



## Committee and Date

Cabinet 9<sup>th</sup> July 2025

10:30 am

Item

Public

## Report heading



# Transfer of Coroner's Officers to Shropshire Council

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<b>Cabinet Member</b> (Portfolio Holder):		Bernie Bentick, Portfolio Holder – Health and Public Protection	

## Synopsis

This report seeks the approval of Cabinet for the transfer of the Coroner's Officers from West Mercia Police to Shropshire Council from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025.

## Executive Summary

**2.1** Coroners are independent judicial officers funded and supported by local authorities, with statutory responsibility under The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 for inquiring into the cause of

certain deaths. Shropshire, Telford, and Wrekin is a Coronal area, with Shropshire Council acting as the lead authority.

**2.2** Coroner's Officers, who perform various support functions at the direction of the Coroner, are currently employed and funded by West Mercia Police ("WMP"). WMP has decided to cease supporting these roles as they are not considered to be core policing functions and as such responsibility for employing and funding the six officers (5 FTE) will transfer to Shropshire Council under TUPE legislation. They will continue to be based at the Guildhall and will be integrated into the existing Registration and Coroners Service.

**2.3** It is proposed that this transfer take place on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 and that the precise arrangements for achieving this should be delegated to the Service Director – Legal and Governance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Public Protection.

**2.4** The Chief Executive of Shropshire Council and the Chief Constable of WMP have provisionally agreed that funding will be reduced on a tapering basis as set out in more detail at Section 5 of this Report.

## Recommendations

That Cabinet authorise:

**3.1** The transfer of the management of the six (5 FTE) Coroners Officers from West Mercia Police to Shropshire Council with the transfer of funding agreed on a tapering basis as set out in the Table at paragraph 5.3.

**3.2** The Service Director – Legal and Governance, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Public Protection, to agree the detail of the transfer of staff and their functions with a target date of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025.

# Report

## Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

**4.1** Some current Coroner's Officers may choose not to transfer to Shropshire Council and either leave or be redeployed across West Mercia Police. This would result in considerable pressure on the remaining team until replacements could be recruited and, with their assistance, trained.

**4.2** An uncoordinated transition of officers could damage the relationship between the Council and HM Coroner, lead to an uncontrolled funding pressure for the Council and damage the support provided to bereaved relatives. If the recommendation to transfer is agreed, then a project plan will be developed and implemented to ensure the transfer is managed as smoothly as possible.

**4.3** Appropriate access to systems within West Mercia Police will need to be maintained to facilitate the smooth running of the service.

## Financial Implications

**5.1** Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands as budgeted for within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 27 February 2025 and subsequent updates. It is also addressed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been, and continues to be, undertaken to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within

the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve scaling down initiatives, changing the scope, delaying implementation, or extending delivery timescales

**5.2** In 2009 an agreement was reached between Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Council which provided Coroners Services for each area and was administered by Shropshire Council. The agreement confirmed that specific case costs will be met by the Council area to which the death relates. Further service costs are met on the cost sharing basis of proportions of Coroners referrals for each area, currently 60% Shropshire 40% Telford and Wrekin.

**5.3** The Council does not currently budget for the costs of the Coroner Officers as this has been 100% funded by WMP. It has been agreed between the Chief Constable of West Mercia Police and the Chief Executive of Shropshire Council that have proposed that their funding is withdrawn over four years on a phased withdrawal basis. This is the same arrangement as was agreed between Worcestershire County Council and West Mercia Police when the Coroner's Officers were transferred in a similar manner in 2023. The Table below outlines the amount and percentage of funding attributable to Shropshire Council and West Mercia Police over the four-year period.

	Year 1 – 2025 from date of transfer	Year 2 – 2026	Year 3 – 2027	Year 4 – 2028	Ongoing from 2029
SC	25%	50%	75%	100%	100%
WMP	75%	50%	25%	0	£0 0%
T&W	40% of SC costs	40% of SC costs	40% of SC costs	40%	40%

**5.4** The consequences for Shropshire Council of the above proposed funding withdrawal are estimated to be, Year 1 £18,700, Year 2 £77,028, Year 3 £118,431 and Year 4 £161,856. Over the four-year period above the forecast cumulative pressure for Shropshire Council would be a total of £376,015. There will be year 4 costs, plus annual salary and on-cost increases due to inflation/demand recurrently from year 5 onwards. Whilst the additional costs for Year 1 can be absorbed within the service it will be necessary to seek growth within the budget for future years.

**5.5** This proposal highlights that any future inflation / salary uplift needs to be costed and funded. It is envisaged that SC may need to review the service following transfer (subject to TUPE legislation) and would want to negotiate risk sharing any potential implications with WMP. Further conversations will need to be held with West Mercia Police over transfer of functions/staff to Shropshire Council and any cost implications recognising the importance of ensuring the service is able to continue to deliver its functions post transfer in October 2025.

## Climate Change Appraisal

**6.1** This report does not directly make decisions on energy and fuel consumption; renewable energy generation; carbon offsetting or mitigation; or on climate change adaption. The Coroners Officers are currently based at the Guildhall and they will continue to operate from there following the transfer.

## Background

**7.1** Coroners are independent judicial officers who are appointed and funded by local authorities. They inquire into deaths reported to them which appear to be violent, unnatural or of sudden and unknown causes. Coroners are judicially independent and as such determine how they discharge their functions within the statutory framework.

**7.2** Over the years there have been calls for a national Coroners' Service of England and Wales, but this has not materialised, and it remains a locally funded service. The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 ("the 2009 Act") has led to some significant and ongoing reforms which are focused on providing consistent good practice, openness and fairness. This, along with the Chief Coroners model coroner area document provides guidance which places the family at the centre of the investigation/inquest.

**7.3** Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin is designated as a Coronial area and as such is required to have a Senior Coroner appointed (not employed) by the Local Authority and agreed by the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor. SC have significant statutory duties in respect of the coronial service. These include:

- appointing and remunerating the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Senior Coroner and Assistant Coroners;
- meeting all the costs of the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Coroner service, including body removal, post-mortems, and toxicology reports; and
- providing the Senior Coroner with suitable officers, staff, premises and office accommodation to fulfil their role

**7.4** In a Coronial area consisting of two or more local authorities, as is the case in Shropshire, one of them will be the lead authority for the area. In Shropshire that is Shropshire Council (with a financial contribution of 40% from Telford and Wrekin Council). As a result, the duty to supply Officers, staff and accommodation to the Coroner in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin falls on Shropshire Council.

**7.5** Coroners are supported by Coroners Officers, who are in many respects the mainstay of the administration of the coronial system. They are the officers most likely to have direct contact with bereaved Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin residents. The service and staff are already based with the Coroner at the Coroner's Court at the Guildhall. The duties and tasks they perform are directed by the Coroner and include a range of tasks such as conducting enquiries on behalf of the coroner, liaising with families, collating statements of evidence and organising post-mortems and inquests following authorisation from the Coroner.

**7.6** Under the 2009 Act the duty to provide officers and other staff falls on the Council *"if, or to the extent that, the necessary officers and other staff for that area are not provided by a local policing body"*.

**7.7** Within Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin these roles have historically been provided and funded by West Mercia Police. However, they are not considered core policing roles, and the current division of accountability does not sit well with a modern Coroner's Service. The roles do not require the exercise of any police powers, hence the decision of West Mercia Police to cease supporting the function.

**7.8** It is envisaged that the proposal, which has been initiated by WMP, would result in the transfer of the 6 staff and their functions from West Mercia Police to Shropshire Council in accordance with Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) legislation) (TUPE) on or around 1 October 2025. The precise transfer date will be subject to formal agreement/consultation as required via TUPE legislation.

**7.9** It is proposed that any staff who transfer would be located within the existing Registration and Coroners Service and will be absorbed into the existing responsibilities of the management team who already oversee the Coroner's administrative staff.

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

**Local Member:** All

**Appendices**