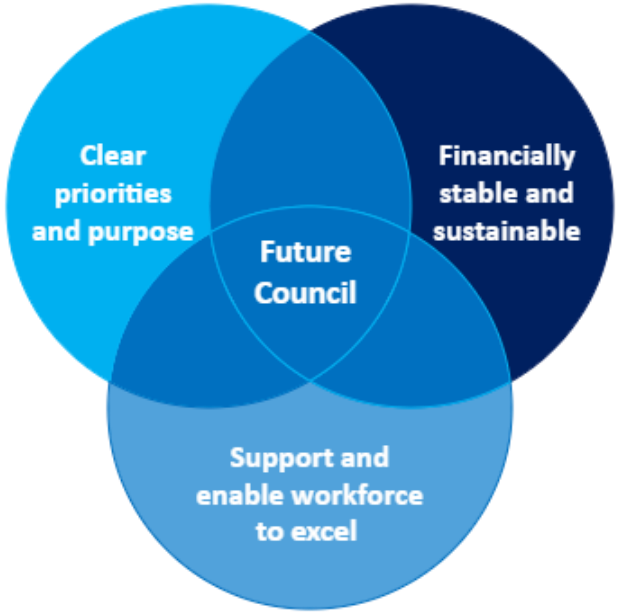
APPENDIX B:
Improvement Plan - Annual Refresh

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

Annual Refresh

November 2026



Foreword from the Leader and Chief Executive

The challenges facing the Council remain significant. We must restore the Council to a sustainable financial position while, at the same time, continuing to strengthen the organisation, improve how we work and ensure we consistently deliver the best possible outcomes for the county and its residents.

These are not separate challenges. Financial recovery depends upon a well-run, effective and high-performing organisation, just as sustained organisational improvement requires sound and sustainable finances. Our task is therefore to address both together, with a clear focus on priorities, strong leadership and governance, and an organisation capable of delivering change with the momentum required.

Over the past year, we have put important foundations in place. Our Improvement Plan (including the People Plan) has provided a single framework for improvement, supported by strengthened oversight and external assurance, including the Shropshire Council Improvement Board (SCIB). We have sharpened our focus on financial management, governance and organisational capacity, while developing more robust arrangements to manage transformation, improvement and change across the Council.

We should recognise that progress. But we must also be clear that there is a considerable journey ahead. The Best Value Notice issued in July, alongside the findings of the CIPFA Assurance Review and Annual Audit Report, provide a clear reminder of where further improvement is required. Our response must be sustained, comprehensive and evidenced through results, not simply the completion of actions and activity.

This refreshed Improvement Plan therefore marks the next phase of our improvement journey. It focuses our effort on the areas that matter most: strengthening financial management and internal controls; improving performance, efficiency and customer experience; developing our organisational culture and workforce; strengthening the involvement of elected members, communities and partners; and embedding continuous improvement across the Council.

Importantly, this work sits alongside our wider transformation and financial recovery activity within a single Transformation, Improvement and Change (TIC) portfolio. This gives us clearer ownership, stronger governance and a more disciplined approach to delivery, benefits and impact.

Our ambition is clear: to become a financially sustainable, well-functioning Council that consistently demonstrates ‘best value’ and delivers for the people and communities of Shropshire. Achieving that will require difficult choices, determination and sustained collective effort from elected members, officers and partners. The foundations are being put in place. Our focus now must be on turning those foundations into lasting change and demonstrable improvement. This Annual Refresh helps us do that.

Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader of Shropshire Council
Tanya Miles, Chief Executive of Shropshire Council

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The Improvement Plan sets out how Shropshire Council will improve 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 was approved by Full Council on 11th December 2025 as a single framework and overall plan for the Council's improvement activity. It includes agreed aims and priorities that provide the basis for a range of activity, projects and programmes that respond to the financial emergency (declared by Cabinet on 10th September 2025), ensure immediate short-term stabilisation and recovery, and drive the development of a strategy for financial sustainability over the medium term.

Over the past 12 months there has been a focus on 9 initial programmes of action aligned to the three overall aims of the Plan. Delivery of programmes has been overseen by an externally chaired Improvement Board, who, since January 2026, have received a monthly update report.

This ***Annual Refresh*** document provides a summary of the next tranche of programmes and projects. These include both new and continuing activity which will address the areas identified in the most recent external reviews and recommendations including:

- The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review
- The non-statutory Best Value Notice issued by MHCLG
- EFS External Assurance Review by CIPFA
- Annual Audit Report by Grant Thornton

The document does not replace the Improvement Plan. It updates and supplements it by summarising the next round of improvement programmes and projects that will help deliver the Plan's aims.

Responding to the Best Value Notice

On 15th July 2026 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued a non-statutory Best Value Notice to Shropshire Council. The Notice is formal notification of the concerns MHCLG have about the Council and its financial position. There are also concerns about leadership capacity, governance, and culture which were identified in reports from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and External Auditor in 2025.

The Best Value statutory guidance sets out 7 overlapping themes of good practice for running a council that meets and delivers 'best value'. These 7 themes suggest that strong governance, culture, and leadership should underpin effective partnerships and community engagement, service delivery, and the use of resources. Continuous improvement is the outcome of all the themes working well together.

Our improvement activity will increasingly focus not simply on completing actions, but on demonstrating sustained improvement across those themes. The refreshed Plan prioritises those areas where further improvement is required, with clear measures and evidence to demonstrate progress and impact.

Our ambition is that by March 2028 the Council will consistently demonstrate the characteristics of a well-functioning authority across all seven Best Value themes, with improvement embedded into the way the Council operates and no material indicators of potential Best Value failure.

