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Committee and Date

Economy and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2nd July 2026

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2026

In the Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ

6.00 p.m. - 7.51 p.m.

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend Committee Officer

Email: sarah.townsend@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257721

Present:

Councillors Ed Potter (Chairman), Sam Walmsley (Vice-Chair), Julian Dean (Substitute) (substitute for Craig Emery), Donna Edmunds, Gary Groves, Alan Holford, Brendan Mallon, Wendy Owen and Sharon Ritchie-Simmons

Other Members in Attendance:

Councillor Bernie Bentick – Portfolio Holder for Health and Public Protection (remotely)

Councillor Roger Evans – Portfolio Holder for Finance (remotely)

Councillor Ruth Houghton – Portfolio Holder for Social Care (remotely)

Councillor David Vasmer – Portfolio Holder for Highways and Environment

Officers in Attendance:

Claire Braddock – Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Rachel Robinson – Executive Director Public Health (remotely)

Andy Wilde – Service Director Infrastructure

47 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Craig Emery, David Minnery and Chris Naylor. Councillor Julian Dean was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Craig Emery.

48 Disclosable Interests

There were no interests declared.

49 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

That, with the following amendments to the Community Safety Partnership Annual Report 2024-25 (Minute 41):

- Councillor Bentick's Portfolio Holder Title be amended to read 'Portfolio Holder for Health and Public Protection'.
- The following additional wording be included at the end of the last paragraph: *'In response to a question on how the Community Safety Partnership could be*

certain that its activities were effective, the Portfolio Holder for Health and Public Protection pointed to the significant reduction in re-offending rates’.

The minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29th January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

50 Public Question Time

No public questions had been received.

51 Member Question Time

A member question had been received from Councillor Dawn Husemann regarding the ongoing failure of pothole repairs. In her absence, her question was read out by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer and the response to the question was provided by the Chairman. A full copy of the question and response provided is available from the web page for the meeting.

52 Pothole Processes Verbal Update

The Service Director Infrastructure introduced the item by providing a detailed overview of the current condition of Shropshire’s highways network, the national funding context and the challenges created by long term underinvestment, increased winter damage and the statutory duty to keep the highway safe and serviceable. He explained that the Council’s annual Department for Transport (DfT) capital allocation had long been insufficient and fell far short of the £33 million per year required simply to maintain the network in a “steady state” condition. Years of under investment had resulted in “managed decline”, with the service prioritising statutory safety repairs over preventative maintenance. A shift toward preventative maintenance such as resurfacing and surface dressing were highlighted as essential to reducing long-term costs.

The Service Director Infrastructure highlighted that the winter period had caused an exceptional spike in potholes, particularly due to a cold period followed by several weeks of persistent rain. This compressed the usual winter season of defects into a short period, generating a significant backlog and the redeployment of extra repair teams. He explained that highways teams were currently completing 800–900 pothole repairs per week, making progress on the backlog, but acknowledged the level of public concern and the severe impact of water, drainage issues and rural road construction weaknesses.

The statutory inspection regime was outlined with the Service Director Infrastructure explaining that A roads are inspected monthly, while rural lanes are inspected annually or bi-annually. All repairs are ordered as permanent unless conditions require temporary works and every defect is photographed before and after repair. Also explained was the transition from the previous single large contractor model to a “mixed economy” approach, combining in-house teams and external contractors to improve quality, responsiveness and value.

Members raised a wide range of queries. These included concerns about blocked drains, inadequate ditching, field run-off, the impact of heavy agricultural and forestry vehicles on fragile rural roads, budget forecasting, reporting systems and communication with both residents and Town and Parish Councils. Members also discussed examples of pothole repairs being undertaken while nearby defects remained unaddressed, leading to public frustration.

In response, the Service Director Infrastructure confirmed that poor drainage is a major contributor to road deterioration and outlined efforts to increase in-house drainage maintenance. He recognised pressures caused by increased vehicle sizes, particularly agricultural, which had changed traffic patterns in ways rural roads were never engineered to withstand and the issue of road edge deterioration, particularly on the rural network. The need for stronger engagement with landowners, the NFU, the CLA and Town and Parish Councils on managing water run-off and ditch maintenance was acknowledged.

