working across the county, bringing together partner intelligence and alignment of investment programmes around shared priorities into a Shropshire based investment and infrastructure network	Nov 2025	June 2026 (ongoing)
Develop, with members and partners, a consistent narrative of place for Shropshire that describes the place it will be (which will form the basis of a Shropshire 2050 vision and plan) (CPC action)	Feb 2026	June 2026
Extend regional working to explore and develop future opportunities under the Government's devolution agenda, producing an integrated, long-term plan (Spatial Development Strategies) and creating a platform for strategic engagement and investment	Dec 2025	Dec 2026
Develop a robust investment pipeline which responds to growth opportunities and addresses future sustainability and resilience challenges, providing a clear delivery plan for a refreshed Economic Growth Strategy and an evidence led basis for the Local Plan Review.	Dec 2025	Dec 2026

Review and Realignment of Transformation Programme

A review of current transformation programme to ensure it is aligned with the future ways of working, national policy context, and the need to deliver financial stability and sustainability. The programme will also ensure there are robust programme management, support and assurance arrangements in place.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Leads (RDL):	Service Director – Care & Well Being Service Director – Strategy & Change
Executive Members:	Leader and Deputy Leader

Activity:	Start	End
Develop a refreshed Transformation and Change Programme - including:		
Initial review of current programme to determine non-priority projects that can be pursued as continuous improvement rather than corporately supported transformation	Oct 2025	Jan 2026
Develop new transformation proposals, informed by the financial stability planning, other improvement priorities, future council principles, and national policy thinking and direction (e.g. Families First Partnership) and through engagement with senior managers and elected members	Oct 2025	Dec 2025
Develop fully costed transformation projects and associated delivery plans that will contribute to financial stability and sustainability over the medium-term	Dec 2025	Ongoing
Develop and implement new Improvement Plan governance arrangements that enable oversight of transformation, improvement and change – including: (a) Further strengthen the PMO including development of a monitoring and assurance function (b) Develop and implement a new monitoring framework with quality assurance by the PMO and reports to Leadership Board (Transformation and Change) (c) Develop an approach for challenging and testing transformation and budget savings proposals at an early stage of their formation	Dec 2025 Dec 2025 Feb 2026	Feb 2026 Feb 2026 April 2026
Review, refresh and relaunch corporate guidance, standards and templates for project and programme management	Jan 2026	April 2026
Recruitment of Service Director (Strategy & Change)	Nov 2025	Dec 2025

People Plan

A Plan and programme of activity to be an organisation that people are proud to work for, feel valued, and can thrive with the right support and development that enables them to perform to their best. There will be an initial focus on **engaging and empowering employees** and **improving support services**

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director - DPH
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Children & Young People
Executive Members:	Leader and Deputy Leader

Activity:

Develop and deliver the **People Plan** for the Council – focused on the priorities of: Our Culture, Leadership & Talent, Capability and Capacity, Performance and Systems & Establishment – including an initial focus on the following projects:

- One Purpose, underpinned by our Values
- Engagement and Communications
- Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging
- Valuing and Supporting new and current staff
- Leadership and management programme including good conversations
- Workforce skills audit
- Employee performance management framework

Start
End

Dec 2025

Jul 2026

Engagement and Communications:

Further development of staff engagement and internal communications, including activity to improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders and evolving existing channels and mechanisms that facilitate a dialogue to support and inform change across the organisation – including:

- Engage employees about how they want to be informed, involved and engaged
- Continued Pulse Surveys, including a six-monthly survey that provides a temperature check across several staff sentiment and perception measures
- Develop and implement a new internal communications and employee engagement plan/programme that introduces new ways of engaging and involving employees

Dec 2025
Nov 2025
Jan 2026

Jan 2026
On-going
Apr 2026

Improving support services:

Continuing the programme of activity to implement the New Ways of Working (NOM) for Enabling Services and Processes – including:

- Information Governance and HR & Payroll – through Sprint review and continuous improvement plan
- Roll out the approach to other service areas – including property services and finance
- Continue the work to define a set of common principles for enabling service Business Partners