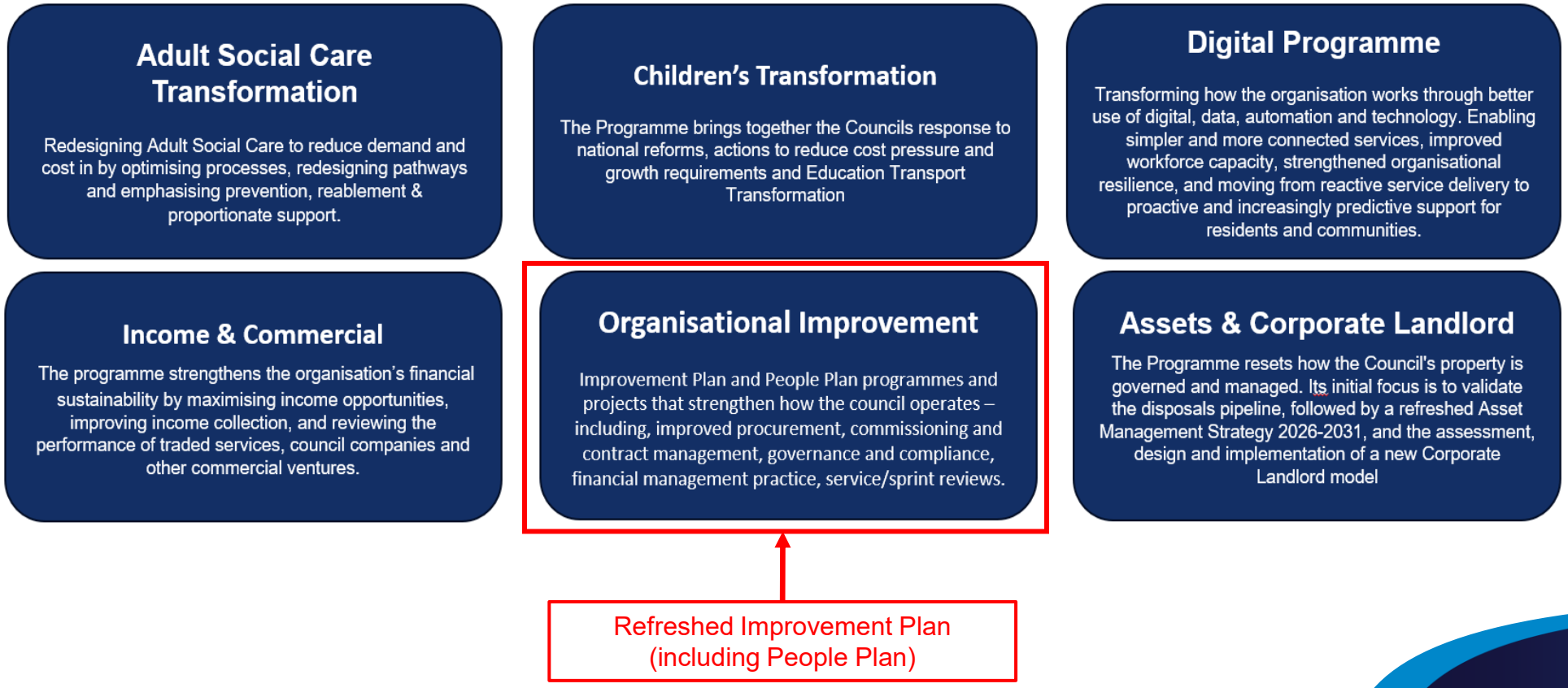
Striving for Best Value: What does good look like?

Our ambition is that the Council will consistently demonstrate the characteristics of a well-functioning authority across all seven Best Value themes, with improvement embedded into the way the Council operates and no material indicators of potential Best Value failure

BV theme	Where are we now	What good looks like	How will we know	Metrics, measures, milestones
Continuous improvement	Improvement increasingly coordinated, but remains reliant on formal improvement arrangements and external assurance	Continuous improvement embedded, with issues identified early and improvement sustained through 'business-as-usual' activity	Improvement is demonstrably sustained and less reliant on exceptional arrangements or driven by external reports and recommendations	Best Value Notice lifted (by July 2028) Delivery of Improvement Plan External assurance findings and feedback
Leadership	Stronger leadership grip and focus, but significant challenges continue to require intensive corporate attention	Clear, visible and accountable leadership, providing effective strategic direction and grip on delivery	Priorities are clear, ownership is understood and underperformance is addressed promptly	Delivery of Corporate Plan priorities TIC milestones on track Timely management of significant risks/action External assurance findings and feedback
Governance	Governance and assurance have strengthened, but weaknesses and areas of inconsistent compliance remain	Robust governance, scrutiny, internal control and assurance, support transparent decision-making and risk management	Controls operate effectively and the Council identifies and addresses weaknesses early through effective risk management	No Statutory Recommendations No 'Limited Assurance' judgement FOI responsiveness / compliance (improved) Complaints responsiveness (improved)
Culture	Culture and engagement are improving, but accountability, constructive challenge and new ways of working are not yet consistently embedded	An open, accountable and learning culture, where challenge and responsibility for improvement are embedded	Workforce indicators demonstrate a healthier, more capable and engaged organisation	Staff engagement and satisfaction (improved) Sickness absence (decreased) PDR completion Mandatory learning completion
Use of resources	We remain exposed to significant financial risks, including a funding gap, delivery risks and reliance on EFS	A balanced and resilient financial position, reduced EFS, with resources aligned to priorities and used economically, efficiently and effectively	Sustainable financial recovery is achieved, plans for longer term sustainability are being delivered, and resources increasingly support agreed priorities	EFS significantly reduced Transformation and savings being delivered Income increased
Service delivery	Performance remains variable and use of data, insight, benchmarking and benefits management is still maturing	Effective, efficient and responsive services, delivering good outcomes and value for money	Performance improves, persistent underperformance reduces and transformation delivers measurable benefit. Complaints reduce, and compliments increase	% key measures on/above target Comparative performance Reduced numbers of complaints Transformation benefits realised
Partnerships & community engagement	Partnership and engagement arrangements are developing but need to be more consistently connected to priorities, service design and delivery.	Strong place leadership – facilitated through a Shropshire Partnership and Plan – and communities, town and parish councils and other partners meaningfully involved in shaping priorities and delivering better outcomes	Partnership and engagement activity demonstrably influences decisions and improves outcomes	Resident/partner feedback Delivery through town/parish councils Evidence of joint delivery shared investment/resources; engagement influencing decisions; and strategic partnerships

One framework for improvement, transformation and recovery

Becoming a well-functioning council that consistently demonstrates the characteristics of a 'best value' authority, will require both organisational improvement and financial recovery which are closely connected. Organisational improvement is essential if financial recovery is to be achieved. The refreshed Improvement Plan and Financial Sustainability and Recovery Strategy set the strategic direction, while the Transformation, Improvement and Change (TIC) Portfolio translates priorities into co-ordinated programmes and projects, with clear ownership, consistent governance, disciplined delivery and transparent reporting of progress, risks, benefits and impact. The refreshed Improvement Plan (including People Plan programme) will form the Organisational Improvement component of the portfolio, aligning this work with the wider transformation and financial recovery activity required to create a more effective and sustainable Council:



Our organisational improvement priorities

Priority programmes of action:

The proposed priority programmes have been developed in response to the Council's own assessment of the improvements still required, alongside the findings and recommendations from external assurance. Together, they provide a targeted programme of organisational improvement aligned to the seven 'Best Value' themes. Some programmes contribute to more than one theme, reflecting the interconnected nature of the characteristics of a well-functioning authority:

