

BUSINESS AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 5 November 2025 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors N A M England (Chair), N Page (Vice-Chair), L Lewis, G Luter and S Syrda.

Also Present: Councillors Cllr Z Hannington (Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Services) and Cllr O Vickers (Cabinet Member for The Economy & Transport).

In Attendance: M Brockway (Director: Finance, People & IDT), J Dunn (Director: Prosperity & Investment), A Lowe (Director: Policy & Governance) and P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)).

Apologies: Councillors J Kaur and R Tyrrell.

BFSC12 Declarations of Interest

None.

BFSC13 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

BFSC14 Update on Growth Fund Investment into Industrial Premises

By way of introduction, the Cabinet Member: Economy & Transport explained that the Growth Fund was designed to enable the Council to borrow and invest in high-quality industrial premises to meet local demand and support economic growth. He highlighted that the Council had committed £30.5m since the Fund's initial launch, which had helped create and safeguard hundreds of jobs and strengthen the local supply chain within the Borough. He shared examples of businesses benefiting from the scheme, including HCI Systems at Ni Park in Newport which had grown from 25 employees to 68 employees since relocating to a Council-developed premises.

The Director: Prosperity & Investment presented the report which outlined that the Growth Fund had invested £30.5m through a combination of prudential borrowing and Homes England profit share. Members heard that the investments made had delivered an estimated gross return of 7.76%, around 3% net after borrowing costs, and generated approximately £0.4m per year in additional business rates. The Council's property portfolio had also seen asset value growth of £6.4m above the original investment.

Major schemes included Ni Park Phases 1 and 2 in Newport which had delivered 24 starter units an additional 3 larger units and 90 jobs, and Orchard Business Park in Hortonwood which had delivered 24 new units using £5.7m in Growth Fund investment and £3.3m in grant funding, achieving an asset growth of £7m.

Earlier developments at Leasows Court had seen the delivery of 15 starter units using £1.5m of Growth Fund investment plus £1m profit share. Units in Hortonwood West had been leased to commercial developments such as Rosewood Pet Products and Eden Horticulture and units at the T54 site had been leased to companies such as Filtermist and Incon Training delivering 70 jobs. All new units incorporated solar panels and EV charging points, ahead of statutory requirements and were designed to meet sustainability goals.

In response to questions raised about how the success of investments are measured, including KPIs, social value, job creation and private sector investment, the Director: Prosperity & Investment explained that job creation, apprenticeships and local supply chain commitments were monitored and reported annually through the Land Deal report. Social value was embedded in contracts, with requirements for apprenticeships and graduate opportunities, and a focus on sourcing within a 25–50 mile radius of the Borough.

In response to questions raised about future asset valuation growth. The Director confirmed that industrial property values had risen significantly post-COVID, with rental growth continuing and yields remaining strong. It was noted that the Council had seen a 20% increase in asset values since the first units were built and further growth was expected which was supported by market data.

In response to questions in relation to strong demand for units and waiting lists, The Director: Prosperity & Investment advised that demand had remained high, with Orchard Business Park largely let before completion and some units had been secured within weeks of being marketed. Location was a key factor for businesses, and the Council's ability to provide grow-on space had supported business expansion.

The Chair asked whether returns were comparable to private sector investments and whether other local authorities were investing similarly. The Director: Prosperity & Investment confirmed that returns were competitive and noted that while some Councils had previously invested outside their areas, Telford & Wrekin's approach focused on local economic growth. He added that the Growth Fund had no fixed end date and would continue subject to budget decisions and opportunities.

Members welcomed the report and commended the Council's strategic approach, noting that investments were delivering strong financial returns, supporting local businesses and positioning Telford as a leading inward investment destination.

BFSC15 Work Programme Review

The Director: Policy & Governance presented the updated work programme. Members were advised that items which were shaded grey had been completed during the current municipal year. The Committee noted that January meetings would focus on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget, with the March meeting scheduled for an update on the Telford Land Deal. Additional items proposed during the work programme review earlier in the year included a review of Leisure Services, Pride in Our High Street, and Wellington Market regeneration.

In response to a suggestion from the Chair, the Committee agreed to add a review of Adult Social Care spend to the January agenda, subject to need for an additional meeting to present alternative budget proposals. Members also agreed to include an external review of Arthog and the High Ropes facilities.

BFSC16 Chair's Update

None.

The meeting ended at 6.32 pm

Chairman:

Date: Tuesday 6 January 2026