

Committee and Date

Cabinet

21 January 2025

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2025

**In The Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ
10.30 am – 12.20 pm**

Responsible Officer: Amanda Holyoak

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Cabinet Members Present

Councillors Heather Kidd (Leader), Alex Wagner (Deputy Leader), Bernie Bentick, Roger Evans, Andy Hall, Ruth Houghton, James Owen, Rob Wilson and David Walker

Also present: Councillors Dawn Huseman, Group Leader, Reform UK, Dan Thomas, Group Leader Conservatives, Councillor Julian Dean, Deputy Group Leader, Green and Progressive Independent, Councillor David Minnery (Chair of Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee),

81 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor David Vasmer.

Labour Group Leader Cllr Rosemary Dartnall and Green and Progressive Independent Group Leader Cllr Duncan Kerr had also sent apologies.

82 Disclosable Interests

None were declared

83 Minutes

RESOLVED

To approve the minutes of the last meeting as a correct record.

84 Public Question Time

Two public questions were received:

From Judy Bradley, in relation to Wem High Street

From John Palmer – in relation to Price Waterhouse Coopers

The full questions and the answers provided to them are available [here](#)

85 Member Question Time

Three public questions were received:

From Ed Potter, in relation to Education, Health and Care Plans

From Julian Dean, in relation to Road Safety and Active Travel Schemes

From Colin Taylor, in relation to cycle routes and funding

The full questions and answers to them are available [here](#) (appendix to SEND question: [here](#))

86 Scrutiny Items

a Scrutiny Item – Report of the Station Gyratory (LUF2) Task & Finish Group

The Chair of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the findings and recommendations of the Station Gyratory Rapid Task and Finish Group, which was formed in response to public concern and scrutiny committee recommendations regarding the Levelling Up Fund Project in Shrewsbury.

The group had conducted a full day of investigations, engaging with emergency services, businesses, stakeholders, and council officers to gather evidence and inform their recommendations.

Key issues identified included: a breakdown in communication among stakeholders - resulting in a scheme that differed from initial plans; concerns about congestion and emergency service access; insufficient information sharing; and a lack of opportunity to pause and review the project.

The group had noted that despite significant external funding commitments, the Council was left vulnerable to liability, and an independent safety audit of the site was recommended to assess risks and guide next steps. Other recommendations focused on improving governance, oversight, and applying lessons learned to future and existing projects to ensure robust management and public confidence.

The Group had emphasized the need for immediate improvements, such as traffic light sequencing, addressing bus stop issues, and ongoing scrutiny workstreams, particularly around the movement strategy and quality assurance for future projects.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Economic Growth thanked the Task and Finish Group for its swift and thorough work. He said the report clearly outlined a series of problems with the scheme, noting links to earlier issues raised about project delivery in the council. Opportunities to stop or reconsider the project were missed, with some officers raising concerns that were not acted upon, which he recognised as a serious problem. He stressed the need to rebuild confidence with partners, as the project became disconnected

from the broader strategy as it developed and changes were made. He committed to learning lessons and doing things differently in future.

Cabinet accepted the recommendations set out the report in full and agreed to review the position in 6 months time.

b Scrutiny Item - Improvement Plan

The Chair of the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided a verbal report on the committee's consideration of the Improvement Plan at its meeting held on 1 December. The Committee had been broadly positive and supportive of the plan, understanding that it was not yet a detailed delivery plan but agreeing that it set out clear aims and programmes of work to be delivered in order for the Council to become financially stable and sustainable in the future. It was noted that Members had been engaged and informed as the plan developed.

The Committee had also considered how the Improvement Board would fit with the Council's political governance structures, and the role of overview and scrutiny overall in adding value in the most agile and effective way, ensuring the Improvement Plan is delivered and supported, whilst avoiding duplication of the role of the Board. Focus on outcomes rather than processes would be required and protocols would be needed for monitoring progress. Recognising the demand on scarce resources, it had been recognised that there may be a need for some Members to take on or assist with background work of Task and Finish Groups.

The Leader thanked the Chairman of the Committee for his useful report.

87 All Age Autism Strategy 2025 - 2030

The Portfolio Holder for Social Care introduced Shropshire Council's All-Age Autism Strategy for 2025–2030. The strategy had been based on extensive engagement with autistic people, families, carers, and professionals and aims to make Shropshire an inclusive place where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported, and able to thrive.

The strategy aligns with the Shropshire Plan and the recent House of Lords report "*Time to Deliver*", which reviews progress since the Autism Act 2009. It focused on early intervention, prevention, and person-centred support in response to rising autism prevalence both nationally and locally.