Improvement Plan Aim	Programme	Rationale and Reason	Best Value Theme
A Council that is financially stable & sustainable	**1. Financial Management & Practice**	Continues existing improvement work and responds to CIPFA and Annual Audit Report (AAR) recommendations	Use of resources; Leadership; Culture
	2. Procurement, Commissioning & Contract Management	Existing improvement priority with further work required, including responding to the Annual Audit Report (KR7)	Use of resources; Governance; Service delivery
	3. Service Improvement and Efficiency	Supports the wider financial recovery agenda and provides a structured means of challenging expenditure and embedding continuous improvement across the organisation	Use of resources; Continuous improvement
A Council with clear purpose & priorities	**4. Strengthening Partnership Working**	Previously identified as a priority, with further work required to develop our partnerships and partnership working including a Shropshire Partnership and work with town and parish councils.	Partnerships & community engagement; Leadership
	5. Customer experience and expectations	Responds to persistent complaints performance issues while providing the opportunity for a broader focus on customer experience and expectations	Service delivery; Partnerships & community engagement; Continuous improvement
A Council that supports and enables its people to excel	**6. Performance Management Framework & Culture**	Builds on the new corporate plan performance framework, and responds to the AAR improvement recommendation (IR2)	Leadership; Continuous improvement; Governance; Service delivery
	7. Risk Management	Risk management is identified in the AAR (SR2 and KR4) and CIPFA recommendation 5	Governance; Use of resources; Leadership
	8. Involving and informing our elected members	Responds to external assurance findings relating to scrutiny, including the AAR (IR1) and CIPFA review	Governance; Leadership; Continuous improvement
	9. People Plan programme	Maintains a sustained focus on supporting staff to deliver and excel, drawing together priorities around culture, leadership, capability, capacity and performance, responding to external assurance findings	Culture; Leadership; Continuous improvement

Priority Programme 1: Summary
Financial Management - Plans and Practice

Programme 1:	Financial Management – Plans and Practice
Description	A programme of activity to strengthen financial management across the council. It will implement the Finance service restructure, improve financial capability and accountability, strengthen strategic financial planning and budget monitoring.
Rationale and Purpose	To address the financial management weaknesses and recommendations identified through CIPFA (rec 2), External Audit and wider external assurance, including the need for stronger financial planning, forecasting, budgetary control and management capacity. The programme will establish the capability, accountability and controls needed to strengthen financial grip, respond to the External Audit statutory recommendation, and support the council's financial recovery and longer-term sustainability
Key activity	• Implement the Finance service restructure, with clear roles, responsibilities and accountability. • Strengthen financial management capability across the Finance service and among budget holders to embed accountability • Strengthen medium-term financial planning and the council's approach to financial sustainability, including analysis and strategy development • Improve budget monitoring, forecasting, challenge and corrective action, including training and mentoring activity • Strengthen the oversight and management of capital expenditure, delivery and slippage. • Develop and deliver updated plans, including Financial Plan, Capital Plan, Treasury Strategy, EFS Strategy and Reserves Strategy
What does good look like	A Finance structure with sufficient capacity, clear accountability and priority roles filled, and budget holders understand and fulfil their financial responsibilities. There will be reliable budget, forecast and capital information that supports timely management action. Financial plans are realistic, evidence-based and aligned with the council's priorities. A stronger financial grip supports the council's recovery and reduces reliance on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).
Metrics, measures and milestones	Finance restructure and priority appointments | Financial management training and capability | Budget and forecast accuracy | Delivery of assurance recommendations | Capital programme performance | Progress against financial sustainability milestones | Unqualified accounts |
Timescales	November 2026 – November 2027 and ongoing. Includes New finance structure in place by April 2027.
Risks of not delivering the programme	• Insufficient capacity and unclear accountability weaken financial advice, support and challenge. • Poor forecasting and budget monitoring allow financial pressures to escalate without timely corrective action. • Outstanding assurance recommendations lead to recurring concerns and reduced confidence in the council's financial management. • Weak capital management results in slippage, delayed priorities or ineffective use of funding. • The council is unable to achieve and sustain financial stability or reduce its reliance on Exceptional Financial Support.
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Finance Director and Deputy 151 Officer

Priority Programme 2: Summary
Procurement, Commissioning and Contract Management

Programme 2:	Procurement, Commissioning and Contract Management (strengthening internal controls)
Description	A cross-council programme to strengthen procurement, commissioning and contract management. It will establish consistent and compliant processes, improve strategic sourcing and category management, strengthen contract and supplier oversight, and make better use of digital systems, data and reporting. It will improve consistency, compliance and value for money, ad reduce financial, legal and reputational risk.
Rationale and Purpose	Continues the work undertaken as part of the Improvement Plan to date. It responds to the need to comply with the requirements of the 2023 Procurement Act and GCF Procurement Policy Notices alongside strengthening procurement and contract management practice, and financial control, across the council. It also responds to the AAR Key Recommendation (KR7).
Key activity	• Establish consistent and compliant procurement, commissioning and contract management processes. • Strengthen strategic sourcing and introduce a more systematic approach to category management. • Improve contract ownership, supplier performance management and third-party risk oversight. • Reduce off-contract spend, sourcing exemptions and non-compliant contract extensions. • Improve commercial capability among commissioners, contract managers and budget holders. • Introduce improved digital systems, data, and reporting
What does good look like	Consistent, transparent and well-governed procurement and contract management, supported by reliable data, effective supplier and contract oversight, improved commercial capability and efficient digital processes compliant with procurement legislation and the Government Commercial Function Procurement Policy Notices. Minimal non-compliant spend and a reduction in the administrative burden associated with supply chain management.
Metrics, measures and milestones	% of sourcing exemptions of total commitments | Non-compliant contract extensions as % of annual commitments | reduction in non-compliant or off-contract spend | Category strategies | Procurement savings and whole-life cost performance | Spend with local SMEs
Timescales	2026/27 – 2028/29
Risks of not delivering the programme	• Non-compliance with procurement legislation leading to potential legal challenge and associated penalties • Weak contract and supplier oversight leads to poor performance, service failure or avoidable cost. • Off-contract and non-compliant spend reduces financial control and value for money • Inadequate data and fragmented systems limit effective oversight, decision-making and assurance. • The council is unable to demonstrate that procurement supports financial sustainability and the local economy.
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Director of Legal and Governance