Questions about the Council's ability to secure full future funding from the DfT were addressed. The Service Director Infrastructure confirmed the council must evidence compliance with asset management practice and strategy criteria, publish relevant documents and demonstrate achievement of key performance indicators to unlock the full incentivised funding allocation. Shropshire had historically met the standards required by the DfT and there was no reason why this would not continue. A four year funding indication from the DfT would help long term planning and increase preventative works such as surface dressing programmes. Members asked for clarity on historic funding levels, actual highways budgets and projected highways budgets and in responding, the Service Director Infrastructure commented that he would provide further written information / data on this, to be circulated by officers after the meeting.

Members raised concerns about communication, including the reliability of FixMyStreet, inconsistencies in the outstanding works map and lack of notice for reactive works that cause road closures. The Service Director Infrastructure acknowledged these issues and advised that system improvements to FixMyStreet were being reviewed and that improved digital scheduling could support earlier communication ahead of reactive works and would be explored further. He welcomed suggestions to give local members more timely updates on works scheduling and acknowledged the value of regular contact between technicians, Councillors and Town and Parish Councils. It was confirmed that pothole repairs were photographed before and after, geo-referenced, audit checked and subject to remedial action at contractor cost where necessary.

Members also explored quality assurance processes, including the possibility of independent post work inspections, cross checking between contractors and in house teams and reducing the "you fixed one pothole but not the other" frustration. The Service Director Infrastructure expressed openness to further scrutiny, external reviews and exploring alternative approaches. In responding to a question about Blackpool's Project Amber, he explained that whilst the principles were sound, Shropshire's rural network differed significantly from Blackpool's urban environment.

RESOLVED:

That a new Highways Task and Finish Group be established with new terms of reference to consider issues such as the new contract procurement, value for money, quality of highways (particularly potholes) work and communication. It was confirmed that both new members and members from the previous Task and Finish Group were welcome to join with it anticipated that several sessions would be required. Following completion of their work, a report would be brought back to the committee for consideration and recommendations made to Cabinet for their consideration.

53 Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The committee reviewed the developing work programme and agreed the approach to scrutiny activity over the coming months. It was confirmed that only two Task and Finish Groups would run concurrently at any one time and it was agreed that in the first instance, the Shrewsbury Station Gyrotory Task and Finish Group would reconvene once the outstanding safety audit report was received and that the new Highways Task and Finish Group would be established as a priority. The new Highways Task and Finish Group would consider those issues that had been raised earlier in the meeting relating to such as quality assurance, communication with local members and communities, reporting systems and opportunities for improved efficiency.

It was noted that whilst a Task and Finish Group on the North West Relief Road was planned, the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also set up a Task and Finish Group and would complete their element of the work relating to finances before handing over to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to explore the impact of not having the North West Relief Road on other road networks such as Battlefield. Regarding Pyrolysis, this would be dealt with either as a Task and Finish Group, or as a whole committee.

The committee also agreed that two all Member briefings would be arranged ahead of their July meeting – one on the Riverside Development, to provide clarity on progress to date and future plans and another on the Adoption of Estates, to understand the current position and any outstanding issues from previous work.

Waste minimisation was noted as a future topic. However, Members agreed to await further clarity on work related to food waste, green waste and the waste contract before scheduling scrutiny activity in this area.

The Committee also considered a request from a member of the public relating to planning decision making processes and how the Council assures that planning decisions are supported by robust, independently verified highways and infrastructure evidence, particularly where developments rely on constrained existing access routes or roads that remain unadopted and while the Council is operating without an up to date adopted Local Plan. It was agreed that Councillors Ed Potter and Sharon Ritchie-Simmons would discuss this with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of both Planning Committees and relevant officers in the first instance to explore the matter further and identify whether specific scrutiny work was required. Feedback would then be provided to the committee.

Members noted the importance of maintaining oversight of wider strategic issues, such as the local plan and economic development. It was agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Officer direct this to the Local Plan Members Group and report back on where these issues were being addressed to ensure effective coordination and avoid duplication.

54 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the next meeting of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 2nd July 2026 commencing at 6.00 p.m.

Signed (Chairman)

Date:

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