Key aims included reducing assessment waiting times, improving access to support, and enabling autistic people to live fulfilling and independent lives. The approach emphasised collaboration across health, education, employment, housing, social care, and the criminal justice system. It also highlighted the importance of lived experience, data-driven service design, and mandatory autism and neurodiversity training for staff.

RESOLVED

3.1 To approve the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030

3.2 To endorse the development of an All-Age Autism Strategy delivery plan to embed the recommendations included and inform policy overseen by the Service Director for Commissioning in consultation with the Portfolio holder for social care.

3.3 To review progress and implementation at People Scrutiny in 12 months, December 2026

3.4 To commit Shropshire Council to be a neuroinclusive employer

88 Improvement Plan

The Leader introduced the draft Improvement Plan, stressing the urgent need to address the Council's financial emergency, respond to external audit and peer challenge findings, and restore stability. The plan outlined three improvement aims and nine priority programmes, forming a framework to coordinate existing work and guide transformation through to 2027. An independently chaired Improvement Board would oversee progress and provide challenge and ideas.

It was noted that the plan was not a detailed delivery document but a high-level framework that would continue to evolve. Transparency and engagement had been central to its development, with input from staff, members, partners, and scrutiny. Further supporting plans, in addition to the People Plan, would follow.

During discussion, Members raised points on value for money, redesigning services, digital inclusion, and the need for broader community partnerships. It was confirmed that several LGA deep-dive reviews (children's finances, adults' social care, transformation) were underway. Early findings showed pressure linked to high service demand and reduced investment in early prevention. Officers noted that capacity gaps limited the Council's ability to assess minimum service levels and emphasised the need to rebuild capability, strengthen place-based work, and improve organisational understanding.

Members recognised the scale and difficulty of the transformation required and the need to make rapid progress.

RESOLVED

3.1 To review, comment on, and recommend the draft Improvement Plan (Appendix 1) to Council.

3.2 To recommend to Council the governance arrangements set out in the Plan.

3.3 To recommend to Council that the capacity and resources to support the delivery of transformation required through this plan will be aligned to the MTFS.

89 People Plan

The Leader introduced the People Plan as a key element of the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations and a central part of the Council's ambition to become an enabling, modern authority. The plan sets out a commitment to empower, support and collaborate with staff, partners and communities, with the aim of improving outcomes for residents. It

included programmes focusing on organisational values, communications, engagement, equality and inclusion, wellbeing, and the introduction of a new performance management framework with clear KPIs.

Delivery of the plan would be overseen by a dedicated People Board, with regular reporting to the Leadership Board and Cabinet. The plan was designed to be collaborative, with strong emphasis on staff engagement, trust, and capturing staff ideas for improvement and efficiency. It aligned directly with the Council's wider Improvement Plan, supporting modernisation, financial sustainability, and improved service delivery.

During discussion, Members raised questions about the resourcing required to implement the plan, and it was confirmed that funding requirements formed part of the Improvement Plan and may depend on the outcome of the Council's request for Exceptional Financial Support. Members emphasised that investment in staff was essential if the Council is to deliver the improvements required.

Portfolio holders spoke about severe staffing pressures across multiple departments, with some services operating at or below minimum viable levels. Members stressed the need to protect and rebuild critical teams, improve staff morale, and ensure that officers are not overwhelmed. Several Members also highlighted the importance of celebrating staff achievements and improving public understanding of service pressures.

All agreed that the People Plan was vital to supporting organisational change and ensuring the workforce is equipped and motivated during a challenging period.

RESOLVED

3.1 To review, comment on, and recommend to full Council the approval of the draft People Plan (Appendix 1).

3.2 To agree the governance arrangements, the aims and values, set out in the Plan.

3.3 To agree the capacity and resources necessary to support the delivery of organisational change and development, as outlined in this plan, are aligned with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to ensure effective and sustainable implementation

90 Financial Monitoring Period 7

The Portfolio Holder presented the Period 7 financial monitoring position, noting a further deterioration. The forecast outturn overspend has increased by £3.677m, resulting in a total projected overspend of £50.746m. With the General Fund balance standing at £34.280m, this leaves an unfunded overspend of £16.466m.

He reminded all of the financial emergency already declared, and all possible actions were being taken to minimise in-year expenditure and maximise income. The three operational boards were meeting regularly and focused on tighter spend control across the organisation.

The plan for managing the in-year position has been set out, to establish a minimum level for the General Fund balance; create a contingency fund from earmarked reserves and actively engage with the DLHC regarding Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) for 2025/26 and future years.

Members noted that the position, while worsening, remains containable if spending stabilises and begins to reduce.