Nov 2025

Dec 2025/on-going

Building on previous work, undertake a review and benchmarking of services (staffing, systems, processes) supported by the LGA – with an initial programme focussing on: Legal, Finance, Revenues & Benefits

Dec 2025

March 2026

Getting the Basics Right (strengthening corporate governance and compliance)

A programme of actions and activity focussed on strengthening overall corporate governance and ethical standards, by improving awareness, understanding of, and compliance with, the constitution and key operating policies, processes, procedure rules and customer standards (e.g. finance, procurement, information management, complaints, FOI). Alongside the programme focussed on 'Strengthen financial management' it will ensure the Council has a tighter grip on its delivery, performance and risk management.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director - DPH
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Planning, Legal and Governance
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:

	Start	End
Establish a statutory officer board consisting of the Head of Paid Service (HoPS), S.151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer to provide oversight and direction of key issues for the council and drive good governance (including implementation of internal audit recommendations).	Oct 2025	Oct 2025/on-going
Provide a clear message from the Head of Paid Service reiterating the importance of compliance with our governance and assurance arrangements	Oct 2025	Oct 2025/on-going
Continue activity to address and improve information governance (including FOI responses, data protection, etc).	Oct 2025	Dec 2025/on-going
Provide an analysis of the biggest risks to compliance across the organisation and use this to determine the priorities for action and attention (including development of a performance dashboard for monitoring and managing compliance moving forward)	Nov 2025	Jan 2026
Develop a coordinated and consolidated approach to planning for, and responding to, external review, audit and inspections – to include: (a) Collating a programme of planned and anticipated inspections, reviews and audit activity so we can support them corporately (b) One plan/approach for monitoring of responses to all corporate governance recommendations from inspection, review and self-assessment activity (e.g. AGS, peer challenge, external audit, CQC, etc) – ensuring oversight of performance, implementation and impact	Nov 2025	March 2026
Undertake a review of mandatory training and refresh the programme (People Plan action)	Jul 2025	Apr 2026
Review and refresh the Council's constitution - including: • Work with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to review and refresh the Council's Constitution • Develop and deliver a programme of activity to support the implementation of the new Constitution	Nov 2025	May 2026
Develop and implement a process for learning lessons from complaints (People Plan action)	Jan 2026	Apr 2026
Develop and deliver Audit Committee training (supported by LGA)	Nov 2025	Jan 2026
Implementation of the new Local Government Ombudsman's complaint handling code from April 2026.	Nov 2025	Apr 2026

