

Rural Response to Covid 19

Shropshire Council

The Context – Shropshire

- Unitary authority in the West Midlands
- 2nd second largest rural county in England and one of the most sparsely populated (1.01 persons per hectare)
- More than half the population of Shropshire live in rural areas, with urban areas accounting for just 2.5% of land mass
- More than half of Shropshire businesses (51.5%) are in rural areas
- 85% of Shropshire's land mass is farmed
- 17 market towns and key centres
- High levels of economic activity amongst the 16-64 population and historically low levels of unemployment (albeit impacted by Covid-19)
- Covid impacts on sectors – particularly retail and hospitality although footfall has bounced back encouragingly since the easing of restrictions
- Brexit challenges, particularly to agricultural sector

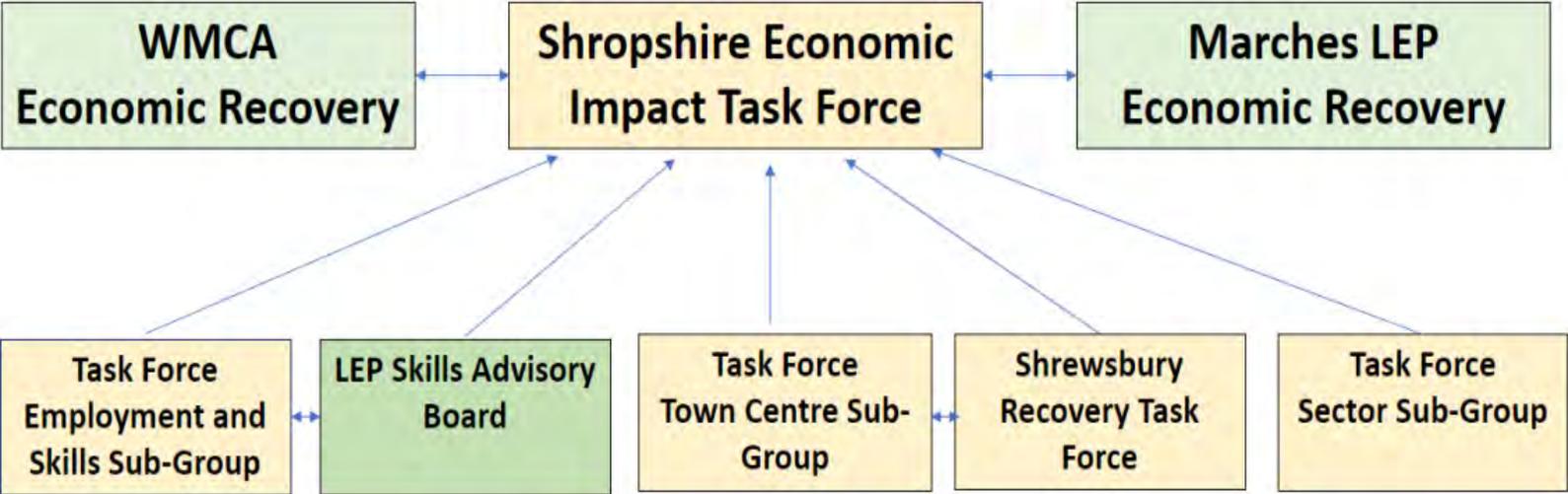
Shropshire's Economy

- Entrepreneurial economy heavily reliant on SMEs and micro-businesses
- 12,345 businesses employ 4 or fewer people (78.4% of total)
- Only a small number of businesses employ more than 250 (45 in 2021)
- Relatively strong levels of business survival and low levels of business churn
- Strong agricultural sector and growing Agri-tech and food manufacturing base
- Sector mix means that wage levels and productivity are comparatively low – gross median workplace wages £53.80 less per week in Shropshire than the national average. GVA per hour worked is £8.30
- Shropshire promotes itself as a place of independent businesses

The Team

- Local, strategic and collaborative approaches are focused towards meeting rural and community needs, preserving and maximising the county's natural capital while adjusting to:
 - Climate change
 - Covid 19
- Shropshire's approach to economic recovery
 - administering central government COVID-19 support
 - working with the Council's partners on growth programmes and areas of opportunity
- Bringing together an Economic Task Force partnership.