RESOLVED

- A. To ensure actions taken by officers under the declared Financial Emergency are focussed to ensure all spending and income generation over the remainder of the financial year is scrutinised to actively improve the Council's projected year end position. Action must predominantly focus on reducing spend, increasing income, delivering remaining savings and mitigating in-year spending pressures.
- B. To support the continued use of Operations Boards, which have been in place from August 2025, to challenge all in-year spending, and more recently have been further enhanced to bring greater Service Director scrutiny. The impact of these boards will continue to inform future Finance Monitoring reports.
- C. To consider the projected spend over budget at Period 7 of £50.746m.
- D. To consider the indicative level of savings delivery at Period 7 of £20.917m (34.94%).
- E. To support the proposal for a minimum value of £5m for the General Fund Balance and the ringfencing of a Contingency Fund of £5.478m.
- F. To support the proposed application for Exceptional Financial Support of £71.361m made up of £21.466m for revenue monitoring pressures, up to £10m for transformation activity and up to £38.895m for NWRR write off costs (should this be necessary). The decision on the final application will be made by the s151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

91 Treasury Management Update Quarter 2 2025/26

The Portfolio Holder for Finance reported that the Council currently held £44.1 million in investments and had £420m of borrowing. During Quarter 2, a 4.11% had been returned on cash balances, slightly below the benchmark by 0.08%. The returns guaranteed a net income of £1.246 million for the Council. He noted that the Council's Audit Committee is responsible for effective consideration of treasury management.

RESOLVED

- 3.1. To note the summary of the wider economic environment and the Council's borrowings and investments set out in Appendix A.
- 3.2. To note the performance within prudential indicators for quarter 2, 2025/26 (Appendix B)

92 Treasury Strategy 2025/26 Mid-Year Review

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the report.

RESOLVED

3.1. To agree the Treasury Strategy activity as set out in the report.

93 Fees and Charges Pricing Policy

The Portfolio Holder introduced the Corporate Fees and Charges Policy, explained that the purpose of the policy was to ensure fees and charges were set within a consistent framework and supported the Council's financial sustainability. The core objective was to move towards full cost recovery for discretionary services as the default position. It was noted that some fees were nationally set or limited by statutory restrictions, including caps on inflationary increases.

Two appendices accompanied the report, including an initial Equality and Social Inclusion Assessment, which currently identifies a low or negative impact. Further assessments might be undertaken where new or significantly altered fees were proposed.

During discussion, a member highlighted the need to consider the cumulative impact on small businesses, which were facing pressures from multiple sources. It was noted that many statutory fee caps prevent the Council from recovering full costs, adding to financial pressures. Cabinet acknowledged these concerns and emphasised the need for balanced decision-making when detailed proposals came forward.

RESOLVED

- a. To consider the Fees and Charges Policy attached at Appendix 1
- b. To recommend to Council the approval and adoption of the Fees and Charges Policy for 2026/27 and incorporation into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process in February 2026.

94 Pre-Budget Report

This item was withdrawn.

95 Setting the Council Tax Taxbase for 2026/27

The Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the technical report on setting the Council Tax Base. The report confirmed that Shropshire had 121,852.27 Bank D equivalent properties, and increase of 4,175 equivalents from the previous year. The collection rate had been set at 98%, representing a 0.2% reduction from the current year.

RESOLVED

To agree and recommend to full Council:

3.1 To approve, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Shropshire Council as its Council Tax taxbase for the year 2026/27, as detailed in Appendix A, totalling 121,852.37 Band D equivalents.

3.2 To note the changes to the Council's localised Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme in 2026/27. The scheme is attached at Appendix B.

3.3 To note the Council Tax Support Scheme amendments detailed in Appendix B have no impact on the taxbase determination.

3.4 To note the exclusion of 7,950.74 Band D equivalents from the taxbase calculation as a result of localised Council Tax Support.

3.5 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to not award a discount in respect of vacant dwellings undergoing major repair, i.e. former Class A exempt properties.

3.6 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties, of 100% for one month i.e. effectively reinstating the exemption and the resulting exclusion of 243.34 band D equivalents from the taxbase calculation. Cabinet 3rd December 2025 – Setting the Council Tax Taxbase 2026/27 Contact: james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk 3

3.7 To note continuation of the "six week rule" in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties.

3.8 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 100% in relation to dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year (but less than five years) and the resulting inclusion of an additional 859.89 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.9 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 200% in relation to dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five years (but less than ten years) and the resulting inclusion of an additional 194.22 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.10 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 300% in relation to dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than ten years and the resulting inclusion of an additional 202.66 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.11 To note the continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 100% in relation to second homes (other than those that retain a 50% discount through regulation as a result of job related protection) and the resulting inclusion of an additional 1,390.00 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.12 To approve a collection rate for the year 2026/27 of 98.0%.