Priority Programme 3: Summary
Service Improvement and Efficiency

Programme 3:	Service Improvement and Efficiency
Description	A programme of activity to improve services, processes and productivity across the council. The programme comprises of 2 elements: 1. A programme of corporately led 'sprint reviews' – focussing on areas experiencing complex, cross-service processes – building on the learning form HR, Payroll, Information Governance and Debt Recovery sprint reviews undertaken 2. The development of a practical methodology, toolkit and training that enables services to lead and sustain their own continuous improvement
Rationale and Purpose	To address inefficient and outdated processes, rising demand and constrained organisational capacity. The programme will build a culture of continuous improvement, identify opportunities for digital enablement and release capacity and financial benefits that support better services and financial sustainability.
Key activity	• Undertake corporately led sprint reviews of complex, high-volume or cross-service processes. • Use multidisciplinary teams to analyse demand, customer journeys, performance and underlying causes. • Co-design, test and embed improved processes with services, customers and staff. • Develop a consistent service review methodology, toolkit and supporting guidance. • Provide training and coaching so that services can lead their own improvement reviews.
What does good look like	A more efficient and continuously improving council, with simpler and more accessible services, better customer and employee experience, and reduced waste, delay and duplication. Digital solutions will be used where they improve quality, access or productivity, releasing capacity and financial benefits. Services increasingly able to identify and deliver further improvement themselves
Metrics, measures and milestones	Process turnaround times | Backlogs and rework | Avoidable and repeat contact | Digital uptake | Customer and employee experience | Cashable savings and cost avoidance | Capacity released | Benefits sustained
Timescales	December 2026 – March 2028: • Dec 2026–May 2027: development of toolkit and training pilot • May 2027-March 2028 (and ongoing): programme of reviews
Risks of not delivering the programme	• Inefficient and outdated processes continue to create avoidable cost, delay and frustration. • Opportunities to improve productivity, release capacity and secure financial benefits are missed. • Digital investment is not sufficiently informed by service and customer needs. • Improvement activity remains dependent on limited central capacity. • Services lack a consistent method for identifying, implementing and sustaining improvement.
Responsible Delivery Leads (RDL):	Service Director Strategy & Change and Director of People and Culture

Priority Programme 4: Summary
Partnership working

Programme 4:	Partnership working
Description	A programme to further develop the Council's partnerships working, with a focus on the development of Shropshire Partnership, locality/neighbourhood working approach, and future approach to working with Town and Parish Councils
Rationale and Purpose	To improve outcomes for Shropshire's residents by enabling those best placed to deliver services to work together and make the best use of available resources. Guided by the Future Council Principles of partnership working and adaptability, the programme will connect the Council, public and private sector partners, Town and Parish Councils, the VCSE sector and communities through countywide, locality and neighbourhood arrangements that respond to local needs and strengthen community involvement.
Key activity	• With partners establish a Shropshire Partnership that covers the whole council area as well as delivering shared outcomes through locality and neighbourhood working, supported by a core Shropshire Strategic Partnership function at the Council that operates as a centre of excellence and expertise, having an overview of strategic partnership working and dedicated locality partnership posts to support coordination • With Parish and Town Councils, develop a Parish Charter (or similar) and a menu of defined and costed offers and opportunities for town and parish councils to consider • Embed a coordinated neighbourhood model (Heath Hub aligned) integrating council services (e.g. housing and social care) with partners (NHS,VCSE etc) to deliver multi-agency support, facilitated by place-based planning.
What does good look like	The Shropshire Partnership being in place with a shared ambition that provides a basis for partners working together to deliver, enable and influence improved outcomes for residents and communities in the most economical, effective and efficient way.
Metrics, measures and milestones	• Core Shropshire Partnership function developed and recruitment of additional officer locality partnership capacity in place by March 2027 • Coordinated neighbourhood model developed with an implementation Plan April 2027 to rolling out April 2028 • Parish Charter / Framework developed by July 2027 • A menu of costed opportunities and offers to town and parish councils by May 2027 • Proposition and governance for the Shropshire Partnership by June 2027 • Partnership Plan with prioritised activity ownership and timeframes by March 2028 *(all dates are indicative and subject to review as programme delivery plan is formed)*
Timescales	November 2026 – April 2028 (and ongoing)
Risks of not delivering the programme	Duplication of work and failure to get the greatest impact from partners' financial and people resources to deliver outcomes Failure to prevent demand by harnessing the social capital and energy in communities and enabling people and groups to act locally Opportunities and benefits of working with town and parish councils are not maximised
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director - Customer & Communities and Service Director – Strategy & Change

Priority Programme 5: Summary
Customer experience and expectations

Programme 5:	Customer experience and expectations
Description	A programme of activity to improve how the council understands, engages with and responds to its customers and communities. It will strengthen customer service and complaints handling, embed consistent standards, improve communications and engagement, strengthen reputational management, and use insight, systems and digital solutions to deliver a more responsive, customer-focused council
Rationale and Purpose	To address inconsistent customer standards and complaints performance and bring together currently fragmented approaches to customer service, engagement, communications and reputation. The programme will strengthen responsiveness, make better use of customer insight and feedback, and improve the consistency and quality of residents' interactions with the council.
Key activity	• Improve complaints handling, learning and responsiveness • Embed consistent customer standards, including the Customer Charter and Ask Assist Act approach • Map and improve customer contact journeys, using insight to identify opportunities for service and digital improvement • Strengthen community engagement and communications, with a more coordinated strategic approach • Develop proactive reputational management, better connecting customer insight, communications and organisational response • Website refresh – enabling more accessibility and information
What does good look like	• Consistent, high-quality customer experience, regardless of service or channel. • Clear standards and expectations understood and embedded across the organisation. • Complaints handled promptly and effectively, with insight and learning driving service improvement. • Better understanding of customer journeys and needs, using data, feedback and engagement to shape services. • Accessible, coordinated communications and engagement, reaching communities in the right ways. • Improved trust and confidence, supported by proactive and effective reputational management.
Metrics, measures and milestones	Complaints timeliness and quality | Customer satisfaction | Customer Charter/standards compliance | Compliments and feedback | Avoidable contact/digital completion | Resident trust and reputation
Timescales	October 2026 – October 2027 (and ongoing)
Risks of not delivering the programme	• Continued poor and inconsistent customer experience, with variable service standards and responsiveness across the council. • Increasing complaints and repeat failure, with insufficient organisational learning from complaints, feedback and customer insight. • Erosion of resident trust and confidence, affecting the council's reputation and its relationship with communities. • Fragmented communications and engagement, limiting the ability to understand expectations, explain decisions and engage effectively. • Missed opportunities for service improvement and efficiency, including reducing avoidable contact and making better use of digital solutions
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Customer and Communities