The COVID-19 economic taskforce has focused on bringing partnerships together to deliver Shropshire's pandemic response.



Shropshire Council led groups 
Externally led groups 

Economic Task Force for Shropshire



Department
for Work
& Pensions



Handelsbanken



Task Force response

- Data driven.
- Tracks the data over time.
- Shares information and data to understand change and trends across the region.
- Action focused.
- Collaborative sub-groups of Town Centre Recovery, Sector Recovery, Skills and Employment Recovery.

Changes in work pattern for Shropshire businesses

- Companies who no longer see the need to base themselves or their workforce in a big city.
- Individuals currently on furlough or may have been redundant and there may be a correlation between this and the take up of start-up support offers in the local Growth Hub.
- Shropshire has high self-employment rates (13.8 per cent, higher than the West Midlands and national average).
- Use of support and information websites

Emerging Trends and Challenges

- Pockets of deprivation and access to employment, education and services can be challenging due to rurality.
- High claimant rate for over 50s and an increasingly ageing population, with a quarter of the population aged 65+
Solution - develop business start-up programmes geared towards targeting this older cohort, The Silverpreneurs.
- Delivering national programme of Kickstart and other national programmes creative in looking for funding and working with partners.
- Support for employment and skills
 - Collaborative work between Economic Task Force and DWP to ensure delivery hubs across the county were where they needed to be.

The Learning

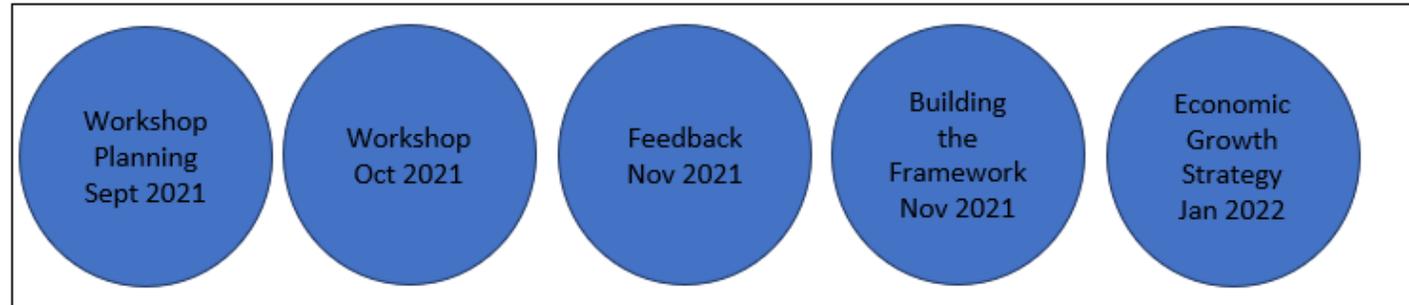
- Covid 19 Economic Task Force has:
 - Strengthened Shropshire Council relationship with its partners.
 - Brought partners together and enhanced collaborative working.
 - Enabled close partnership working to help develop the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire – a collaborative document with ownership by all.
 - Enabled greater recognition of co-dependencies across partner organisation and local authority boundaries, and commonalities of the challenges of fair and equitable access to opportunities across groupings, and to digital and physical connectivity across geographies.

The Future

What's the future for Shropshire? Economic recovery and strategy 2022-2027

Focus on a set of strategic values around:

- **Resilience**
- **Sustainability**
- **Inclusivity**
- **Wellbeing and Health**



3 themed workshops:

- **Employment and Skills**
- **Supporting Local Businesses**
- **Strategic Locations**

The Future

- Updated Economic Growth Strategy initiatives will be owned by SC and partners creating stronger partnerships.
- Promoting of Shropshire as a good place to do business, bringing more people into Shropshire's economy.
- Sectors expected to support growth and upskilling of residents are Agri-tech, digital health, food and drink, digital and creative industries and advanced manufacturing.
- Continue to build on strengths SMEs and micro-businesses and support those that have grown such as online retailers and logistics.
- Overall focus – putting infrastructure and programme development in place.
- All aligned to the climate imperatives.