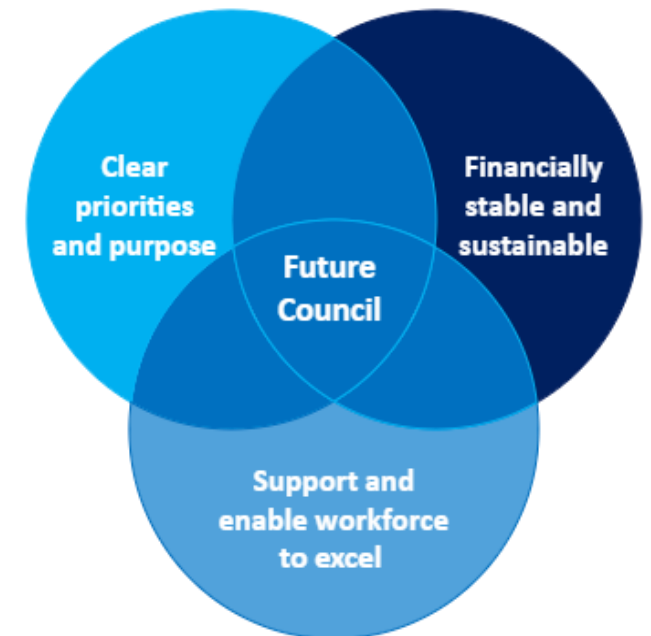
Digital Programme

A programme of initiatives and developments to modernise our services, improve operational efficiency, and better serve our residents and stakeholders, building on the Digital Customer programme, reviewing and reprioritising planned initiatives, and the implementation of a new intranet. At the heart of the programme is an ambition to provide simpler, efficient, secure, predictive, data-led services, that cost less to deliver.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director - DPH
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Enabling
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Review priority areas from opportunity backlogs and discovery work, align to priorities.	Oct 2025	Jan 2026
Establish Chief Digital Information Officer & Digital Transformation Board creating a strong governance model that will ensure accountability, transparency and alignment with statutory obligations, best practice, the DSIT Blueprint and LGA guidance	Oct 2025	Jan 2026
Develop the strategic basis (Digital Strategy, Cyber Strategy, and Data Strategy) to drive the creation of a data-driven, and agile organisation capable of delivering modern, efficient public services.	Oct 2025	Feb 2026
Continue to develop Secure, Resilient Foundations (CAF, PSN, Cyber Exercises)	Oct 2025	July 2027
Web Development (Website migration, Intranet rebuild) delivering visible and impactful change, a strategic hub for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and service delivery, enabling efficiency, compliance, and innovation.	Oct 2025	Mar 2027
Continue to modernise systems with connected platforms so services work together - embracing Automation, AI & Integration (with a focus on the “Top 50” high volume, high cost to service tasks redesigned) - following the Local Digital Declaration and Central Digital and Data Office’s mission for secure, efficient, sustainable technology.	Dec 2025	Ongoing (through to Mar 2029)
Further developed ‘Digital Front Doors’ to deliver user centred inclusive public services, designed around real people, making them easy to use and accessible for everyone, including those who need extra support. This aligns with the Government Design Principles and the Technology Code of Practice.	Jan 2026	Ongoing (through to Mar 2029)
Develop and deliver a programme of Digital Skills, Inclusion and Culture Change that enables confidence we can deliver transformation, build digital skills and capabilities across the council.	Apr 2026	Ongoing (through to Mar 2029)

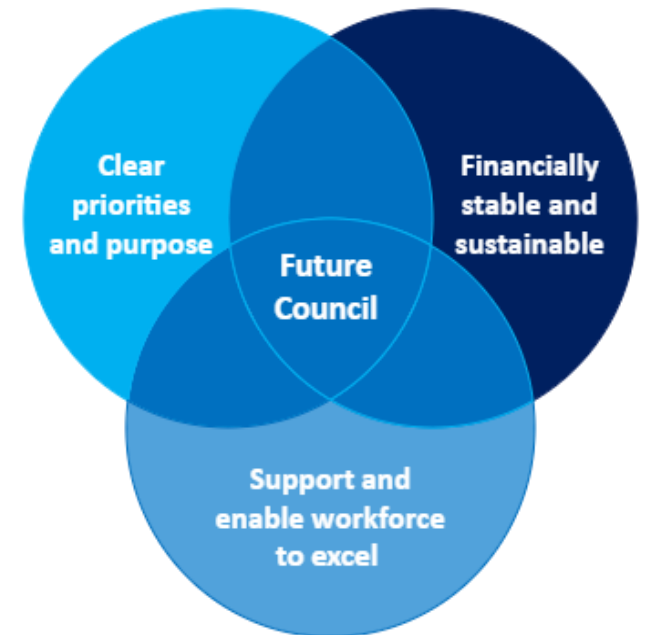
Appendix 2: Key risks to the delivery of the Plan



As well as specific programme related risks, there are overarching risks across the whole Improvement Plan which are set out below. These risks will be reviewed regularly by the Leadership Board and Improvement Board:

Risk title	Risk description	Controls and Mitigations
Capacity and pace of delivery	Failure to deliver the improvement plan in a timely and effective manner due to capacity constraints. Delivering the improvement plan needs to be carried out rapidly, achieving significant changes across the Council. This needs to build on changes delivered to date and incorporate new areas of focus and action. As the Council continues to change the way it works to achieve outcomes for local communities within available finances, capacity to implement these changes when it is required is a challenge and a risk.	A comprehensive a robust view of the resourcing requirements to deliver the plan, with reprioritisation and allocation taking place. Confirming and securing capacity in key teams that will be enabling the delivery of the plan. Clear and consistent leadership setting out the direction, pace, outcomes and expectations of the change required. Governance and delivery arrangements that remove siloed working Accountability and responsibility clearly articulated and demonstrated, including through progress and impact reporting
Resourcing the plan	Inability to reallocate and invest in functions to support the delivery of the plan will lead to difficulties in delivering the improvement plan. The Council has been prioritising resources over several years especially to maintain services, particular to vulnerable people. This has needed the reduction of budgets and therefore staffing in other areas of the Council, including council-wide support services. It is recognised that there may need to invest in these services to enable the improvement plan to be realised and contribute to a sustainable council in the future. Failure to align and free up resources to deliver effective change and improvement is a risk.	The Improvement Plan will set out the strategic framework for improvement activity, bringing together the Financial Stability Plan and the Sustainability Strategy, and overall Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). A new Corporate Plan 2026-30 is being developed, and this will take the priorities of the council, alongside the improvement plan and the financial strategy. Specifying and negotiating with MHCLG the amount and use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to deliver financial stability through the Improvement Plan and financial sustainability in the medium to longer term.
Understanding and perception of change	Inability to maintain stakeholder confidence leading to reduced support for the improvement plan. There is a risk that residents, partners, members and staff see short-term changes in performance reducing rather than improving as the Council implements the plan.	Clear and timely internal and external communications and engagement that describes the process the Council is going through with open and honest descriptions of current progress while setting out the rationale for change and where the council is aiming to be in the future.
Managing interdependencies across the plan	Failure to manage interdependencies across the improvement plan leading to disruption, duplication or failure in delivering the improvement plan at pace. There are a wide range of interdependencies between the various change programmes in the improvement plan. Without appropriate management of these interdependencies and the sequencing between them there is a risk that delivery of the Plan could be negatively impacted, activity is duplicated, or programmes could become unviable	The need for direct communications between Senior Accountable Officers (SAOs) responsible for the programmes of action has been identified early. Interdependencies between the programmes have been identified and shared. Changes in the performance or scope of change programmes will be communicated via the Improvement Plan governance structures and arrangements. Clear leadership will set out the aims and priorities of the change required. Strengthened Project Management Office (PMO)

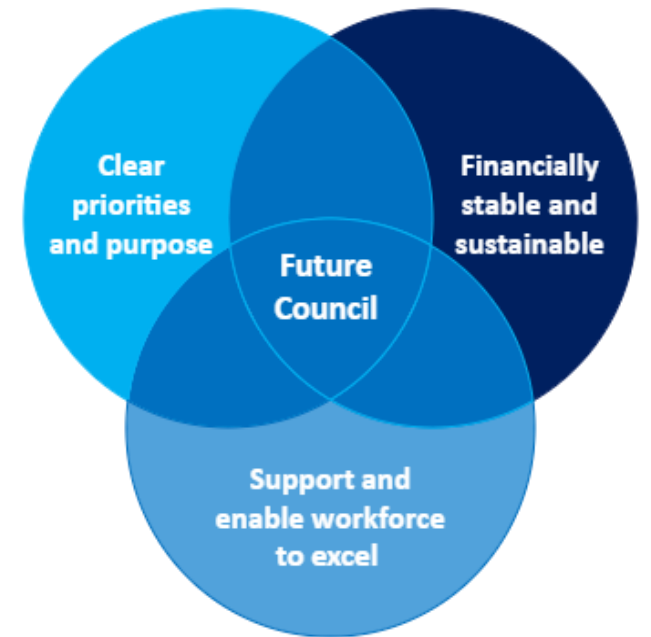
Appendix 3: Key Performance Measures



Reporting on delivery and impact of the Improvement Plan will use a combination of deliverables, milestones, key performance indicators (KPIs) and measures. Listed below are a range of KPIs and measures that we intend to use. Some measures need developing and baseline information/position establishing.

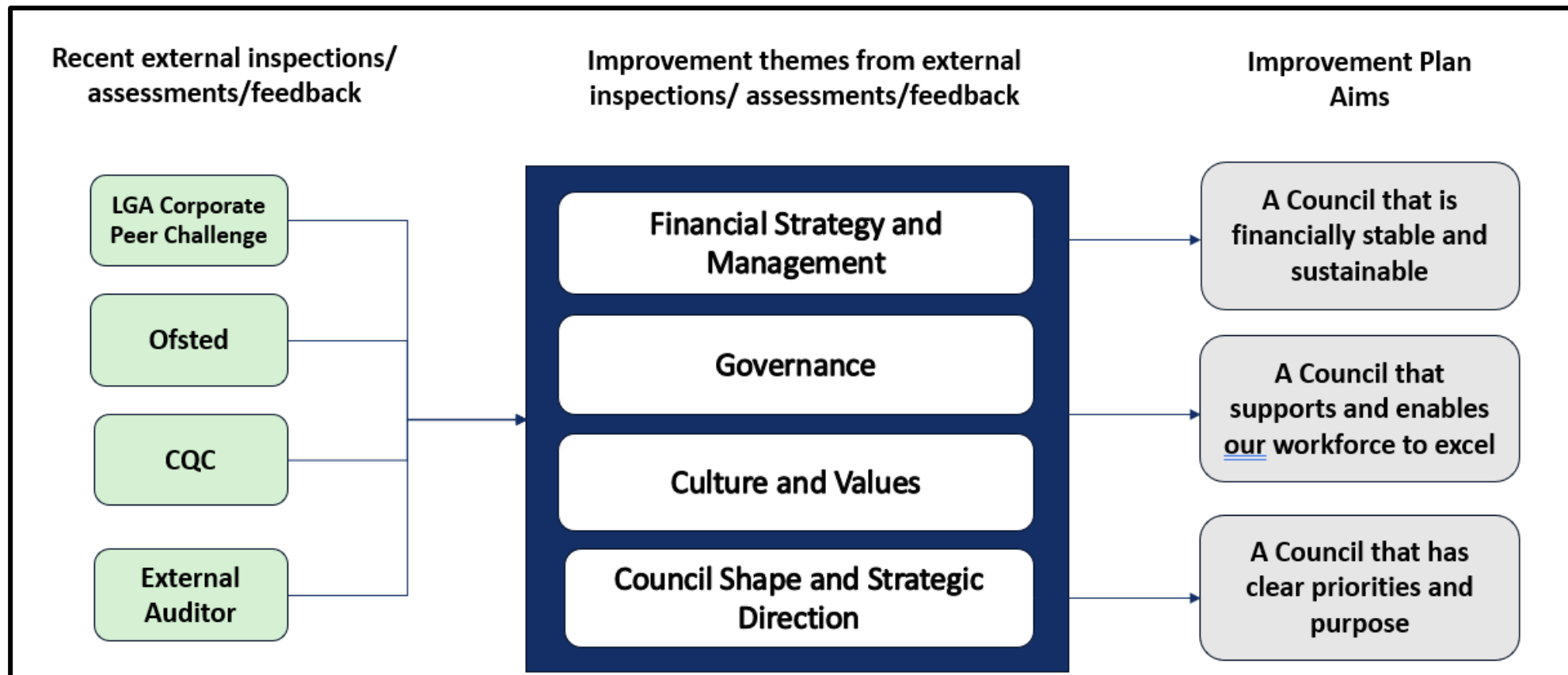
Aim	Benefits/Outcomes	KPIs / Measures
Financially Stable and Sustainable	A balanced budget for 2026/27 Improved delivery of savings and income through more robust plans Transformation proposals that deliver financial stability and sustainability Robust financial monitoring, management and accountability A sustainable financial strategy aligning revised service delivery to available financial resources Strengthened procurement and contract management practices	Budget performance KPIs – against profile, underspend/overspend, GFB resilience
		Financial health KPIs – e.g. Levels of reserves, levels of debt, use of EFS over MTFS
		Savings delivery: % of savings plans in place, % savings delivered
		Income against target / Income collection rates
		Completion of revenue budget monitoring by budget holders
Clear priorities and purpose	New plans approved (Corporate Plan and 2050 partnership vision/plan) Increased understanding of council priorities and their roles in delivering them Transformation aligned with corporate plan, improvement plan and financial stability plan More transformation projects delivered on time and within budget Future Council principles guiding delivery, transformation and continuous improvement More collaboration with partners and communities Increased stakeholder confidence and satisfaction Improved public perception of the council	New plans approved: corporate plan 2026-30, Shropshire 2050 partnership plan
		Service delivery plans in place and aligned to Shropshire Plan
		Staff perception and understanding of council priorities and operating principles
		External perceptions of council: (a) Residents (b) partners <i>(to be developed)</i>
		Elected member perceptions of the council <i>(to be developed)</i>
Staff are supported and enabled to excel	Improved staff satisfaction Increased levels of staff engagement Reduced levels of staff absence Increase in compliance performance (FOIs, SARs, Complaints, etc) Increase levels of mandatory training completed Increase numbers of PDPs completed Reduction in number customer complaints More digital enabled services National recognition/awards	Responding to corporate governance recommendations <i>(to be developed)</i>
		Staff sentiment and perceptions (Pulse Surveys)
		Number of FOIs and SARs and performance in responding to them
		Number of: (a) Compliments (b) complaints and performance in responding to them
		Workforce data – including absence, turnover and retention, % of agency staff
		Mandatory training completion: (a) staff and (b) elected members
		% of PDPs completed

Appendix 4: Mapping external recommendations to the Plan



Appendix 4: How the Plan responds to external feedback and recommendations

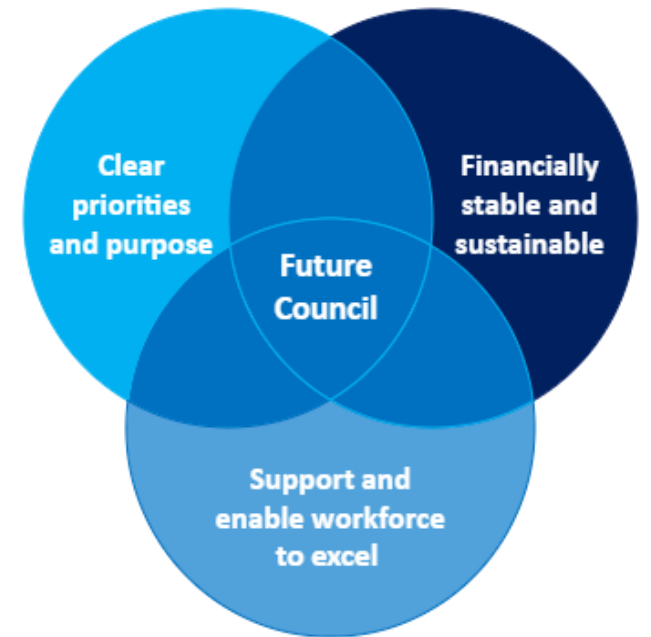
The Improvement Plan has been developed to consolidate the improvement-focused recommendations and key issues to the Council that have been made following external reviews and inspections. Over the past 12 months the council has received reports following the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, Ofsted and CQC inspections of Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care and the External Auditor. The feedback and recommendations have been used to inform the Improvement Plan aims and priorities. The diagram and the table on the following pages help to illustrate how the Plan responds to them.



Improvement Aim	Externally identified recommendations/ key issues			
A Council that is financially stable and sustainable	CPC1: 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. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy	CPC2: Immediately assess and negotiate your EFS requirements for 25/26 and for the period of the MTFS before a s114 notice becomes a necessity. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy	CPC9: 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. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice	
A Council that supports and enables its staff	CPC3: 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. Programme 8: Getting the basics right	CPC5: 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' Programme 7 : People Plan	CPC8: 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. Programme 8: Getting the basics right	CPC10: Change your narrative, tell your story and clearly celebrate your success as one council. Programme 7 : People Plan Programme 9: Digital programme
A Council that has clear priorities and purpose	CPC4: 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 Programme 6: Review and realignment of transformation programme	CPC6: 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. Programme 4: Corporate Plan 2026-30 Programme 5: Future council	CPC7: Improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders to help make the organisation legible for colleagues at a time of great change. Programme 7 : People Plan Programme 9: Digital programme	

Improvement Aim	Externally identified recommendations/ key issues			
A Council that is financially stable and sustainable	EA SR1: The Council should: continue, at pace, the action taken to address the financial challenges it faces. In addition, the Council should undertake an immediate review of all service, both statutory and non-statutory, and identify the cost of minimum viable service provision. This will enable the Council to understand the scale of its structural deficit between the cost of service and the income available to the Council. This action should give the Council an understanding of immediate decisions and savings that can be delivered, replicating actions that would be taken were the Council to issue a Section 114 Notice. The Council develop a realistic and deliverable plan over the medium term as to how Exceptional Financial Support will support the increase in financial resilience, and how the Council will reduce reliance on this support to reach a financially sustainable position. Exceptional Financial Support should be temporary in nature, and the Council needs to clearly articulate the plan for reaching a financially sustainable position without undue reliance on temporary sources of support. The Council should also immediately action the recommendations raised in the Internal Audit review and report to Audit and Governance Committee on the progress of addressing the recommendations to avoid a similar situation occurring again in the future. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy	EA KR1: The Council should: review all savings programmes to scrutinise deliverability and ensure that, when setting the budget for 2026/27 the savings programmes included are deliverable and achievable. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice (link to full report and recommendation wording – EAAR 2024/25)	EA KR2: The Council should: continue to drive forward activity that seeks to mitigate the growth of the DSG deficit whilst continuing to engage through the Schools Forum on the management plan in place. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice	EA IR1: The Council should: review its approach to reporting on slippage against the capital programme and, as appropriate, enhance the detail of reporting. Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice
A Council that supports and enables its staff	EA KR3: The Council should: immediately create an action plan as to how to address the pervasive issues across the Council that are contributing to the “Limited Assurance” opinion from the Head of Policy and Governance (Internal Audit). Programme 8: Getting the basics right	EA IR2: The Council should – develop a clear action plan for addressing the recommendations raised in the Corporate Peer Review.		

Appendix 5: Glossary of Terms



Term	Definition
Local Government Association (LGA)	The national membership body for councils in England and Wales. Its main role is to represent and support councils, acting as the voice of local government to national government and other stakeholders
Care Quality Commission (CQC)	The independent regulator of health and adult social care services in England. Its main purpose is to ensure that care provided is safe, effective, compassionate, and high quality
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)	The non-ministerial department of the UK Government responsible for inspecting and regulating services that care for children and young people, as well as those providing education and skills training
External Auditor	An external auditor for councils is an independent audit professional or firm appointed to review and provide assurance on a council's financial statements and arrangements for securing value for money. In Shropshire, the appointed external auditor is Grant Thornton
Best Value	A statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 1999. It requires councils to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)	An independent body in England that investigates complaints about councils, adult social care providers, and certain other public services
General Fund Balances and Reserves	Funds held by councils as a mitigation against the risk of unknown or unexpected financial pressures
Programme Management Office (PMO)	A function or team within an organisation that provides governance, standards, and support for managing programmes and projects
Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)	Temporary financial assistance provided by the UK Government to councils facing severe financial difficulties
Third Party Spend	Refers to the money the Council spends on goods and services provided by external suppliers or contractors rather than produced internally.
Strategic Operating Model	A high-level framework that defines how an organisation delivers its strategy through its structure, processes, technology, and people
Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)	The independent body in England responsible for regulating registered providers of social housing, such as housing associations and councils
Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF)	A national framework that sets priority outcomes for local authorities and measures progress using agreed metrics
SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)	Children and young people who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn compared to most others of the same age
Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)	An independent, national body that supports councils and other public bodies to improve governance, accountability, and scrutiny practices.
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)	The UK Government department responsible for housing policy, local government oversight, community development, and planning
CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy)	A professional accountancy body that provides qualifications, training, and guidance and sets accounting standards for councils