Priority Programme 6: Summary
Performance management framework and culture

Programme 6:	Performance management framework and culture
Description	A programme of activity to strengthen performance management and embed a performance-focused culture across the council. It will introduce a clear Performance Management Framework, establish consistent performance conversations and reporting, strengthen target-setting and accountability, and progressively integrate performance, finance and risk information
Rationale and Purpose	To address inconsistent performance management practice and make more systematic use of the council's data and insight. The programme responds to external assurance findings by establishing clearer targets, benchmarks, milestones and accountability, supported by regular reporting to senior management and elected members
Key activity	• Develop and implement a council-wide Performance Management Framework. • Establish clear performance roles, responsibilities, reporting arrangements and escalation routes. • Introduce consistent local target-setting aligned with council priorities and outcomes. • Refresh the Senior Leadership Forum Performance and Quality Group. • Establish a Performance Champions Network as a community of practice. • Improve data quality, ownership and assurance. • Introduce more transparent and integrated performance reporting. • Progressively align performance, financial and risk information to support more rounded management conversations.
What does good look like	A strong performance culture will be embedded across the council, with clear priorities, targets and accountability for delivery. Timely, integrated performance, finance and risk information will enable leaders and Members to understand progress and emerging challenges, support effective performance conversations and prompt early corrective action. Transparent reporting will provide clear evidence of sustained improvement
Metrics, measures and milestones	• Improvements in performance indicators, target setting and compliance. • Feb 2027: Report to Audit & Governance Committee - setting out overall framework and plans to embed reporting and behaviours.
Timescales	October 2026 – March 2027: Development of new framework and practice April 2027-March 2028: ongoing development to embed new practice and culture
Risks of not delivering the programme	• The Council will not move to a performance culture which supports delivery, accountability and learning. • Leaders will not be fully equipped and accountable for delivery of the required improvements and performance outcomes in their area. • The Council will not be able to demonstrate the required delivery improvements, or evidence sustained performance, which will impact on the improvement journey and ability for the Improvement Board to be stood down and Best Value Notice to be lifted.
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Strategy and Change

Priority Programme 7: Summary
Risk management

Programme:	Risk management (strengthening internal controls)
Description	A Council-wide refresh and relaunch of risk management, implementing the new Risk Management Framework and strengthening how strategic, operational and project risks are identified, assessed, managed, escalated and reported. The programme will embed risk management as an active management tool supporting better decision-making, delivery and organisational resilience
Rationale and Purpose	To address weaknesses identified through Internal Audit and external assurance, including inconsistent practice, unclear ownership, escalation and reporting, and limited assurance. The programme will strengthen accountability, risk culture and assurance, embedding risk management within decision-making, service delivery and transformation
Key activity	• Implement the new corporate Risk Management Framework and supporting guidance. • Review and reassess strategic, operational and project risk registers. • Strengthen risk ownership, scoring, escalation and mitigation arrangements. • Develop improved reporting, dashboards and assurance arrangements. • Deliver training and embed risk management within planning, finance, transformation and decision-making
What does good look like	A consistent and embedded approach to risk management, with clear ownership and accountability, current and meaningful risk registers, timely escalation of significant risks and effective assurance over controls. Risk information routinely informs management decisions, planning and transformation, with leaders and Members having clear visibility of the Council's overall risk exposure
Metrics, measures and milestones	• Strategic, operational and project risk registers reviewed against the new framework. • Risks have clear owners, controls, actions, target dates and assurance. • Compliance with agreed review, reporting and escalation requirements. • Risk management training delivered and improved reporting/dashboard arrangements implemented. • Evidence of improved risk maturity and reduction in recurring Internal Audit/assurance weaknesses
Timescales	October 2026-March 2027: initial implementation phase, including framework rollout, risk register review, training and improved reporting and assurance arrangements. Embedding and development of enterprise risk management will continue beyond March 2027
Risks of not delivering the programme	• Significant or emerging risks are not identified, escalated or managed effectively. • Inconsistent practice and weak accountability reduce confidence that risks and mitigating actions are actively managed. • Poor risk information and assurance limit effective management and Member decision-making. • Failure to address Internal Audit and external assurance recommendations
Responsible Delivery Lead (PDL):	Director of Legal and Governance

Priority Programme 8: Summary
Involving and informing elected members

Programme:	Involving and informing elected members
Description	Developing and reaffirming how members are involved in the work of the council, as local members and as members of committees, including how they are informed in a timely way about changes, developments, and decisions affecting the council and their local areas.
Rationale and Purpose	To respond to the Annual Audit Report, including Improvement Recommendation 1, and the CIPFA review, which highlighted opportunities to strengthen member involvement, information, development and governance. The programme will ensure elected members have the timely information, knowledge and support required to fulfil their representative, decision-making and scrutiny roles, while strengthening officer-member working and the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny
Key activity	• Work with members to ▪ enable them to be a conduit between the council and their communities and to fulfil their wider role(s) ▪ reestablish a member development programme that takes account of knowledge and skills and roles, to include supporting the council to be financially sustainable and improve governance. ▪ Reinforce the awareness, use and application of the Local Member Protocol. • Refresh / relaunch the Member Portal • Annual survey of members (to include access to information, member development opportunities, effectiveness of O&S) • Establish consistent officer working with and responding to all members, to include political awareness training for officers at all levels • Review the development of overview and scrutiny carried out to date, identifying opportunities to further strengthen the function
What does good look like	Members have the information they need to understand and engage with key council developments and are equipped to communicate these to residents. Effective overview and scrutiny provides constructive challenge, adds demonstrable value and has a clear impact on council policy and decision-making.
Metrics, measures and milestones	Member satisfaction with information and support | Attendance at briefings and development sessions | Member Portal use | Compliance with the Local Member Protocol | Participation in overview and scrutiny activity | Delivery and impact of scrutiny recommendations | Officer political awareness training | Annual member survey results
Timescales	• November 2026 to March 2027: Establish the member development programme and confirm the member information arrangements • July 2026 to March 2027: continued Overview and Scrutiny development
Risks of not delivering the programme	The pace of decision making and implementation is reduced because members need to be assured when the decision is made Decisions less robust because they not informed by a range of member experience and perspectives
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Director of Legal and Governance

Priority Programme 9: Summary
People Plan

Programme:	People Plan
Description	The People Plan is the council-wide people focussed programme that coordinates projects across five priorities and aligns people, processes and technology change with the wider improvement and transformation programme.
Rationale and Purpose	It ensures that Shropshire has the leadership, workforce capability and capacity, culture, performance and people systems needed to deliver its priorities, improve services and operate effectively and sustainably.
Key activity	Continue to improve employee engagement, embed the Role of the Manager and strengthen management accountability and engagement, develop workforce capacity planning to support transformation, undertake skills assessments and identify training needs, including those arising from technology and other skills gaps and the generation of a Learning and Development operating model including the roll out of the new Learning Management System (LMS).
What does good look like	Success means stronger, more accountable leadership and management; the right people and skills, in the right areas to deliver priorities and transformation; an engaged and inclusive workforce that feels valued, heard and able to contribute; clear expectations and regular meaningful conversations that drive performance; improved role clarity, wellbeing and reduced workforce pressures; more effective processes and better use of technology.
Metrics, measures and milestones	Workforce data and dashboards | Pulse Survey feedback | Priority programme measures | tracking manager accountability | engagement and participation | capacity and skills gaps | retention and development | performance development reviews (PDRs) | training uptake | improvements in processes and use of technology.
Timescales	September 2026 – December 2027 for key activity identified for the next 12 months (Full People Plan runs from 2026 until 2030)
Risks of not delivering the programme	Failure to deliver the People Plan risks ongoing workforce capacity and skills gaps, inconsistent management, reduced engagement, increased wellbeing concerns, and inefficient ways of working, limiting the council's ability to deliver priorities, transformation, improve services and achieve financial sustainability. Delivery may also be constrained by limited resources, competing priorities, unclear accountability and dependencies with wider transformation programmes.
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Director for People & Culture

Strengthening our internal control environment

Our internal control environment is the system of leadership, governance, processes, behaviours and controls through which the Council manages its resources, risks and responsibilities and provides assurance that it is operating effectively. It has been regularly identified through the Annual Audit Reports as an area requiring further improvement and strengthening.

Effective internal control is not simply about policies, procedures or compliance. It depends on clear accountability, good decision-making, effective management of risk and performance, sound stewardship of resources, capable people and reliable information and systems. Together these provide the foundations for a well-run Council, helping us identify and address weaknesses early, manage risk appropriately and deliver our priorities economically, efficiently and effectively.

A strong internal control environment is therefore a shared organisational responsibility, embedded in how we lead, manage, make decisions and deliver services every day.



Elements of our internal control environment:

- Leadership, ethics and organisational culture: Clear expectations, accountability and behaviours, with leaders setting the tone for integrity, openness, constructive challenge and responsibility.
- Governance and decision-making: Clear roles, responsibilities, delegations and decision-making arrangements, supported by effective scrutiny, assurance and transparent governance.
- Strategic planning, risk and performance: Clear priorities translated into plans and measures, with risks identified and managed and performance actively monitored, challenged and acted upon.
- Financial management and stewardship: Robust financial planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, with clear accountability for the effective and sustainable use of public resources.
- Procurement, commissioning and contract management: Consistent and compliant arrangements that secure value for money and ensure expenditure, contracts, suppliers and commissioned services are effectively controlled and managed.
- People, capability and capacity: Clear management responsibilities, appropriately skilled and supported people, effective workforce planning and the capacity needed to operate controls consistently.
- Information, digital and operational controls: Reliable data, secure and effective systems, clear processes and proportionate operational controls that support compliant, efficient and evidence-based delivery.

Strengthening our internal control environment

Improvement Plan Aim	Programme	How the Programme helps strengthen the internal control environment	Responsible Lead Officer
A Council that is financially stable & sustainable	**1. Financial Management & Practice**	Strengthens financial accountability, planning, forecasting, budget and capital management and financial capability, providing stronger oversight and earlier identification and management of pressures.	Finance Director and Deputy S151 Officer
	2. Procurement, Commissioning & Contract Management	Strengthens compliance, transparency and value for money through more consistent procurement and contract controls, clearer oversight of suppliers and contracts, and better data, reporting and assurance	Director of Legal and Governance
	3. Service Improvement and Efficiency	Identifies weaknesses in service processes, clarifying responsibilities and embedding more consistent procedures that reduce errors and improve accountability. A structured approach to service reviews provides governance checkpoints, documented decisions, risk escalation, testing and supported handover, helping ensure changes are authorised, controlled and sustained within services.	Service Director – (Strategy & Change)
A Council with clear purpose & priorities	**4. Strengthening Partnership Working**	Strengthens accountability and governance across partnership arrangements, with clearer structures, responsibilities, priorities and oversight of activity delivered with or through partners	Service Director (Communities & Customer)
	5. Customer experience and expectations	Strengthens operational controls through clearer customer standards, more consistent complaints handling and better use of customer insight to identify failure, improve services and reduce repeat problems	Service Director (Communities & Customer)
A Council that supports and enables its people to excel	**6. Performance Management Framework & Culture**	Establishes clearer targets, accountability and performance conversations, integrating performance, risk and financial information so that underperformance is identified, challenged and addressed earlier	Service Director – (Strategy & Change)
	7. Risk Management & Culture	Establishes a consistent Council-wide approach to identifying, assessing, escalating and managing risk, strengthening ownership, assurance and management visibility of significant risks	Director of Legal and Governance
	8. Involving and informing our elected members	Strengthens democratic governance, scrutiny and decision-making by improving the information, development and support available to members and reinforcing effective member-officer working	Director of Legal and Governance
	9. People Plan programme	Strengthens management accountability, workforce capability and compliance by clarifying responsibilities, addressing skills and capacity gaps and improving learning, workforce planning and people systems	Director of People and Culture

Developing our organisational culture

Effective controls depend as much on behaviours and culture as they do on processes and systems. Our improvement programmes therefore seek to strengthen the Council's control framework and embed the leadership, accountability, challenge, collaboration and learning needed to make those controls effective and sustainable – by developing our organisational culture and realise the organisational characteristics and future council principles set out in the Improvement Plan:

Improvement Plan Aim	Programme	How the Programme helps strengthen our organisational culture	Responsible Lead Officer
A Council that is financially stable & sustainable	**1. Financial Management & Practice**	Builds a culture of financial ownership in which managers understand their responsibilities, use financial information actively and recognise stewardship of resources as a core management responsibility	Finance Director and Deputy S151 Officer
	2. Procurement, Commissioning & Contract Management	Builds stronger commercial awareness and a culture of compliance, transparency and value for money, with better ownership of purchasing, commissioning and contract decisions across the Council	Director of Legal and Governance
	3. Service Improvement and Efficiency	Builds collaboration, curiosity and continuous improvement by involving teams in solving problems, testing ideas and taking ownership of better, simpler and more efficient ways of working	Service Director – (Strategy & Change)
A Council with clear purpose & priorities	**4. Strengthening Partnership Working**	Develops a culture of openness, collaboration and shared responsibility, encouraging teams to look beyond organisational boundaries, value different perspectives and work with partners and communities to achieve better outcomes	Service Director (Communities & Customer)
	5. Customer experience and expectations	Encourages a more outward-looking and collaborative culture, working across organisational boundaries and with communities to share responsibility, resources and solutions around common outcomes	Service Director (Communities & Customer)
A Council that supports and enables its people to excel	**6. Performance Management Framework & Culture**	Builds on our focus on compliance in year one to create a performance culture based on clear expectations, evidence, regular performance conversations, constructive challenge, accountability and learning.	Service Director – (Strategy & Change)
	7. Risk Management & Culture	Develops a more risk-aware culture in which managing risk is part of everyday management responsibility, supporting open discussion, timely escalation and well-informed decisions rather than being treated as a reporting exercise	Director of Legal and Governance
	8. Involving and informing our elected members	Supports a more politically aware, open and collaborative organisation, strengthening constructive member-officer relationships, challenge and understanding of respective roles	Director of Legal and Governance
	9. People Plan programme	Translates values into everyday behaviours through stronger leadership and management, engagement, development and clearer expectations, building a more accountable, collaborative and learning-focused organisation	Director of People and Culture

Transformation, Improvement and Change (TIC) Portfolio

Governance and assurance

The Improvement Plan (and People Plan) forms the basis of the Organisational Improvement programme in the Council's overall TIC portfolio. The Portfolio also includes programmes focussed on:

- Adults Social Care Transformation
- Children's Services Reforms and Transformation
- Digital Transformation
- Assets & Corporate Landlord
- Income & Commercial.

Each of these has a Programme Board that oversees delivery and reports progress and escalate risks to an Assurance Board made up of members of the Council's Leadership Board. A monthly report summarising the TIC portfolio delivery position is presented to the Improvement Board.

A Governance Framework (figure 1) provides a clear focus for assurance discussions at *Delivery Governance* (blue) and *Corporate Governance* (green) meetings. The *Framework* is designed to ensure risk, issues and dependencies are understood and mitigated at the earliest opportunity. Each forum maintains a clear focus to avoid duplication and encourage appropriate escalations

Investing in transformation, investment and change

The Council has allocated a Transformation Fund. This will enable the dedicated capacity, specialist support and implementation resources needed to deliver transformation, improvement and change required at the scale and pace required, rather than expecting it to be absorbed within existing workloads. Proposals for investment are submitted to and considered by the Budget, Transformation and Change Panel (BTCP), chaired by the Section 151 Officer. The Panel tests strategic fit, readiness, deliverability, affordability and resource requirements, and challenge whether the proposed benefits, savings and return on investment are sufficiently clear and evidenced.

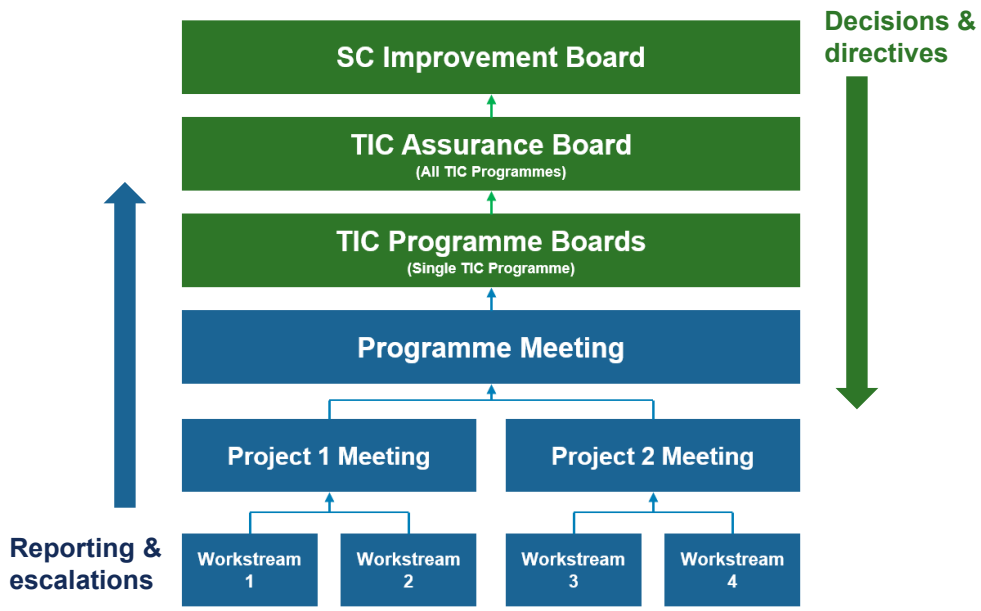


Figure 1: Transformation, Improvement and Change Portfolio governance

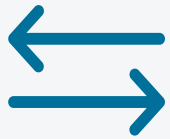
Corporate Portfolio Management Office (CPMO)

The Corporate PMO (CPMO) will be represented at each Board to support, cascade decisions and produce board reports. The consistent use of CPMO tools and templates in projects and programmes will ensure reporting integrity for each board. The CPMO also supports programme delivery through the provision of programme and project management, and business analyst capacity and expertise, ensuring that programmes are well-structured, supported and resourced appropriately.

Engagement and insight that has informed the refreshed plan

External reviews

Recommendations from external reviews have informed the annual refresh of the Improvement Plan (and People Plan).



Senior leaders

63 senior leaders took part through the Senior Leadership Forum, identifying what had improved most over last 12 months and the focus for the next 12-18 months.



Staff

Three Viva Engage questions gathered views on improvements, priorities, savings and demand. Average reach: 1,500 staff per post 163 votes and 26 comments



Elected members

Member briefings on rationale for refreshing the Plan and its proposed the focus for the next 12-18 months.



Improvement Board

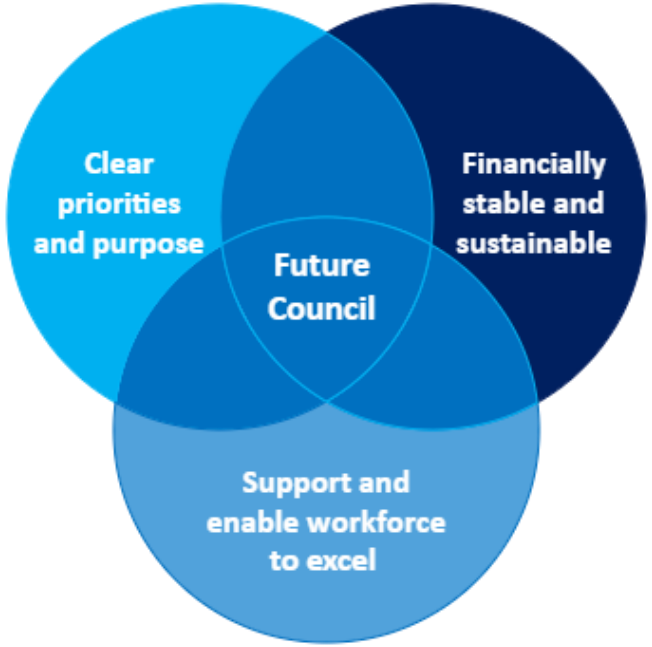
Proposed priorities and programmes tested with the Board



Together, this feedback has helped to inform the Improvement Plan refresh.

Shropshire Council

APPENDIX 1:
Key updates to Improvement Plan programmes



Changes to our priority programmes

Current priority programmes

- Programme 1: Financial stability
- Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy
- Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice
- Programme 4: Corporate Plan 2026-30
- Programme 5: Future council – including:
  - Embedding principles and ways of working
  - Working with town and parish councils
  - Place shaping role
- Programme 6: Review and realignment of transformation programme
- Programme 7 : People Plan – including:
  - Employee engagement and involvement
  - New Ways of Working - services that support staff
- Programme 8: Getting the basics right (Strengthening corporate governance and compliance)
- Programme 9: Digital programme

A Council that is financially stable and sustainable

A Council that has clear priorities and purpose

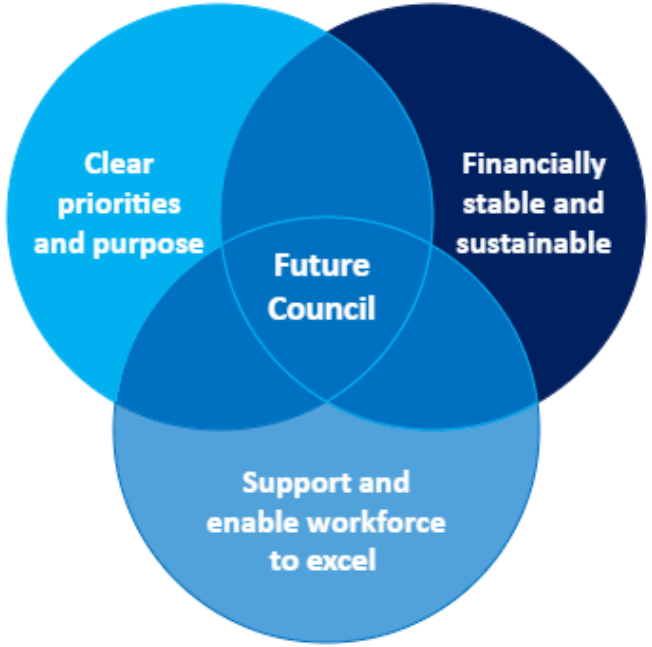
A Council that supports and enables its workforce to excel

New priority programmes

- Programme 1: Financial management and practice
- Programme 2: Procurement, Commissioning, Contract Management
- Programme 3: Service Improvement and Efficiency
- Programme 4: Customer experience and expectations
- Programme 5: Partnership working:
  - Working with town and parish councils
  - Shropshire Partnership and Plan
  - Locality working
- Programme 6: Performance management and culture
- Programme 7 : People Plan – including:
  - Leadership & Talent
  - Capacity & Capability
  - Systems & Establishment
  - Culture and Employee Engagement
- Programme 8: Risk management
- Programme 9: Involving and informing our elected members

Shropshire Council

APPENDIX 2:
Mapping of external recommendations



Responding to external reviews and recommendations

Rec ref	Description	Improvement Plan (Organisational Improvement)									ASC Transformation	Children's Reforms	Digital	Income and commercial	Assets and Corporate Landlord	Other
		IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9						
CIPFA 1	Resolve weaknesses in the control environment							✓		✓						
CIPFA 2	Finance roles, training and support	✓								✓						
CIPFA 3	Explore interim finance capacity	✓														
CIPFA 4	Explore options with other LAs	✓														✓
CIPFA 5	Staff raising risk management issues promptly - training and guidance							✓		✓						
CIPFA 6	Detailed risk assessed, costs/savings profiled in transformation delivery plans										✓	✓	✓			
CIPFA 7	Explore service restructuring to reduce costs (digital/collaboration/outsourcing)			✓	✓	✓				✓			✓			
CIPFA 8	Consider minimum viable statutory service obligations			✓												
CIPFA 9	Transformation Plans to BTCP by December 2026			✓							✓	✓				

CIPFA = Assurance Review, AAR = Annual Audit Report

Responding to external reviews and recommendations

Rec ref	Description	Improvement Plan (Organisational Improvement)									ASC Transformation	Children's Reforms	Digital	Income and commercial	Assets and Corporate Landlord	Other
		IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9						
CIPFA 10	Develop clear financial recovery strategy	✓									✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
CIPFA 11	Explain EFS borrowing costs and interest-rate risks in the next MTFS.	✓														
CIPFA 12	Shirehall feasibility work and prompt asset disposal														✓	
CIPFA 13	Identify saleable assets and develop BV disposal strategy by Dec 2026														✓	
CIPFA 14	Strengthen capital governance and assessment of costs and benefits	✓														
CIPFA 15	Grant funded capital projects - grant clawback/project management capacity	✓														
CIPFA 16	Adults & Children's Transformation – add short-term cost-cutting initiatives										✓	✓				
CIPFA 17	Add external ASC and CSC expertise to the Improvement Board															✓
CIPFA 18	Prioritise service transformation initiatives with biggest financial impact			✓							✓	✓				

CIPFA = Assurance Review, AAR = Annual Audit Report

Responding to external reviews and recommendations

Rec ref	Description	Improvement Plan (Organisational Improvement)									ASC Transformation	Children's Reforms	Digital	Income and commercial	Assets and Corporate Landlord	Other
		IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9						
CIPFA 19	Explore alternative delivery models			✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			
CIPFA 20	Fill leadership gaps															✓
CIPFA 21	Refocus the Improvement Board on to financial recovery															✓
CIPFA 22	Explore mandatory financial management training/guidance/support	✓								✓						
AAR SR1	Deliver financial recovery – remove reliance on EFS	✓												✓		
AAR SR2	Urgently strengthen governance	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓						
AAR KR1	Deliver transformation at scale and pace				✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			
AAR KR2	Mitigate DSG deficit growth and report to Schools Forum and Cabinet	✓														
AAR KR3	Agree plan for internal control improvement – report quarterly	✓				✓		✓								

CIPFA = Assurance Review, AAR = Annual Audit Report

SR = Statutory Recommendation, KR = Key Recommendation, IR = Improvement Recommendation

Responding to external reviews and recommendations

Rec ref	Description	Improvement Plan (Organisational Improvement)									ASC Transformation	Children's Reforms	Digital	Income and commercial	Assets and Corporate Landlord	Other
		IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9						
AAR KR4	Comprehensively redesign and embed corporate risk management							✓		✓						
AAR KR5	Fully-costed workforce and capacity plan – critical skills & enabling services	✓								✓						
AAR KR6	STAR/CDL – strengthen governance, shareholder & client arrangements. Develop a Housing Strategy															✓
AAR KR7	Accelerate procurement and contract management improvement		✓							✓						
AAR IR1	Strengthen Overview and Scrutiny								✓							
AAR IR2	Complete the corporate performance framework (inc. performance culture)						✓			✓						
AAR IR3	Work with partners to implement SEND improvements & EHCP timescales				✓							✓				

CIPFA = Assurance Review, AAR = Annual Audit Report

SR = Statutory Recommendation, KR = Key Recommendation, IR = Improvement Recommendation