

## **BUSINESS AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 24 June 2026 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG**

**Present:** Councillors N A M England (Chair), J Kaur (Vice-Chair),  
G Luter, S Syrda and R Tyrrell.

**Also Present:** Councillor O Vickers (Cabinet Member for Jobs,  
Transport & Digital Connectivity).

**In Attendance:** G Ashford (Strategic Planning, Inward Investment and  
Business Support Group Manager), A Hickman  
(Democracy Officer), R Phillips (Head of Registrars,  
Public Protection, Legal & Democracy) and P Starkey  
(Lead Democracy Officer).

**Apologies:** Councillors L Lewis and R Mehta.

#### **BFSC1    Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **BFSC2    Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 March  
2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **BFSC3    Terms of Reference 2026/27**

The Head of Service: Registrars, Public Protection, Legal & Democracy  
presented the report which invited the Committee to review and reconfirm its  
Terms of Reference for the 2026/27 municipal year.

Members were advised that it was a constitutional requirement for each  
scrutiny committee to review its Terms of Reference at the first meeting of the  
municipal year and that each Committee had been delegated authority to  
approve their own terms of reference.

It was noted that there were no proposed changes.

**RESOLVED** – that the Terms of Reference for the Business & Finance  
Scrutiny Committee for the 2026/27 municipal year be approved.

#### **BFSC4    Business & Finance Scrutiny Work Programme 2026/27**

The Head of Service: Registrars, Public Protection, Legal & Democracy  
presented the draft work programme for the 2026/27 municipal year.

Members were advised that the work programme had been developed through consultation with SMT, Scrutiny Chairs and elected Members and reflected the Committee's priorities for the coming year. It was noted that the programme remained flexible and items could be added or amended should new issues emerge during the year.

Members discussed the ongoing joint working group review into innovative approaches to alternative accommodation and agreed that future work should concentrate on meeting the Borough's identified need for single occupancy accommodation.

In response to questions raised regarding the future direction of the working group, the Head of Service: Registrars, Public Protection, Legal & Democracy advised that officers were seeking further guidance from Members to inform the next workshop session.

Members suggested that the next stage of the review should focus on identifying suitable Council-owned and brownfield sites, assessing the viability and affordability of different delivery models, while considering opportunities to repurpose existing assets.

Members requested that the Wellington Market Regeneration item be scheduled at the earliest opportunity in order to receive an update on progress and scrutinise the outcomes of the Council's investment.

Members discussed the Housing Investment Programme update scheduled for September 2026 and expressed an interest in undertaking a site visit linked to the programme. Officers advised that consideration would be given to arranging a visit and exploring opportunities for Members to view recently completed developments.

**RESOLVED – that the Business & Finance Scrutiny Work Programme for the 2026/27 municipal year be approved.**

#### **BFSC5 Pride in Our High Street**

The Cabinet Member: Jobs, Transport & Digital Connectivity introduced the report and highlighted the success of the Pride in Our High Street (PIOHS) programme over the past decade.

Members heard that the programme had supported the regeneration and revitalisation of local high streets through targeted interventions. The Cabinet Member: Jobs, Transport & Digital Connectivity explained that more than 130 new businesses had been supported, over 100 eco and digital grants had been awarded and significant levels of private sector investment had been leveraged through the programme. The Borough's town centres were continuing to perform strongly, with vacancy levels remaining significantly below the national average.

The Invest Telford Team Leader delivered a presentation outlining the key achievements of the programme. The Committee heard that approximately £725,000 of public investment had helped leverage around £2.46m of private sector investment, supporting the creation of more than 440 jobs.

Members were advised that the current offer included start-up grants, trial grants, façade grants, eco grants, digital grants and diversification grants, all designed to support business growth and improve the long-term resilience of the Borough's high streets.

Officers reported that only 24 retail units across the Borough's town centres were currently vacant, compared with approximately 98 vacancies if national vacancy rates were applied locally. Members also heard how the programme benefited from extensive cross-Council working and engagement with local businesses.

The presentation included several examples of businesses supported through the programme, including Book Nook and Baked Bean in Ironbridge and Sweet Little Things Bakery and Tea Room in Madeley. Members welcomed the report and praised officers for their work in supporting local businesses and revitalising town centres across the Borough.

Members commented positively on the visible improvements that had taken place in Wellington and other borough towns, noting that increased occupancy levels, investment in the public realm and support for independent businesses had helped create stronger community-focused high streets and encouraged wider economic activity. The importance of continuing to support micro-businesses and entrepreneurs was also highlighted, with Members noting that smaller businesses often had the flexibility to respond quickly to changing market conditions and played a key role in sustaining local economies.

Questions were raised regarding support for communities that did not have traditional high streets, including Priorslee and other residential areas with limited local retail provision. Members also sought clarification on whether additional interventions could be targeted at local centres.

In response, the Group Manager: Strategic Planning, Inward Investment & Business Support explained that whilst the programme maintained a strong focus on the Borough's principal town centres, support had begun to extend into local centres where opportunities arose, including recent investment in Donnington, and officers would continue to explore opportunities elsewhere.

Members noted that vacancy figures represented a snapshot in time and that many units were only vacant temporarily between occupancies. The Group Manager: Strategic Planning, Inward Investment & Business Support advised that several vacant units in Newport were already under offer and vacancy levels across the Borough continued to remain significantly below national averages.

The Committee sought further information regarding the emerging Elevate Programme. The Cabinet Member: Jobs, Transport & Digital Connectivity explained that the next phase of support was currently being developed and would focus on increasing footfall, activating town centre spaces, driving local spending and supporting business growth. Members were advised that further details would be brought forward later in the year.

Members also highlighted the challenges faced by some businesses once initial start-up support had ended and suggested that additional support for business sustainability and growth beyond the start-up phase could be beneficial.

The Committee welcomed the update and noted the continued success of the programme.

#### **BFSC6     Chair's Update**

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on 16 September 2026.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Head of Service: Registrars, Public Protection, Legal & Democracy for his support to scrutiny and wished him well in his new role at Shropshire Council.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:**                Wednesday 30 September 2026