3.13 That the Council Tax Support policy and other similar Council Tax and Business Rate policies are reviewed and consulted upon, where necessary, over 2026 with a view to implementing any revisions by Financial Year 2027/28 at the latest.

96 Children's Services Annual Reports 2024-25

The Portfolio Holder for Social Care introduced the annual Children's Services report, which provided a summary of activity across children's social care over the past year. Members were reminded of their responsibilities as corporate parents and the importance of being fully informed about the safety, quality and outcomes of services delivered for children and young people.

The report highlighted the breadth and complexity of children's social care. Members were reminded that earlier in the year Children's Social Care received an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating, with children's residential homes also achieving Good or Outstanding ratings. The Portfolio Holder praised staff for their dedication in delivering strong outcomes despite financial pressures.

A key recommendation asks Council to require all members to complete mandatory training in children's safeguarding and corporate parenting, reflecting statutory duties for members. The Portfolio Holder emphasised the importance understanding these responsibilities.

Looking ahead she reported that work through the Families First Partnership and the Children's Ambitions Board would focus on early intervention, improved outcomes, and delivering services differently across the partnership.

RESOLVED

3.1 That Cabinet acknowledge the content of the reports attached and the positive impact and outcomes that services are achieving for children and young people.

3.2 That Cabinet acknowledge the breadth of statutory requirements being successfully delivered and achieving good outcomes for the children and young people in Shropshire.

3.3 Where Cabinet wish to influence progress and development opportunities this can be incorporated into the plans of the Ambitions Board which will be driving forward the services continuous improvement plan.

3.4 That Cabinet recommend to Council that it receive the Annual Report and resolve that Childrens Safeguarding training becomes a mandatory requirement for all elected Members in order that they are well equipped to fulfil their role as corporate parents.

97 Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement 2025

The Portfolio Holder for Planning presented the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement for 2025, confirming that £6.5m of developer contributions had been received, £7.1m allocated, and £5.7m spent between April 2024 and March 2025. A further £1.1m was distributed to town and parish councils as Neighbourhood Fund during the same period.

The statement covered Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions supporting sustainable growth and essential infrastructure.

He explained that although the statement must be published before the end of the calendar year, officers had been asked to publish future reports earlier in the financial year, when figures were more current and useful. The infrastructure list remained indicative; inclusion did not guarantee funding, and projects not listed were not excluded from receiving CIL funding.

In discussion, members noted ongoing concerns regarding the transparency and progress of CIL-funded projects. References were made to the ongoing task-and-finish work reviewing the future use and allocation of CIL.

The Leader emphasised the importance of aligning CIL spending with the Council's wider financial context and improving visibility given that most projects do not currently require Cabinet approval unless above £500k.

A Member highlighted issues accessing the place plans via the link in the report, which officers agreed to investigate.

RESOLVED

- A. To agree the Infrastructure Funding Statement - Appendix 1 to this report – for publication before the end of 2025
- B. To delegate responsibility to the Service Director – Legal, Governance and Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to agree, if necessary, amendments to the Infrastructure Funding Statement before its publication.

98 Update on the School Library Service (SLS)

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Education presented the report on the School Library Service, a non-statutory offer currently used regularly by only 13 schools across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and beyond.

He explained that due to declining school engagement, rising financial pressures on schools, and the Government's September 2025 announcement requiring all state schools to have on-site libraries by the end of the parliamentary term, the service was no longer financially viable and was forecast to make a £90,000 loss this year. In light of the Council's declared financial emergency, options for reducing the cost of non-statutory services had to be considered.

It was proposed that the Director of Children's Services would seek expressions of interest from external organisations, for example, schools, multi-academy trusts, town and parish councils and charities to explore transferring the service. If no viable provider emerged, the Council may donate resources to schools to support the establishment of their own libraries, aligning with the National Year of Reading 2026.

During discussion, concerns were raised about the viability of transferring the service and the likelihood of it ultimately being discontinued. The Portfolio Holder and Leader

emphasised the change in circumstances since previous years, including reduced buy-in from schools, years of under-investment in the book stock, and the new government funding commitments for school libraries.

RESOLVED

3.1 To approve the proposal to cease the operation by the Council of the Schools Library Service but before closing the Service altogether, delegate to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, the implementation of an engagement process to ascertain the viability of the service being maintained by a Multi-Academy Trust, Federation, town or parish council, or other third-party organisation. Should that engagement be unsuccessful in identifying a viable interest in operating the Service, it will be closed.

99 Exclusion of Press and Public

100 Exempt Minutes

RESOLVED

That the exempt minutes of the last meeting be confirmed as a correct record.

101 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 21 January 2025 at 10.30 am

Signed (Chairman)

Date: