

# YOUR CHAMBER YOUR VOICE



Shropshire  
Chamber of  
Commerce



Spring 2024

## Time to move forward



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# Shropshire Chamber: pioneering progress in 2024

**A**s we navigate the dynamic landscape of 2024, the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce underlines its commitment to driving growth and innovation within our vibrant business community. We are proud to be leading significant strides in several key initiatives, all aimed at empowering local businesses and fostering sustainable economic development.

Central to our efforts is our commitment to enhancing local skills remains unwavering. Building on the foundation laid in stage 1 of our Local Skills Improvement Plan, we are now firmly entrenched in stage 2, actively working towards achieving the actionable insights highlighted in the initial report. As part of this endeavour, we are engaging in deep dive interviews with businesses across the region, seeking to gain invaluable insights into their current and future skill needs. By aligning training and education initiatives with industry demands, we aim to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of meeting the evolving needs of our economy.

Simultaneously, the "Active Leadership" project is well underway, this is funded by the UKSPF. This transformative initiative seeks to cultivate effective leadership skills among business owners and managers, empowering them to navigate challenges and seize opportunities in an ever-evolving marketplace. Through tailored training programmes and mentorship opportunities, we

aim to nurture a new generation of dynamic leaders equipped to drive growth and innovation across Shropshire.

In parallel, the Chamber is gearing up to launch its much-anticipated Policy Manifesto in March, a comprehensive blueprint outlining our advocacy priorities and policy recommendations. Set to be unveiled in Westminster, this manifesto reflects our unwavering commitment to championing the interests of Shropshire businesses at the highest levels of government. By articulating clear policy objectives and engaging with policymakers, we strive to create an enabling environment that supports business growth, innovation, and sustainability.

Amidst these ambitious initiatives, the Chamber continues to serve as a beacon of support and collaboration for our members. From networking events to informative webinars, we remain dedicated to facilitating meaningful connections and fostering a supportive business ecosystem. Despite the challenges posed by external forces, our resilience and adaptability enable us to remain agile in our response, ensuring that our members have the resources and support they need to thrive.

As we look to the future, the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce remains steadfast in its commitment to driving positive change and fostering economic prosperity across our region. With the active participation and support of our members, partners, and stakeholders, we are confident in our ability to overcome challenges and seize opportunities, propelling Shropshire towards a brighter, more prosperous future.



Ruth Ross, Chief Executive Officer

**Ruth Ross, Chief Executive Officer,  
Shropshire Chamber of Commerce**



# New members to engage with



HH Hospitality Ltd  
WESTON  
SY4 5UZ  
01630 685242

Mini First Aid  
Shropshire,  
Herefordshire &  
Worcestershire  
07553 156227

Shropshire Floats  
4 Alford Gardens  
Myddle  
SHREWSBURY  
SY4 3RG  
01939 291 933

Empower Multi  
Academy Trust  
Unit 6 The Courtyard  
Yeomanry Road  
Battlefield Enterprise  
Park  
SHREWSBURY  
SY1 3EH  
01743 598200

Hibberts Solicitors LLP  
25 Barker St  
NANTWICH  
CW5 5EN  
01270 624225

New Moves Removals  
and Services  
Meadow Barn  
Halford  
CRAVEN ARMS  
SY7 9JG  
07388 836945

Smash Life UK Ltd  
35 Howey Close  
SHREWSBURY  
SY2 5WF  
07944 415475

Fresh Clarity  
Unit 8 Maypole Court  
2 High Street  
Wem  
SHREWSBURY  
SY4 5AA  
01939 231150

Hobsons Brewery &  
Company Ltd  
Newhouse Farm  
Tenbury Road  
CLEOBURY MORTIMER  
DY14 8RD  
01299 270837

Numero Ltd  
07894 347249

Software Skills Training  
Old Bentley Cottage  
Hoccum  
BRIDGNORTH  
WV15 5HQ  
07814 028851

Beamish Prestige  
Old Hall  
Church Road  
Willey Village  
BROSELEY  
TF12 5JN  
01952 443415

Global Air Quality  
07958 687046

Home Instead Telford  
Millenium House  
New Street  
NEWPORT  
TF10 7AX  
01952 581112

Omega, Ending  
Isolation, Ending  
Loneliness  
London House  
Town Walls  
SHREWSBURY  
SY1 1TX  
01743 245088

Srvnet Ltd  
The Studio  
Mansell Road  
Wellington  
TELFORD  
TF1 1QQ  
03333580099

BLA Sustainability  
07801 734158

GWR Fasteners Limited  
Units 6-7 Artillery  
Business Park  
Garrison Avenue  
Park Hall  
OSWESTRY  
SY11 4AD  
07895 000 156

Little Rascals  
Foundation  
Little Rascals  
Clubhouse  
Welshpool Road  
Bicton Heath  
SHREWSBURY  
SY3 5BH  
07501 855387

Retrained Search Ltd  
The Green  
Wheathill  
NR BRIDGNORTH  
WV16 6QT  
07585 143676

Zar HR Ltd  
07891 760097

Camelott@  
Unit 6A/B,  
Ketley Business Park  
Waterloo Road,  
Ketley  
TELFORD  
TF1 5JD  
03333 449497

Healthsec Solutions Ltd  
t/a Healthsec Rehab  
Cedars,  
The Black Beeches  
Sansaw Est, Hadnall  
SHREWSBURY  
SY4 3DH  
07720204173

Limberger Associates  
Ltd  
Cliffe Cottage  
Ruyton XI Towns  
SHREWSBURY  
SY4 1NB  
07882 155987

Shires Property  
Management Ltd  
70 Wellington Road  
Muxton  
TELFORD  
TF2 8NZ  
07854 312804



Compomotive  
International Ltd  
01952 850618

Healthwatch  
Shropshire  
4 The Creative Quarter  
Shrewsbury Business  
Park  
SHREWSBURY  
SY2 6LG  
01743 237884

Mammoth Consulting  
and Coaching Ltd  
7 Westbourne Rise  
Bayston Hill  
SHREWSBURY  
SY3 0JQ  
07739 317741

Shropshire Expert  
Cleaners LTD  
58 High Street  
Madeley  
TELFORD  
TF7 5AT  
07462 479576

Edukat Ltd  
3 Waterside Gardens  
SHREWSBURY  
SY3 9AG  
07830 082 168



# Chamber welcomes £243.4 million boost to transport funding

**S**hropshire Chamber of Commerce has welcomed news of a £243.4 million funding boost to the county's transport infrastructure.

The cash is part of a new Government fund created by scrapping the northern leg of HS2 which sees a total of £1.2 billion awarded to the West Midlands.

The Shropshire Council area is to receive £136.4 million to be spent over the next seven years, with £107 million allocated to Telford & Wrekin.

The Government is asking local authorities to invest in the transport projects that 'matter most to communities – helping create jobs, grow the economy, and level up the country'.

Ruth Ross, Shropshire Chamber's chief executive, said: "We are pleased to see the Government pledging this much-needed funding boost for our transport infrastructure.

"We also welcome the devolution of this allocation, allowing local authorities to decide how best to spend it.

"As one of the largest rural counties in England, an effective, reliable and well-maintained transport infrastructure is essential for the movement of people and goods – vital to our economic growth.

"We are currently putting the finishing touches to our new Chamber manifesto, which identifies the need to prioritise improvements and investment in the transport infrastructure.

"This is particularly important when it comes to levelling the playing field for some of Shropshire's hardest-to-reach areas."

Ruth added: "We see this Local Transport Fund allocation as very much a step in the right direction to unlock business growth."

It comes just days after Shropshire was dealt a major public transport blow with news that the county's direct rail service to London is being axed in June.

The Chamber has voiced its concerns and urged decision makers and stakeholders to rethink the plans.

Ruth said: "Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has long identified that one of the key barriers to growth in Shropshire is the lack of transport infrastructure which is fit for purpose in terms of both road and rail."

## Top tips to optimise your LinkedIn profile



*Alex Brown, Connor Silman, Luke Franks and Cameron Griffith Norris*

Members of a Shropshire networking group specifically for young business people have been learning how to make the most of their social media presence.

Our Future in Focus is run by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and is a collective of young people who work in businesses across the county.

The group hosts a minimum of four events each year – and the latest focused on helping members to optimise their LinkedIn profile.

Held at Chamber House on Battlefield Enterprise Park in Shrewsbury, the session was led by Sophie Coombs from J&PR.

She shared valuable insights on how to optimise your presence on LinkedIn and how to expand networks to create more business opportunities.

Ella Preece, from the Chamber's marketing team, said: "The event was a great opportunity for young business people to connect with like-minded colleagues and to get some tips and advice on how to improve their LinkedIn performance.

"Members also had the opportunity at the start and end of the presentation for some casual networking which is always a lively and friendly session."

The aim of Our Future in Focus is to foster connections, enhance personal knowledge, and contribute positively to the Shropshire business community.

"By being part of this group, our



*Lucy Poole, Lauren Macmillan, Emilie Kerr and Ella Preece*

members play a vital role in shaping the future of Shropshire's business landscape, and it's open to any young business person – you don't need to be a member of Shropshire Chamber to sign up," said Ella.

Bookings are now already being taken for the group's next event – Securing Your Financial Future – that will be held on May 9, from 5pm to 6.30pm, at the Chamber's Telford office on Stafford Park.

Ella said: "Our guest speaker will be wealth management consultant Sean Clifford who will share his advice on how to take control of your financial future and he'll explore the essential elements of financial planning.

"Mortgages, navigating the housing market and the complexities of pensions will all be on the agenda.

"We believe these topics are not discussed enough, leaving young people uncertain of where they should even start planning for their future. So we have organised this event to reassure our members and to give them a head start."

To book a place on the next event, email [events@shropshire-chamber.co.uk](mailto:events@shropshire-chamber.co.uk)

Our Future in Focus was set up to bring together ambitious young people from a wealth of industries, skill sets and backgrounds, helping them to connect, engage and succeed with Shropshire Chamber.

# Training opportunities for next quarter

It has never been a more important time to train staff as this can lead to increased productivity, performance, and staff retention. Training improves employee confidence, boosts skills and can improve employee retention. Continuous improvement of employees through training can also have a positive impact on the overall running and performance of the business.

The Shropshire Chamber team works to create a training calendar that boost your knowledge and improve your staff wellbeing.

For full details of all upcoming courses please do take a look at our website <https://www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/business-training>

Our upcoming courses over the next quarter are:

## April:

- Managing Safely in the Workplace – 18th April
- Understanding Export and Export Documentation (Virtual) – 18th April
- Structured Sales Training – 24th April
- Google Ads Advanced – 25th April

## May:

- Emergency First Aid at Work – 2nd May
- Customs Procedures and Documentation – 8th May
- Presentation Skills and Confident Communication – 9th May
- WordPress in a Day – 14th May
- LinkedIn for Business – 15th May
- First Aid for Mental Health level 2 – 21st May
- Trust Based Sales – 22nd May

## June/July:

- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) Training – 5th June
- Fire Marshall & Fire Awareness – 5th June
- Managing Safely in the Workplace – 11th June
- Import Procedures and Special Procedures (Virtual) – 11th June
- Digital PR and Social media – 13th June
- Customer Service Excellence – 18th June
- First Aid Mental Health for managers – 25th June
- Digital Marketing, SEO and Google (virtual) – 3rd July
- Emergency First Aid at Work – 4th July

# Chamber called for 'sustainable growth plan' in recent Budget

**Shropshire Chamber of Commerce called on Chancellor Jeremy Hunt to use the Budget to develop a 'sustainable growth plan' by working in partnership with business.**

It gave its backing to a pre-Budget submission from the British Chambers of Commerce calling for the Government to:

- Match industry-led funding of £3 million for planning qualifications to help plug the lack of local resource.
- Commit to fund business led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) beyond the current 2025 cut off point to at least 2028.
- Restart the VAT registration review with a view to removing the existing cliff edge.
- Reform business rates to make it a tax that incentivises growth.
- Introduce a new internationally competitive tax-free shopping scheme.

Ruth Ross, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber, said: "Businesses are wrestling with many challenging issues right now, and with the clock ticking towards a General Election, they want to see a clear vision.

"Through our work on the Local Skills Improvement Plan for the region, we know that attracting, retaining, and developing people with the right skills is crucial for business – but far too many employers are struggling to do that.

"Our own research, alongside that of the BCC, also reveals that many small firms are struggling because of business rates, while others are limiting their expansion plans because of the VAT threshold.

"We believed the Chancellor should have used his statement to announce plans to make rates fairer."

Research from the BCC shows that nearly half of businesses with a turnover below £85,000 are concerned about growing revenue because of the requirement it would bring to start paying VAT.

And more than one in three companies say they are now paying more in business rates since the revaluation which took place last year.



**Ruth Ross: "Businesses are wrestling with many challenging issues right now, and with the clock ticking towards a General Election, they want to see a clear vision"**

The BCC's Quarterly Economic Survey for the final three months of last year showed that while business confidence has improved slightly, most firms continue to report no improvement to sales, cash flow or investment.

Shevaun Haviland, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce, said: "As businesses continue to chart a course through choppy economic waters, they want to work in partnership with Government to get the UK economy growing again.

"The Chancellor has shown he is in listening mode. At the Autumn Statement we were pleased to see full expensing made permanent and business rate relief.

"The Budget is an opportunity to build on that good work and further accelerate help for business.

"Our recommendations were solution focused. We're actively working with industry to develop a UK-wide, private sector funded programme to train more planners to work in local planning authorities, to boost their planning skills and capacity."



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Party time – guests enjoyed themselves after the 2023 event



The Shropshire Chamber Business Awards is the county's 'biggest celebration'

# Business awards launched

**S**hropshire Chamber of Commerce has officially launched its 2024 business awards to champion the local economy's 'vibrancy, innovation and success'.

Nearly 200 business people attended the Mercure Albrighton Hall Hotel near Shrewsbury for the launch event to hear from organisers, judges, previous winners, and sponsors.

Entries are now open for the showpiece awards, which will be presented at a glittering black-tie ceremony at Telford's International Centre this summer.

Details can be found at [www.shropshirechamberbusinessawards.com](http://www.shropshirechamberbusinessawards.com).

The 2024 competition, which is free to enter, is open to all businesses with an operational base in the county of Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin – whether or not they are a Chamber member.

It includes the return of long-running categories including Company of the Year, Best New Business, Best Small Business and Outstanding Customer Service.

There are also several new-look categories this year including an

Outstanding Business Growth award, and a return of the category recognising retail, leisure and hospitality companies.

"The Shropshire Chamber Business Awards are firmly established among the largest events of their kind in the country, with a history stretching back more than 20 years," said Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross.

"The past few years have been an extraordinary journey for us all. Instead of dwelling on the challenges, we've embraced them as opportunities to grow, adapt, and create.

"Shropshire businesses have shown remarkable agility and determination, evolving in ways we couldn't have imagined, while delivering new products and services to a broader array of markets

"We take immense pride in presenting businesses of all sizes that shine as beacons of excellence in their respective fields. These are the businesses that have not only raised their own profiles but have also elevated the stature of Shropshire businesses on a larger stage. Winning one of these awards can be a real boost for you, your employees and your business.

The closing date for applications is April 12, and winners will be announced at the awards night on June 21. Tickets are now on sale through the awards website.

## Raise your company's profile at the 2024 awards

Companies across Shropshire are being encouraged to raise their profile in 2024 by sponsoring the county's biggest celebration of business success.

This year, a whole host of extra sponsorship opportunities have been created – with packages to suit all budgets.

Events and training manager Kelly Riedel said the Chamber had restructured its sponsorship packages this year to open them up to a wider range of companies and organisations.

"The awards will be presented at The International Centre in Telford, on June 21 in front of hundreds of people – the event is well established the highlight of the Shropshire business calendar.

"More than 13,000 people have attended the awards presentation evening since the event's launch, so it's an incredible opportunity for companies to raise their profile and demonstrate their commitment to supporting the local economy.

"That's why we've restructured the sponsorship packages this year – so that no matter what size your business is, we can tailor make a package that will suit your budget."

In addition to headline sponsorship



There is a multitude of sponsorship opportunities available for the awards

packages for individual categories – which include a table of 10 at the dinner – there are product placement packages, and sponsorship of the drinks reception, wifi, or the event's master of ceremonies.

"Headline category sponsors have the chance to take part in the judging and shortlisting process, with opportunities to meet the category finalists. They also

present the award on stage during the ceremony, and their branding appears on all promotional literature.

"No matter what your budget may be, we would be delighted to talk you through what is available."

For more information contact Kelly on 01952 208200.

Email [awards@shropshire-chamber.co.uk](mailto:awards@shropshire-chamber.co.uk)





# This year's categories

**H**ere is the full list of categories for 2024, and the criteria which will be used by the shortlisting panel to judge the entries:

## COMPANY OF THE YEAR

The showpiece award for an all-round star performer, flying the flag for Shropshire business excellence. Judged on a combination of:

- Financial track record, and pursuit of excellence
- Creativity, innovation and ambition
- Leadership and customer service skills
- Training, people development and marketing strategies
- Commitment to the community
- Effective response to economic challenges
- Awards, testimonials and accolades
- A commitment to staff wellbeing and sustainability

## BEST NEW BUSINESS

For businesses in any sector, formed since January 1st 2022. Entries will be assessed on:

- Strength and originality of business vision
- Clear and dynamic business plan
- Financial objectives, and evidence of progress
- Creative and ambitious marketing and growth strategies
- A commitment to staff development, wellbeing and sustainability

## BEST SMALL BUSINESS

For businesses in any sector employing up to 10 full-time equivalent staff, demonstrating a high level of success. Judged on:

- Innovation, and forward-thinking strategies for growth
- Gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage
- Commitment to staff development, wellbeing and sustainability
- Clear and creative marketing and growth plans
- Accolades, testimonials, and evidence of financial success

## OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE

For companies that go the extra mile in looking after the needs of their customers. Judged on:

- Ways of consistently exceeding customer expectations
- Measuring customer satisfaction, and acting on feedback
- Training and development in customer handling and service skills
- Awards, accolades and testimonials
- A commitment to staff wellbeing and sustainability

## OUTSTANDING BUSINESS GROWTH AWARD

For companies demonstrating substantial growth over the past 36 months (Evidence will need to be provided during the application process). Judged on:

- Evidence of strategic and profitable expansion including last three years of accounts, evidence of new products/services and expansion into new markets
- A dynamic and scalable business model
- A growth in staff numbers and/or turnover, evidence of payroll growth for three years
- Ability to break into new markets, at home or overseas
- A commitment to staff development, wellbeing and sustainability

## COMMUNITY CHAMPION – BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

For businesses that believe in the philosophy of 'putting something back' into the Shropshire community. Judged on:

- Top-to-bottom 'buy-in' from staff at all levels, over and above statutory requirements
- Examples of projects which have made a real difference to local people's lives
- Promoting the value of community work through company vision and values
- Supporting Shropshire suppliers by 'buying local'
- Fostering links with schools, colleges and community groups

## EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING

Celebrating the contribution being made by companies of all sizes in the manufacturing and engineering sectors. Judged on:

- Innovation and customer satisfaction
- Quality control processes, and use of new technology
- Effective leadership and management
- Testimonials, and evidence of financial success
- Wellbeing and sustainability policies and processes

## RETAIL, LEISURE & HOSPITALITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

For companies making a positive contribution to some of Shropshire's most important sectors. Judged on:

- Established market position and strong financial performance
- Overcoming challenges to gain a competitive advantage
- Commitment to staff development, wellbeing and sustainability
- Clear and creative marketing and growth plans
- Awards, accolades and testimonials

## THE TRAILBLAZER – INNOVATION AWARD

For companies who have spotted a gap in the market, and thought outside the box to fill it. Judged on:

- Your USP: What makes you stand out from the competition?
- Innovation in products, services or processes
- Evidence of profitability and effective leadership
- Testimonials, awards, and potential for future growth
- A commitment to staff development, wellbeing and sustainability

## THE ECO AWARD

For environmentally aware businesses that promote innovative practices, processes or technology. Judged on:

- Embracing green technology to lower the carbon footprint
- Promoting or producing eco-friendly products and services
- A cross-company commitment to 'make a difference'
- Substantial and quantifiable improvements in environmental and commercial performance
- A commitment to staff development, wellbeing and sustainability

## YOUNG BUSINESS PERSON

Open to anyone aged 30 or below in January 2024, who demonstrates flair, commitment and an entrepreneurial spirit. Judged on:

- Evidence of a significant influence on the business
- A commitment to training and personal development
- Entrepreneurial attitude, reliability and work ethic
- Strong people skills and maturity beyond their years
- Testimonials from managers, colleagues, and/or customers.

## THE JOHN CLAYTON AWARD

Named after a previous Shropshire Chamber president, this award is the only one to be chosen by Chamber directors. Judged on:

- Someone judged to have made an outstanding contribution to the local business community.





Shropshire Chamber patrons visiting the Harper Adams veterinary training centre



Martha Lane-Fox and Shropshire Chamber patrons tour the site

# British Chambers of Commerce President meets SCC patrons

**T**he president of the British Chambers of Commerce met a group of Shropshire Chamber patrons during a fact-finding visit to the county.

Digital entrepreneur Martha Lane-Fox, co-founder of Europe's largest travel and leisure website lastminute.com, was guest of honour at the event, held at Harper Adams University.

She joined Shropshire Chamber patrons on a tour of the award-winning site near Newport including the veterinary school, engineering centre and working farm, before a networking lunch.

Baroness Lane-Fox, who has a seat in the House of Lords and was elected president of the BCC in October 2022, said: "Shropshire is such an interesting and varied county.

"I'm fortunate in my role to get a real sense of how businesses are performing, the concerns they have, and also what the next 10 years in this country is going to look like.

"I'm a curious person and I love learning about what's going on. But more importantly, I'm a fully vested member of the UK who has started businesses here and had every benefit, and the most amazing career in this country.

"I care deeply about helping in my own small way to make it the best it can be by 2030. Building a great narrative about British business is a big part of that."

She added: "Places and their particular challenges are different, but there are also some fundamental building blocks that are the same.

"I'm constantly hearing things as I travel around the country about infrastructure, skills, the pace of digitisation, transition to net zero, imports, exports and investments.

"There are very big similarities across businesses right now. For an incoming



Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross with BCC president Martha Lane-Fox and Harper Adams University chief executive Professor Ken Sloan



Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross makes friends with the locals

Government of any shade, they should listen to our 100,000 members, because we know what we are talking about.

"Business is front and centre of politicians' minds at the moment. There

doesn't seem to be any debate about the fact that, without thriving businesses, we will not have the economy we want, or be able to deliver public services."

"It's fundamental economics – but it hasn't always been as front and centre in an election. I think it will be this time."

Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross said: "It was fantastic to be able to welcome Martha. We're grateful to her for sparing the time to speak with our patrons to hear first-hand about the issues that matter to them.

"She has the ear of many key decision-makers, so this is another example of how we are helping to make sure the voice of Shropshire business is heard in the corridors of power at Westminster.

"We must also say a big thank you to Professor Ken Sloan and his team at Harper Adams University for hosting us, and conducting such a fascinating tour of their world-class facilities."

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*The team at Ascendancy is now an officially accredited Gold Standard 4 Day Week business*

# Fantastic four-day week working well for digital marketing agency

**P**lans to step-up the campaign for a four-day working week across the UK have been welcomed by a Shropshire digital marketing agency that successfully trialled and adopted the scheme last year.

The 4 Day Week Campaign is encouraging businesses to take a look at the benefits of a shorter working week as a way of helping to 'prevent burnout for millions' of people who are 'being pushed to the brink' as a result of Britain's long hours culture.

The scheme has already worked well with those companies involved highlighting less stress and better staff retention among the benefits. The hope now is for it to be extended into the public sector.

Digital marketing agency Ascendancy, based in Newport, took part in the six-month global project to trial the four-day working week last year and director

Helen Culshaw said its success saw the company make it a permanent working arrangement – with Ascendancy now an officially accredited Gold Standard 4 Day Week business.

"The trial, initiated by 4 Day Week Global, saw hundreds of companies internationally experimenting with the idea. It has proved to be a major success with reports of increased productivity and reduced levels of fatigue, stress, insomnia and burnout," she said.

"It has also worked for Ascendancy, productivity has improved, the team is happy with the four-day working week and it has had a positive impact both in terms of the office environment and the work/life balance for all. I am delighted to hear of plans to step-up the 4 Day Week Campaign and would urge businesses to take a close look at it and see how it could work for them.

"There were concerns for us going into the trial, the main one being could we get all the work done? But this hasn't been a problem and we are doing just as much work now, if not more, as we were before.

"We put a huge amount of thought and planning into how this was going to

work because we still needed to provide a five-day-a-week service while maintaining our high standards. We managed the challenges well and the key thing to running this kind of system is to be super-organised.

"Each permanent, full-time member of staff is included in the scheme once they have passed their probation period and get either a Monday or Friday as their 'rest day'. The remaining four days are slightly longer than before, but overall we have reduced the working week from 37.5 hours to 32 hours, with no reduction in pay."

Joe Ryle, director of the 4 Day Week Campaign, said recent official figures showing almost two million workers reported suffering from work-related ill health in 2022/23 demonstrated the urgency of the move to a four-day working week.

He said: "Our very British culture of long working hours and low pay is pushing people to the brink. We work some of the longest hours in Europe which is causing burnout for millions and not producing good results for the economy.

"We are long overdue for a reduction in working hours – the time has come for a four-day working week, with no loss in pay."

# Corby and Sam join a growing qs team

**Two new recruits have joined an expanding quantity surveyor team with bases in Shropshire and Mid Wales as it takes on new projects in the public sector.**

Corby Oges has been appointed as a senior quantity surveyor at CQS Solutions which has offices in Telford and also in Newtown as Bowen Consultants.

Corby, 44, will be based at the CQS Telford office as a senior quantity surveyor where he will be focusing on public sector work. He is already working with company owner Tim Lloyd on a government contract.

Corby joined the company from a national construction and cost management consultancy where he handled a mixed portfolio of quantity surveying and project management work across a range of sectors.

He originally trained as a quantity surveyor in Nigeria where the qualification includes five years at university. He worked in Nigeria for a construction company before rejoining his family in the UK.

He said he was attracted to CQS Solutions by the friendly working atmosphere and the varied scope of the contracts it works with.

"It's more like a family unit – the team make you feel very welcome and part of the business. That's something that is very hard to find these days. We are very busy working on new projects but I've really settled in and enjoy working here," said Corby.

Adding to the family atmosphere is the appointment of Sam Green as an assistant quantity surveyor. He joins his older brother Jack at the company with Jack being promoted to the role of quantity surveyor after completing his QS qualification.

Sam, 21, is two years into his three year BSc Hons Quantity Surveying with Wolverhampton University. Both brothers started their training with their father's company but moved to separate firms when the business closed during the pandemic lockdown.

Jack, 23, joined CQS Solutions while Sam continued his QS apprenticeship with a Midlands specialist contractor for 18 months before also moving to CQS Solutions.

"Jack told me that Tim at CQS was looking for new people and I sent in my CV. I was really pleased when Tim offered me a post as Jack had given me a lot of information about the company and I knew it was a good place to work. My workload will be much more varied so it is broadening my horizons which is a big plus," said Sam.

"It's also good to work alongside my brother. He helps me out at work if I need it but when we are at home we are both able to leave work conversations in the office," he added.

CQS Solutions owner Tim Lloyd said that Corby and Sam were great additions to the team.

"The business is growing and we are constantly taking on new work in the public sector which means we need to expand the team. Corby brings a huge range of experience across all sectors and it is really rewarding to help Sam launch his career in quantity surveying," said Tim.



*Senior quantity surveyor Corby Oges*



*Assistant quantity surveyor Sam Green*



Two rapid 120kW chargers have been installed, which are capable of adding 100 miles of range to your electric vehicle in just 15 minutes

# Rapid EV charge points are available at Battlefield 1403

**The integration of electric car chargers signifies a forward-thinking approach towards sustainability and convenience for customers. Imagine pulling up to your favourite Farm Shop & Café to stock up on fresh produce – or grab a bite to eat – and being able to charge your electric vehicle while you shop?.**

At Battlefield 1403 you can do exactly that.

As part of the ongoing environmental

policy on the Albrighton Estate, Battlefield 1403 Farm Shop & Café have partnered with leading EV charge point operator, InstaVolt, to bring public, rapid charging points to their premises in Shrewsbury.

Two rapid 120kW chargers have been installed, which are capable of adding 100 miles of range in just 15 minutes – giving access to a quick top-up before continuing on with a journey. The chargers are available for use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All chargers can be accessed using a contactless credit/debit card, making it accessible to all EV drivers.

Director, Jeremy Jagger says: "By installing electric car chargers in our car park, our customers are provided with the convenience of charging their vehicles while carrying out their shopping or eating in our café.

"This integration eliminates the need for separate trips to charge stations, saving time and effort for our customers who are electric car owners.

"The accessibility of these chargers means that they are also available for non-customers, with them being accessible around the clock..."

One of the challenges in the electric vehicle industry is the need to expand the network of charge points.

Many companies are working to increase the availability of charging stations, making it more convenient for electric car owners to travel longer distances without worrying about running out of battery power. And it's great to see this at Battlefield 1403.

Find out more by visiting the website [www.battlefield1403.com](http://www.battlefield1403.com)



# Growing local economy – firms moving into business villages



From left, John Banner of Big Timber, front, with Jez Stridgen and Dave Yates-min

## Diverse companies have taken up Bradford Estates leases as the landed estates business on the Shropshire-Staffordshire borders expands its commercial property footprint.

With more arrivals in the pipeline, the landed estates business is ramping up its circular economy drive by converting its surplus agricultural buildings into a flexible range of business villages located along, or just off, the M54, A5, A41 and A518, between Telford and Wolverhampton.

Among the youngest occupiers to move in is Edwina Lowe Wedding Florals, a florist business which has expanded from a home

garage to dedicated space at Tong Business Village adjacent to the A41.

Owner Edwina Lowe, 25, said: "I had looked at industrial units but wanted somewhere with character, where couples can visit and enjoy the experience of planning their big day with a consultation session so when I saw Bradford Estates' offering, I loved the history of the place and wanted to move in."

The Old Drying Shed, which adjoins the Bradford Estates Office on the A5, has been turned into the home of Big Timber, a new company creating benches from trees felled in the local area.

Next door is tech company Twindom UK Ltd, which makes 3D scanners for use by leading international entertainment and leisure brands. Co-founder Suresh Bawa said: "We have a lovely location which is strategically a great place to showcase our business."

Huntapac, a national supplier of root produce to the UK's leading supermarket chains, has taken over Woodside Farm, just off the A41. Farm director Ben Madarasi said: "We appreciate the heritage of Bradford Estates and their understanding of agriculture and farming as a landowner."

Bradford Estates Asset Management Director Andrew Barrett has overseen these latest arrivals and said: "As the direct owners of all these properties, we can offer occupiers a one-to-one relationship rather than having to negotiate through third parties, and as long-term owners, can be flexible to accommodate the needs of businesses within our varied range of space as they grow."

- For more information on the Bradford Estates commercial property portfolio go to: [www.bradford-estates.co.uk/properties/commercial/](http://www.bradford-estates.co.uk/properties/commercial/)



# World of possibilities on your doorstep

**L**ooking to secure promotion, climb the career ladder, or try a complete change of employment direction?

Then you need to speak to the award-winning team at Telford College, which offers a world of training possibilities on your doorstep.

The college has been recognised this year at the further education sector's 'Oscars', the Beacon Awards, for its engagement with employers, and has launched a new-look range of business study programmes to fit in with people's busy lifestyles.

For example, you can:

- Study for an AAT accounting qualification either during the daytime or at evenings on part-time one-year courses.
- Complete an introduction to bookkeeping to give you the perfect grounding, and route into employment.
- Upskill on new sustainable electricity regulations through bootcamps at the college's new Retrofit Skills Lab.
- Pave the way for a degree-level qualification by enrolling on an Access to Higher Education programme.
- Specialise in IT and computing, starting at either level 3, 4 or 5.
- Sign up for one of the college's new T-Levels – a vocational alternative to A levels – in health, digital skills, and much more.

Telford College also has a new marketing apprenticeship for 2024. The level three multi-channel marketer qualification is designed for those with responsibility for day-to-day marketing activities. For more details, call the apprenticeships team at the college on 01952 642200, or email [apprenticeships@telfordcollege.ac.uk](mailto:apprenticeships@telfordcollege.ac.uk)

If an apprenticeship isn't for you, and you'd rather study at home, that's not a problem, because Telford College's distance learning curriculum includes specialist short programmes in areas such as customer service, data protection, team leading, equality and diversity, business administration . . . and much more.

Teresa Hughes, director of business and professional studies, says: "Our business curriculum is very wide-ranging, whether someone wants to run their own business or progress in a large organisation.

"Marketing, HR, management, finance, and anything at all to do with computing and IT – we've got it all covered.

"Our HNC higher level qualifications are aimed at adults who have maybe been in the workplace for some considerable time but maybe just haven't got the qualification they need for the promotion they're after."

The Ofsted rated 'Good' college is



*The Retrofit Skills Lab at the Wellington campus*



*Fancy putting your business experience to work as a tutor? Get free training and support at Telford College.*



*Telford College was recognised at the Beacon Awards, the further education sector's 'Oscars', last month. Graham Guest is pictured at the event in London*

the largest further education centre in the county, offering A levels, T-Levels, apprenticeships, adult courses, distance learning programmes, and much more.

With new study pathways, a new maths and digital skills hub set to open in Telford town centre's 'Station Quarter' later this year, and major investment in the Wellington campus, it's an exciting time to be at the college.

Principal and chief executive Graham Guest says: "If you're looking for a job, we can help you into employment through one of our sector-based work academies. If you're keen to progress in your current role, we'll help you to upskill or diversify."

#### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:**

- Telford College is organising a recruitment event in April for anyone with a skilled trade or profession who is interested in moving into teaching – either on a full or part-time basis, with free training and support. Register your interest at [www.telfordcollege.ac.uk/about/job-vacancies/register-interest/](http://www.telfordcollege.ac.uk/about/job-vacancies/register-interest/)
- The next Telford College open event will be on June 19, when the Wellington campus will be open from 5pm to 7.30pm for prospective students and their families to chat with tutors and students, and receive practical careers advice. For more details, or to register a place, see [www.telfordcollege.ac.uk](http://www.telfordcollege.ac.uk)





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*Beamish Prestige offers their services for corporate or leisure bookings including airport/seaport transfers, business meetings and corporate events*

# New member is impressed by first breakfast club visit

**B**eamish Prestige Ltd are one of the chamber's newest members and attended the Bridgnorth networking breakfast at the Woodbridge pub on Valentines Day. The event was hosted by chamber events manager Kelly Riedel and featured a presentation by Louise Welsby, director at BUY-FROM creative agency.

Alex Brennan, managing director of Beamish Prestige, said: "This was my first networking event and I didn't quite know what to expect, but soon found the atmosphere to be relaxed and welcoming. There were almost 40 attendees from various business sectors and made some valuable connections, most notably Sally Themans from Good-02Great, I have just enrolled on their 'start-up workshop' also, the guest speaker Louise Welsby, who delivered a very enthusiastic and engaging presentation. I am meeting with Louise this week to see how they can help us create awareness among the Shropshire business community."

Based in Shropshire, Beamish Prestige Ltd offer an 'executive private hire' service, a prestige vehicle and driver for corporate or leisure bookings and are members of 'North Wales Advanced Drivers' where Alex is heading towards the gold standard RoSPA Advanced Drivers Certificate.

Alex added: "Not only are we new to the chamber, but we are a new business, launching in January, after several months gaining the correct licensing we now need to get exposure and feel that joining the chamber is the first step.

"What came across from the event was the willingness to support and promote each other's business, and we are very much a Shropshire centric company".

Beamish Prestige offers their services for corporate or leisure bookings:

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- Business meetings, corporate events, conferences
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Visit [www.beamishprestige.co.uk](http://www.beamishprestige.co.uk) or call 01952 443415. Contact by email [info@beamishprestige.co.uk](mailto:info@beamishprestige.co.uk)



# Pledge to invest in Women Code

**B**lack Country business loan provider BCRS Business Loans has reinforced its commitment to supporting the advancement of female entrepreneurship by making a pledge to the Investing in Women Code.

The Investing in Women Code is a commitment backed by the UK Government to support the advancement of women entrepreneurs in the UK by improving their access to the tools, resources and finance they need to achieve their goals.

The Code was established after the Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship identified a lack of funding as one of the most significant factors holding back women from scaling their businesses.

As a signatory to the Investing in Women Code, BCRS has committed to a culture of inclusion and to advancing access to capital for women entrepreneurs. BCRS will achieve this by helping to increase access to finance and support for female-led businesses. In 2022-23, 16% of BCRS's total lending was



**BCRS Finance Director Caroline Dunn and Head of Business Development Andrew Hustwit**

disbursed to female-led businesses. In 2022, 15% of SME employers were female led.

The organisation's commitment to gender diversity also extends to its leadership and lending teams, with 50% of its executive directors and 57% of its lending team being women. Overall, 61% of the wider team at BCRS is comprised of women.

BCRS Chief Executive Stephen Deakin commented: "At BCRS, we believe in championing female-led businesses and empowering women to be successful business leaders. Funding should be equally accessible to all business professionals regardless of their demographic.

"The percentage of our loans awarded to

female-led businesses is increasing year on year, and we will continue to explore ways to continue this growth.

"Together with other signatory firms, we are committed to working to make the UK a great place to start and grow a business by advancing female entrepreneurship."

Signatories to the Investing in Women Code include angel investment groups, venture capital and growth investors and high street banks.

All have pledged to support equality in their organisation's interactions with women entrepreneurs and adopt internal practices that aim to improve female entrepreneurs' access to the tools, resources and finance they need to grow their businesses. They must also provide data on their organisation's investing or lending activities.

The Rose Review 2023 found that a record high of more than 150,000 all-female founded companies were created in 2022. However, underfunding is preventing many women-led businesses from reaching their full potential.

According to the review, £250 billion could be added to the UK economy if women in the UK matched men in starting and scaling businesses.

Visit [www.bcrs.org.uk](http://www.bcrs.org.uk) to discover more about their work

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*The integration of autoclave solutions into Busch's robust framework ensures a unified approach to delivering excellence*

# For all autoclave requirements

**F**ollowing the strategic acquisition of Vacuum Furnace Engineering Ltd in 2021, Busch (UK) Ltd proudly announces the evolution of its autoclave solutions offerings into the Busch brand. The move underscores Busch UK's expanded capabilities in providing comprehensive autoclave solutions that are tailored to meet diverse industry needs.

#### **Elevated Offerings, Unmatched Expertise**

The integration of autoclave solutions into Busch's robust framework ensures a unified approach to delivering excellence. This evolution solidifies Busch's position as a leader in the autoclave solutions industry,

offering unmatched expertise, an enhanced extensive service and product portfolio to address all autoclave, oven and associated composite manufacturing requirements, along with a widened service and support network.

#### **Seamless Transition to Busch**

Busch's long-standing commitment to customer satisfaction remains unwavering. Busch's valued customers will continue to work with the same dedicated team they have trusted for many years, ensuring continuity and familiarity. The esteemed Autoclave Solutions Centre in Poole will operate seamlessly under the Busch banner, while the VFE facility in Halesowen remains dedicated to vacuum furnace solutions.

#### **A One-Stop Shop, Your Complete Autoclave Solutions Partner**

Leveraging on decades of extensive expertise, Busch has evolved into a one-stop-shop for customers' specific autoclave requirements. Their dependable services encompass tailored support to ensure maximum equipment uptime, irrespective of brand. Furthermore, Busch offers new equipment and upgrades, including

state-of-the-art autoclaves, ovens, cooling systems, vacuum systems, and control systems. The Autoclave Management and Control System (AMCS), engineered by an in-house team, can be customized to meet unique customer requirements. Additionally, with remote monitoring capabilities, Busch provides worldwide support.

#### **About Busch Group**

The Busch Group is one of the world's largest manufacturers of vacuum pumps, vacuum systems, blowers, compressors and gas abatement systems. Under its umbrella, the group houses three well-known global brands: Busch Vacuum Solutions, Pfeiffer Vacuum and centrotherm clean solutions. Headquartered in Maulburg, Germany, The Busch Group is a family owned business with more than 8,000 employees in 45 countries worldwide and has an annual consolidated revenue of close to 2 billion Euro.

For Enquiries or for further information please contact Busch UK at 01952 677 432 or via email at [sales@busch.co.uk](mailto:sales@busch.co.uk). Alternatively, contact the Busch Autoclave Solutions Centre on 01202 630 033.



# Multi-million pound contract

**A** Shropshire driver training specialist has won a multi-million pound Government contract to deliver training across the West Midlands and North West England. The two-year contract means Dulson Training will be offering free HGV and ADR training for individuals or 90% subsidised training for SME employers looking to upskill their staff.

It's part of the Government Skills Bootcamp initiative aimed at tackling the HGV driver shortage and offers an end-to-end programme lasting up to 16 weeks with minimal time away from other commitments – covering everything from enrolment to starting a professional driving career with all the skills and qualifications necessary to succeed in the logistics industry.

Since Skills Bootcamp for HGV Driving launched a few years ago, Dulson Training has been involved as a partner, sub-contractor and even held a small contract as part of a rescue effort when another provider collapsed leaving hundreds of learners who had enrolled with them no option to complete the programme until Dulson Training stepped in.

Dulson Training has now become a prime Skills Bootcamp provider for 2024 and 2025, one of only a handful nationwide.

The company delivers its training programmes across the West Midlands, North Wales, Shropshire, Cheshire and the North West of the country.

Steve Dulson, Managing Director, said: "We are delighted to be awarded one of the most prestigious contracts in our industry. This is proof of the quality and level of service and compliance we achieve.

"We had a fantastic record on our Skills Bootcamp rescue contract last year, with the DfE delighted with the pass rates and volume of successful job outcomes we achieved. It was a real company-wide effort with multiple people playing a big part.

"We are hitting the ground running, starting to enrol learners and are already engaging with employers who have vacancies to fill or staff to upskill.

"This programme has a very distinct aim, and that's to fill vacancies and help the UK driver shortage. Although the shortage has eased in the last 12 months, it is predicted that it will start to spike again, and within a few years or even months we will have the driver shortages that we witnessed after Covid.



Hayley Norgrove, Steve Dulson and Emma Jones

"The programme is for anyone, employed, self-employed or unemployed, who holds a full UK driving licence, is aged 19 or over and living in England – it is a fantastic opportunity to gain your Cat C or C+E licence fully subsidised.

"The programme will include, enrolment, new skills, medical, theory tests, driver training, driving tests, Driver CPC and employer engagement to find a suitable role.

"If you are an employer with staff members to upskill, the same will be provided with a 90% subsidy for a SME or 70% contribution for an enterprise business with a turnover of £50m or having more than 250 employees.

"We have a contract to deliver four pathways, Car to Cat C, Car to Cat C+E, Cat C to Cat C+E upgrade and existing HGV driver upgrade to ADR with Tanks. Enrolment and training will be delivered from our Nantwich, Shrewsbury, Telford, Ludlow and Wrexham training centres providing excellent coverage across the regions."

Hayley Norgrove, Dulson Training Operations Manager, added: "We have been working towards this contract for the last two years, it has taken a lot of hard work and determination.

"We have successfully won some smaller contracts which has paved the way for us to successfully be awarded a multi-million pound contract with The Department for Education, Skills Bootcamp for HGV.

"We have been working closely with

The DfE for the last 12 months on another contract which has shown how Dulson Training is committed to helping reduce the national driver shortage and provide quality training at multiple training sites across the West Midlands and North West.

"We have invested in new training equipment, recruited more staff and upskilled existing staff to make sure we can provide the excellent level of service we provide."

Emma Jones, Dulson Training Employer Engagement & Partnership Coordinator, will lead the programme in a full-time employer engagement role and will be available to discuss the programme with any employers who have staff to upskill or have future vacancies to fill.

She said: "I am delighted to lead and support individuals and companies on this prestigious and exciting contract, from initial enrolment all the way through to supporting employment.

"I look forward to building on and developing our already successful network of employers, to further support our students in every possible way. Upon completion of their driver training, students will receive a full package of employment support from CV guidance, job application and interview support."

● *If you are interested in Skills Bootcamp for HGV driving or have a staff member to upskill please contact 01952 770659 or register your interest at <https://www.dulsontraining.co.uk/hgv-igv-skills-bootcamp-funded-training-courses/>*

# Discover Adcote School for girls



*Adcote prides itself on a commitment to academic excellence. Dedicated and experienced teachers provide a curriculum that encourages girls to reach their full potential and achieve outstanding results*

**A**dcote School for girls is a prestigious and highly respected boarding school located in the beautiful countryside of Shropshire, England.

With a history dating back over a century, Adcote has a long-standing reputation for providing an excellent education and fostering a strong sense of community and personal development among its students.

On 6th May 2024, Adcote School will be hosting an Open Day for prospective parents to come and see first-hand what sets our school apart from the rest.

Here are just a few reasons why you should attend our open day:

- **Academic Excellence:** At Adcote, we pride ourselves on our commitment to academic excellence. Our dedicated and experienced teachers provide a challenging and stimulating curriculum that encourages girls to reach their full potential and achieve outstanding results.

- **Pastoral Care:** The well-being and happiness of our students is of

utmost importance at Adcote. Our caring and supportive staff provide a nurturing environment where girls can thrive and grow in confidence, both academically and personally.

- **Extracurricular Opportunities:**

Adcote offers a wide range of extracurricular activities (90 a week!), from sports and arts to leadership and community service. We believe that a well-rounded education goes beyond the classroom, and our extracurricular programme allows girls to explore their interests and passions in a supportive and encouraging environment.

- **Beautiful Campus:** The picturesque setting of Adcote School is the perfect backdrop for a first-class education. Our school boasts stunning grounds, historic buildings, and modern facilities that provide an inspiring and enriching environment for learning.

If you are considering Adcote School for your daughter, our Open Day on 6th May, is the perfect opportunity to see all that we have to offer! Come and meet our Headteacher, staff and students and explore our grounds, and discover why Adcote is the right choice for your daughter's education and future. We look forward to welcoming you to our school and showing you the difference we can make!

## Hot off the press!

*Adcote School has just announced the dates for Summer Camp '24! Running from the 14th of July to the 24th of August, both boys and girls are welcome to attend and have a summer of fun!*

*Tailored with children in mind, the camp is suitable for those aged 10-17 and the programme promises a blend of on-site and off-site activities designed to foster personal growth and lasting memories. See our website for more details!*

- Whether you're considering Adcote School for Girls as your educational choice or seeking an unforgettable summer experience for your child, we extend a warm invitation to explore everything we have to offer. Embrace the opportunity and journey!

Contact: [admissions@adcoteschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@adcoteschool.co.uk) or [summercamp@adcoteschool.co.uk](http://summercamp@adcoteschool.co.uk)

**ADDCOTE SCHOOL**

# OPEN EVENT

Monday 6th May at 10am

Save the date and discover...

CLEAR LEARNING

Book your space now by calling us on: 01939 260 202  
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# It's 'The Little Things in Life' that count

**Nothing is too much trouble when it comes to doing the little things to make life brighter for residents of Shropshire's leading care home company.**

Whether it be having a chat over a nicely brewed cup of tea, reading a favourite story together or completing the last piece in a jigsaw puzzle – there are a million and one ways that carers at Coverage Care Services ensure residents retain their individuality, enjoy favourite hobbies and reduce stress.

And to celebrate, the not-for-profit company has launched a new online campaign called 'The Little Things in Life'.

It aims to highlight the many ways in which staff go out of their way to help care home residents live happy and fulfilled lives.

Debbie Price, chief executive of Coverage Care, said: "Moving into residential or nursing care is a major life change, so it's important that our residents feel at home with us.

"Our residents are individuals, with very different needs, backgrounds and life experiences, and we are committed to giving each one the personalised care and attention they need to be comfortable and happy.

"Research has shown that even a simple cup of tea and a chat can improve mental



*Research has shown that even a simple cup of tea and a chat can improve mental health*

health and making time for 'the little things in life' is why our staff are so good at what they do.

"Residents with dementia can benefit enormously from activities which help them remember who they are. That might mean spending time reminiscing over old photo albums, listening to some favourite music or reading a treasured story from their past.

"Doing a jigsaw can also help improve focus and cognitive ability, or carers might spend time supporting a resident to do some drawing, painting their nails or a craft that they find enjoyable. For some, their daily trip to a café or even the pub might be that important little detail that makes life fun!

"The key to all these things is time, and we make sure our staff have the time that each person needs. We offer homes, not

hospitals, and we want residents to be able to think of our staff as their friends.

"We choose and train our staff very carefully to make sure everyone in the team really understands the value of the little things in life."

Research reported by Harvard University shows that physical exercise and mental stimulation can both help improve cognitive function and reduce stress.

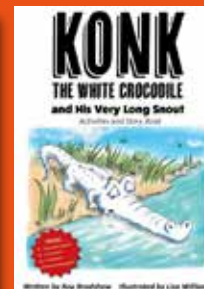
One of the little things staff do is help residents to use large-screen digital tablet tables which allow people to play games, enjoy creative activities and even video call loved ones, all of which helps to improve co-ordination, brain function and a sense of identity.

Debbie added: "We are always keen to hear from people who would like to join our team. You don't need qualifications or experience as we offer a full and ongoing training programme, but you do need to be caring, empathetic and willing to do all the little things that can make someone's life better."

Coverage Care Services runs 11 care homes across Shropshire and employs about 1,000 people, many of whom have stayed with the company for many years.

You can follow 'The Little Things in Life' campaign on Coverage Care Services social media channels Facebook and X and online at <https://www.coveragecareservices.co.uk/>

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*Operating as an independent boutique-style agency, Prince offers a personalised and cost-effective approach to recruitment*

# Connecting success and people over two decades

**T**elford-based recruitment agency, Prince, is marking a momentous occasion this year: two decades of successfully connecting talented individuals with leading companies across Shropshire and beyond.

Since its inception in 2004, Prince has built a reputation for providing professional, quality candidates and exceptional service, earning the trust of both businesses and job seekers.

"It's incredible to look back and see all we've achieved," says founder Mike Prince. "From the beginning, our focus has been on building genuine relationships and understanding the unique needs of both clients and candidates. This approach has not only helped us thrive, but also fostered a loyal and dedicated team."

This dedication to people-centric service is echoed by co-founder Maria

Sandford. "We genuinely care about making a positive impact," she explains. "That's why we're not just another recruitment agency."

"We go the extra mile to create meaningful connections and help people achieve their career goals."

Prince's commitment to excellence is exemplified by retaining their coveted Investors in People Gold accreditation, held since 2016. Recognised by Investors in People since 2005, their journey to Gold in 2016 and successful retention through three audits demonstrates their dedication to fostering a positive and supportive work environment that empowers employee development and growth.

"Our team is our greatest asset," says Mike. "By investing in their well-being and professional development, we ensure they have the skills and resources needed to deliver exceptional service to our clients."

Operating as an independent boutique-style agency, Prince offers a personalised and cost-effective approach to recruitment.

They specialise in commercial, operations, and accounts & finance sectors, collaborating with established UK companies and having corporate

membership with REC, the UK's leading recruitment industry body. Their vision and values are not mere words but a driving force behind every interaction. "We strive to be the 'people people,'" explains Maria. "This means honesty, transparency, and genuine care for those we work with, both internally and externally."

With a combined 154 years of experience, Prince's specialist consultants hold in-depth knowledge of the local job market. They excel at matching the right people with the right opportunities, delivering swift and effective matches that exceed expectations.

Mike concludes, "We're proud of our journey and excited for the future. As we celebrate 20 years, we remain committed to connecting people and success, while upholding our values and fostering a thriving culture within our team."

Whether you're a talented individual seeking your next career challenge or a company looking for exceptional talent, Prince is ready to connect you with the perfect match.

For more information, visit [www.prince4jobs.co.uk](http://www.prince4jobs.co.uk), call 01952 299844 or email [hello@prince-personnel.co.uk](mailto:hello@prince-personnel.co.uk)



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# AI could increase cyber threats

**S**hropshire business owners have been warned that artificial intelligence could bring an increase in cyber attacks as criminals begin to exploit its capabilities.

Dave Williams, from Henshalls Insurance Group, said AI cyber attacks were already unfolding and they were likely to become even more prolific and more expensive.

“Ransomware costs are at an all time high and so it’s vital that businesses do all they can to protect themselves as an attack could prove to be extremely damaging, and even lead to the business failing altogether.”

Dave said one of the most effective ways to protect a business from the impact of ransomware and tighten up cyber security systems was with cyber insurance.

“Cyber insurance policies help alleviate the financial and operational burden in the wake of an attack, and the criteria you need to follow helps businesses to develop an all-round security strategy that’s as strict as possible.

“This kind of strategy not only needs to work alongside existing security measures but also needs to provide a safety net in case a breach occurs.”

Dave said policies were designed to address the increasingly complex threats that criminals were developing.

“A typical policy would cover key areas such as data recovery, financial compensation, help with reputational damage, and legal support, but it’s important to ensure that the policy you choose suits the specific needs of your individual business.

“In today’s difficult economic climate, you may consider cyber insurance as just another expense – but given the catastrophic financial losses you could face from a ransomware attack, it’s a small price to pay.

“An insurance policy could be the difference between keeping your company running and losing everything.

“Having cover in place will help your business follow cyber security best practices, and by showing that you’re taking ongoing steps to limit the risk of ransomware, you could potentially reduce the insurance premiums over time.”



*Dave Williams from Henshalls Insurance Group warns businesses about AI cyber attacks*

## Iconsys's northern office set to open in Cheshire



*Iconsys will have new offices in Cheshire*

As a result of exponential organisational expansion, iconsys have announced a significant step with their growth strategy with the planned opening of a new northern office. The new office will be based at Sci-Tech, The Innovation Centre, Daresbury, Cheshire, in April 2024.

“Having a Northern office is very exciting and offers greater flexibility and allows for a more engaging experience for our existing talent living in and around the region, and opens up our talent pool to add to our growing team of “Best in Class” engineers.

This exciting new and innovative space offers a flexible, agile and enjoyable working environment, surrounded by nature, that will allow for co-working and collaboration and aids learning of our people at all levels.

We put our people at the core of everything we do.

Having this new office is also great news for our customers, as they will now have access to our talented people across our two locations. Having boots on the ground will allow for a higher customer experience”. Nick Darrall, Managing Director.

It’s an exciting time to join #teamiconsys during this period of sustained growth. They are recruiting for a number of exciting roles, based both at The Technology Hub, Telford, and at their new office based in Cheshire.

For a confidential chat about opportunities, contact them on [careers@iconsys.co.uk](mailto:careers@iconsys.co.uk) or take a look at their current opportunities.

For more information visit the website [www.iconsys.co.uk](http://www.iconsys.co.uk)



# Helping to revive canal basin

**E**xascale is delighted to be working with the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust, introducing Gigabit speeds to the Wappenshall Junction redevelopment project. The ambitious initiative aims to revive the Canal basin while also offering community spaces and an on-site café, enhancing the overall area.

Thomas Bibb, CEO of Exascale said: "We're very excited to be working with the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals trust, providing managed WiFi solutions in addition to Managed Gigabit Full Fibre connectivity to the building – which will be a massive improvement on the current 1Mbps legacy ADSL connection!"

Bernie Jones, Chairman of the Trust said "This will bring 21st Century technology to our 200 year old wharf, for the benefit of our visitors. I'm sure that Thomas Telford, who was partly responsible for the canals meeting here, would greatly approve!"

Exascale is an independent Internet Service Provider (ISP) which has an expanding Gigabit Full Fibre network serving properties north of Telford & Wrekin, connecting large businesses estates such as Hortonwood through to villages such as Preston upon the Weald Moors and most recently Wappenshall.



Thomas Bibb, CEO of Exascale and Bernie Jones, chairman of Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust

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# Is trouble looming?

**A major increase in car parking charges will make it harder for businesses to attract talent to Shrewsbury in the future, a town centre trader has stated.**

Chris Beane, branch manager of Howden Insurance in High Street, said Shropshire Council's proposals to more than double charges in some town centre car parks had come as a huge blow. "These massive increases have come totally out of the blue and could end up causing real problems for businesses," he said.

"My biggest concern is the impact this will have on my team members – both in terms of our existing people and our ability to attract new talent.

"Howden Insurance is committed to having high street premises, with more than 100 branches in the heart of town centres across the UK, and I know Shrewsbury is considered to be among the more expensive places to park compared to our other branches.

"The cost of parking is already a major consideration for our teams. Shrewsbury town centre is a great place to work, but these increases could make it harder to attract people, so they might never find out what Shrewsbury has to offer."

Shropshire Council claims the increases are aimed at encouraging people to find other ways of getting into the town centre, but Chris said the alternative options were not currently viable.

He added: "A lot of people are prepared to use public transport or cycle whenever they can, but the local bus services are simply not regular or reliable enough.

"Until better alternatives are in place, hiking car parking charges



Chris Beane of Howden Insurance

will just result in turning people away from the town centre, whether that's workers or customers.

"I am passionate about highlighting Shrewsbury as a great place to work – we have lots of fantastic young people with bags of potential who go off to university and don't come back because they feel there are not enough opportunities here.

"It's so frustrating because short-sighted decisions like this do nothing to encourage people to work in the town centre – in fact, they do the opposite."



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## New partner announced at Shropshire law firm

A Welsh-speaking clinical negligence specialist has become the latest partner at a law firm working with clients across Shropshire and North Wales.

Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors have offices in Shrewsbury, Telford, Hereford, Oswestry and Conwy, and the firm has kicked off the new year by welcoming Laura Weir as a new partner.

Laura joined Lanyon Bowdler's award-winning clinical negligence team in 2020, returning to her native Wales following a successful career in London.

She is a fluent Welsh speaker and her knowledge of the Welsh healthcare system is of great benefit to her clients when dealing with a range of legal claims.

Laura said: "I am delighted to have become a partner of the firm, and feel as passionate as ever about supporting people

in claims arising from delays in, or failure to diagnose, refer or treat a range of serious conditions resulting in a significant injury.

"I have a particular interest in brain, spine and birth injury claims, as well as cases arising from the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

"Although based in Shrewsbury, I work closely with the team in Conwy and am always happy to help with any clients who prefer communicating in Welsh."

Brian Evans, managing partner of Lanyon Bowdler, said Laura's promotion was richly deserved.

He added: "Laura has been an extremely valuable member of the team since she joined us in 2020, and we are delighted to welcome her as a new partner."

Please visit [www.lblaw.co.uk](http://www.lblaw.co.uk) for help with any legal queries.



Laura Weir

## Revolutionising on-site operations

**Working within the education sector has thrown up a number of significant challenges over the years, not least working within a live & time sensitive environment.**

Schools typically have a very short window in which building work must be completed and school holidays are realistically when the bulk of the work is undertaken.

SIPS or Structurally Insulated Panels have revolutionised the way in which R1 Construction can operate on site. In simple terms they are single pieces of insulation foam, sandwiched between two timber sheets.

Up to 7x stronger than traditional timber frames and 3x stronger than brick and block, they offer impressive structural stability considering their lightweight nature.

SIPS usually have an average lifespan of 60 or more years. However, having been used for many decades, there are buildings made with SIPS that are over 90 years old and still going strong.

Time is money in this industry, and SIPS offers a distinct advantage in terms of speed.

They are designed, pre-cut and pre-insulated off-site, allowing for quick and easy assembly on-site. The panels are light enough to manually handle, which takes out the need for costly cranes or machines.

This streamlined construction process significantly reduces the companies labour and material costs while accelerating the construction programme. In contrast, steel frame & traditional methods typically involve more complex on-site work, which can lead to delays on the project and severe



**R1 are confident that once awareness of the product becomes more widespread amongst the construction community, SIPS won't be limited to commercial developments**

over-running of budgets. The beauty of SIPS is that they can be constructed in any weather.

There is a common misconception that SIPS structures must be boxy and boring when in fact, it's quite the opposite. The flexibility in design and ease of construction means there are no limitations to what can be achieved.

One of the most significant advantages of SIP panel systems is their exceptional insulation properties.

SIPS consist of two layers of timber with a thick layer of insulation sandwiched between them. This design creates an airtight seal that minimises heat transfer, resulting in an increase in energy efficiency.

They have recently completed a new

locker room in SIPS over at RAF Shawbury for their on-site Fire Station. R1 was awarded the project following a successful tender exercise. They were on and off site within 9 weeks! They are also currently on site in Monkmoor, Shrewsbury, building the new SYA Headquarters in SIPS. This is a much larger project, and R1 look forward to seeing it take shape over the next few months.

R1 are confident that once awareness of the product becomes more widespread amongst the construction community, SIPS won't be limited to commercial developments, but may provide a solution to an ever-increasing shortfall and urgent demand for energy-efficient housing in the UK.



# Duo unites wellbeing and sales for resilient success

**F**rom the heart of Shropshire business, a dynamic collaboration has emerged, transcending traditional boundaries, and redefining the landscape of business success.

Laura Butler, an esteemed international wellbeing and performance coach, and Pippa Tait, the visionary force behind Sales Geek Shropshire, have joined together to unveil a transformative training program centred on resilience. Their partnership not only underscores the intrinsic link between wellbeing and sales but also illuminates the pivotal role resilience plays in driving success in the competitive world of sales.

At first glance, the realms of wellbeing and sales may seem disparate, belonging to separate spheres of professional expertise. However, upon closer examination, their interconnectedness becomes strikingly apparent. In the fast-paced world of sales, where rejection, setbacks, and stressful high-pressure environments are commonplace, maintaining optimal mental and emotional wellbeing is paramount. Sales professionals must navigate a myriad of challenges while remaining steadfast, focused, and resilient in the face of adversity. But how?

Enter Laura Butler, an internationally recognized figure in the field of wellbeing and performance coaching.

With her deep understanding of human psychology, resilience-building techniques, and holistic approach to personal development, Laura brings a wealth of expertise to the table. Her insights into stress management, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness serve as invaluable tools for individuals seeking to thrive amidst the rigors of the sales landscape.

Laura says: "You can't succeed and strive for more from a place of depletion, for me, wellbeing equals performance."

On the other side stands Pippa Tait, the driving force behind Sales Geek Shropshire, a renowned sales development firm dedicated to empowering businesses with cutting-edge sales strategies and techniques. With her extensive experience in sales training and business development, Pippa understands the unique challenges faced by sales professionals and the critical role resilience plays in driving sales success. She recognises that resilience is not merely a desirable trait but a foundational skill that empowers individuals to persevere in the face of rejection, adapt to



Laura Butler



Pippa Tait

change, and bounce back stronger than ever.

Together, Laura and Pippa have crafted a groundbreaking training programme that seamlessly integrates the principles of wellbeing and sales, offering a holistic approach to personal and professional development. Through a series of workshops, coaching sessions, and experiential exercises, participants are equipped with the tools, strategies, and mindset needed to cultivate resilience and unlock their full potential.

An optimum state of positive mindset and wellbeing sets the stage for resilience, creating a robust and adaptive framework that enables individuals to navigate life's inevitable challenges with confidence and ease.

In this unique training you will discover what resilience is and how to recognise your limitations, key attributes of resilient and successful people, how to change your mindset and squash automatic negative thoughts.

You will also learn which wellbeing practices and lifestyle choices that contribute to resilience by providing a solid foundation for coping with stressors, managing emotions effectively, and cultivating and sustaining a positive mindset through life's challenges.

Laura will be sharing her 4 power principles for building resilience along with helping you to create your own personal wellbeing plan and teaching you many different tools and techniques to call on when times are good and bad.

Becoming resilient enhances your ability to connect authentically with clients, build trust, and cultivate long-lasting relationships. By fostering emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and empathy, resilience enables us to navigate challenging conversations with grace and poise, turning objections into opportunities and setbacks into successes. To find out more contact Laura at [Laura@laurabutlercoaching.co.uk](mailto:Laura@laurabutlercoaching.co.uk) or Pippa at [Pippa.tait@salesgeek.co.uk](mailto:Pippa.tait@salesgeek.co.uk)

**Together, Laura and Pippa have crafted a groundbreaking training programme that seamlessly integrates the principles of wellbeing and sales, offering a holistic approach to personal and professional development.**

# Career initiative wins 'phenomenal support'

**A** Shropshire hygiene and decontamination specialist, developing and manufacturing products for healthcare, catering and hospitality sectors around the world, has marked a record-breaking year with a rebrand as they plan for the future.

The team at Telford-based Serchem has revealed a new identity for the business, including a new website, along with the addition of a group of experienced investors to guide the next phase of growth, new products and the creation of jobs in the town.

It comes as the company celebrates the biggest export order in its 43-year-old history.

Serchem was launched in Telford in 1981 and is now recognised as a global leader in the development and manufacturing of hygiene and decontamination products, working with both NHS and private health providers, along with catering and hospitality businesses around the world.

The Serchem team celebrated the rebrand and marked the first stage of the new era at the Arab Health Exhibition at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Alison Arnold, Serchem Commercial Director, said: "The company continues to go from strength-to-strength. We have enjoyed a phenomenal period of growth which has included our biggest ever export order and our confident, new identity will be vital in driving our exciting plans for future growth.

"We have launched a new website [www.serchem.com](http://www.serchem.com) as well as a new suite of marketing collateral and have celebrated major new investment which will help us expand our global reach, increase our workforce to meet demand and add to an already extensive product range – cementing our position as an industry leader.

"In recent years Serchem has continued to attract an increasing level of business both in the UK and internationally, driven by a commitment to premium products and service. We want to not only successfully deliver on that growth but further strengthen our customer relationships and position in the market.

"As part of achieving that we have carefully selected a group of experienced investors to actively support the team. We welcome experienced corporate finance professionals Oliver Wadlow and Simon Lloydbottom, who have joined forces with Richard Hale, after his successful and longstanding ownership of Deritend Industries."



*The team at Telford-based Serchem has revealed a new identity for the business, including a new website, along with the addition of a group of experienced investors to guide the next phase of growth, new products and the creation of jobs in the town*

Commenting on the developments, Mr Wadlow said: "The time was right to create a robust brand strategy together with a sharper, more professional identity that truly reflects Serchem's expertise and capability.

"Working with industry specialists, we've created a distinctive brand in the health, catering and hospitality sectors that captures all that is incredible about Serchem, enabling us to tap into the wide-ranging opportunities that lie ahead for us."

Mrs Arnold added that the launch of a new era for Serchem comes at a time when its position within the health, catering and hospitality sectors, both at home and abroad, has never been stronger.

Serchem continues to lead the way in

the manufacture and distribution of vital chemical products and equipment, essential to hygiene and safety in medical and catering and hospitality settings.

She said: "This is a very exciting time for the business which we are so proud to run here in Telford.

"This next phase will offer job opportunities and career development for many who are in the business and for people who are yet to join us.

"I am extremely proud of our team – known as the Serchem family – and look forward to a very successful year ahead and beyond."

Visit [www.serchem.com](http://www.serchem.com) to see the new website and for more information.

**"We have launched a new website [www.serchem.com](http://www.serchem.com) as well as a new suite of marketing collateral and have celebrated major new investment which will help us expand our global reach, increase our workforce to meet demand and add to an already extensive product range – cementing our position as an industry leader."**



# Employer & Candidate Mismatch...



“  
**CONFIDENCE  
RISES**  
*...noted  
improvements*

“  
**INFLATION  
WOES**  
*...continued  
worry*

“  
**CASH  
FLOW**  
*...belt  
tightening*

“  
**TAXATION  
FEARS**  
*...will we see  
taxes rise*

# Employer vs Candidate

## As the economy bites and more are looking for work will candidate demands lessen?

Though the vast majority of jobs posted are for full time set hour roles many candidates are looking for part-time or flexi working, causing issues for employers.

We are starting to see a slight shift to more part-time roles being on offer, which may go some way to reducing the mismatch.

### “ Will automation and AI be needed to fill the skills gaps...

Employers are still seeing candidates with high expectations, often way above their skills set and experience levels. Work ethic and poor soft skills are still high on the list of negatives articulated by employers. Pressure for higher wages, greater flexibility and other benefits continue.



## We want to hear your views...

Each quarter Shropshire Chamber takes part in the British Chambers of Commerce national economic survey. In this report, you will see the results for Shropshire, trending from as far back as 2009. If you and your company would like to take part in these surveys, please contact [policy@shropshire-chamber.co.uk](mailto:policy@shropshire-chamber.co.uk) giving your name, company name and the email to which invitations should be sent.

Please note this is only open to businesses in **Shropshire** and **Telford & Wrekin**, and Chamber Membership is not required to take part. Those in neighbouring counties should approach the British Chambers of Commerce to locate their nearest BCC Accredited Chamber.

This survey is open to businesses from all sectors including public sector and the third sector. The survey is open to any size of business from micro's, who employ no staff, to the very largest businesses. The data is used both locally and nationally to lobby those in power on the main topics of concern. The national survey is highly respected and is used by Central Government and the Bank of England to understand the economic situation and pressures facing businesses in the UK.

**The greater our business voice, the more valuable the information becomes, so we want to encourage every business, Chamber member or not, to add their voice to this vital survey.**

© Shropshire Chamber 2009-2024. Survey carried out over 3 weeks during February and March 2024.



**DOMESTIC (UK) SALES INCREASES**

**UK Sales Past:**

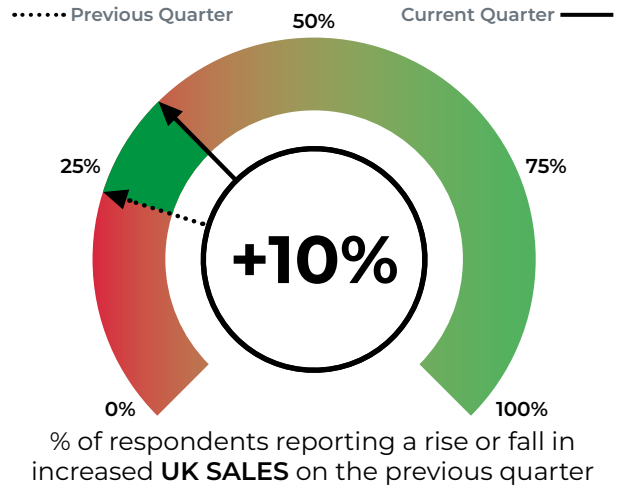
*"We had a strong Q4 of 2023 but Q1 of 2024 has started slowly. We are looking to develop new customers to achieve growth, but our existing customers are slow this year so far."*

Retail / Wholesale Sector

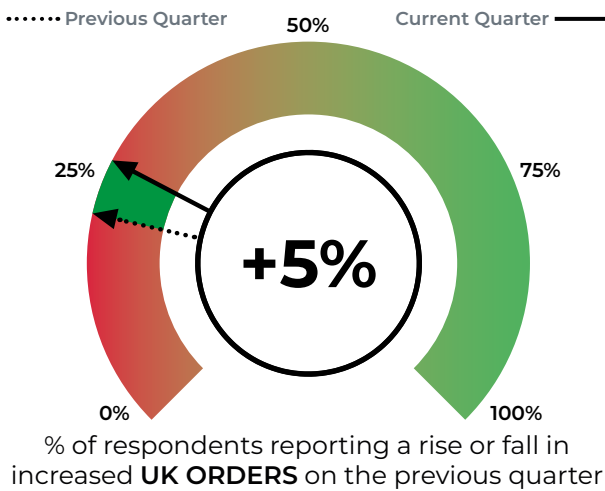
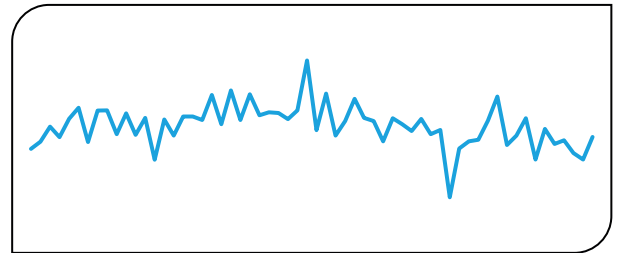
*"We spend more time trying to get business and the customer commitment with lots of pre sales work."*

Professional Services Sector

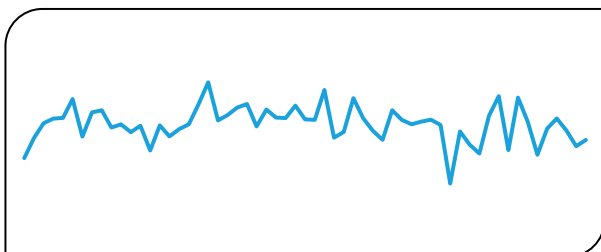
*Over 40% said sales remained static.*



2009      UK Sales Past      2024



2009      UK Sales Future      2024



**UK Sales Future:**

*"There is still a huge amount of uncertainty out there - exacerbated by the political situation and upcoming general election, making trade uncertain."*

Marketing / Media Sector

*"We have had to increase marketing spend substantially to maintain income levels. This is evidence of underlying structural problems in the economy."*

Professional Services Sector

*54% expect no change in sales levels looking forward.*

## EXPORT SALES

### INCREASES

#### Export Sales Past:

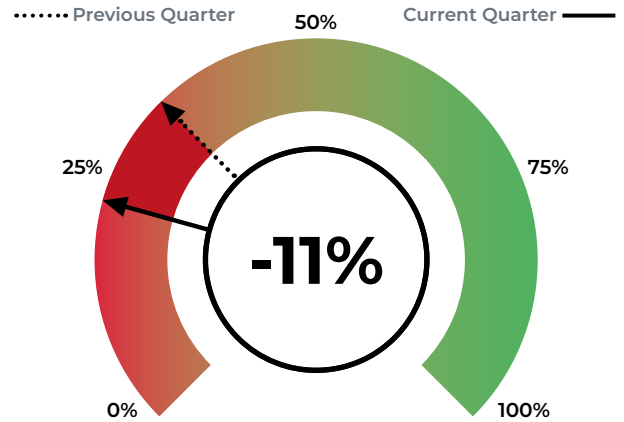
*"Export - US sales are okay, but European sales are down."*

Manufacturing Sector

*"Brexit is still making it hard to sell to Europe, been so long now cannot see this ever recovering."*

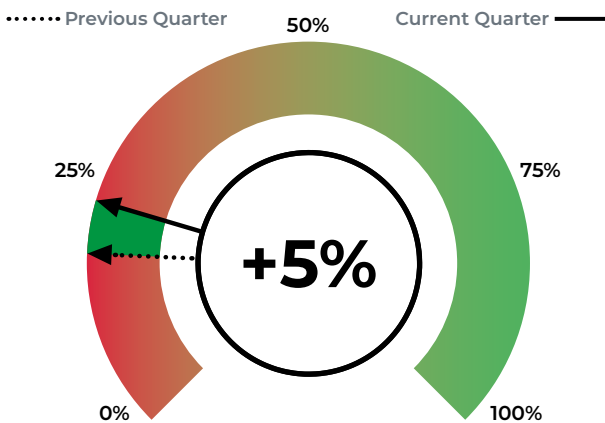
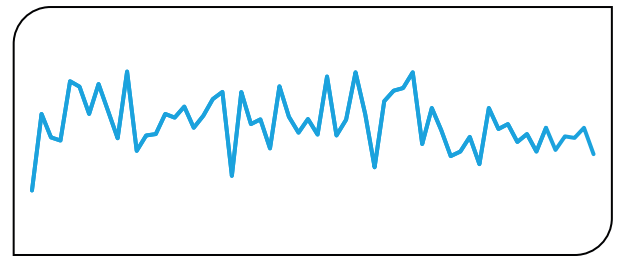
Manufacturing Sector

*Quarter of exports saw a decline in sales over the past three months.*



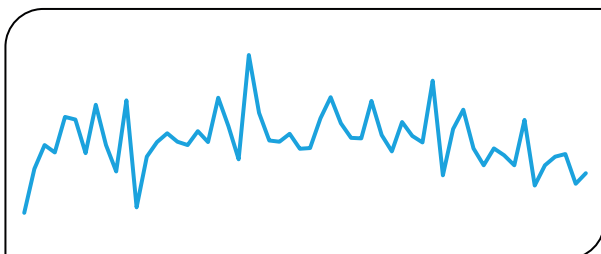
% of respondents reporting a rise or fall in increased **EXPORT SALES** on the previous quarter

2009      Export Sales Past      2024



% of respondents reporting a rise or fall in increased **EXPORT ORDERS** on the previous quarter

2009      Export Sales Future      2024



#### Export Sales Future:

*"Export and Future Export - it has become far more challenging to export, with extra costs and red tape. UK Sales & Future Sales - The Cost of Living crisis and the impact felt by the Pub Trade nationwide, with unprecedented closures has reduced the market size for us, as such remaining consistent is seen as market share growth, but ever more competitive."*

Manufacturing Sector

*52% expect their export future sales (next three months) to remain the same.*

# WORKFORCE PAST & FUTURE

## INCREASES

### Workforce Past:

*"Recruitment has been and still is, very difficult in our area of the County. As a result, we are upskilling the existing workforce and investing in greater levels of automation in order to increase productivity."*

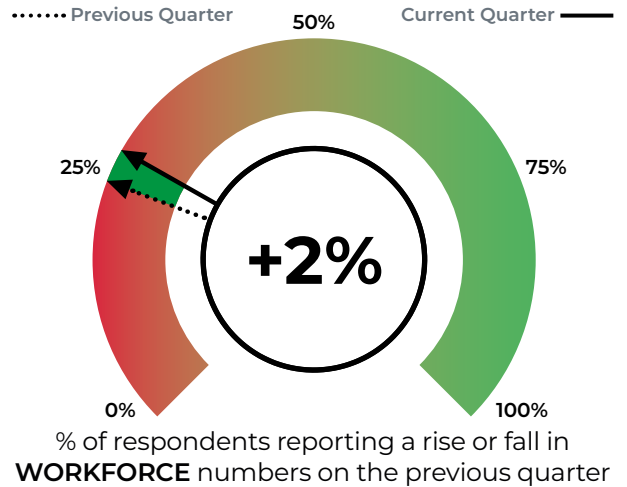
Manufacturing Sector

*"Struggling to recruit legal secretaries, solicitors and accountants."*

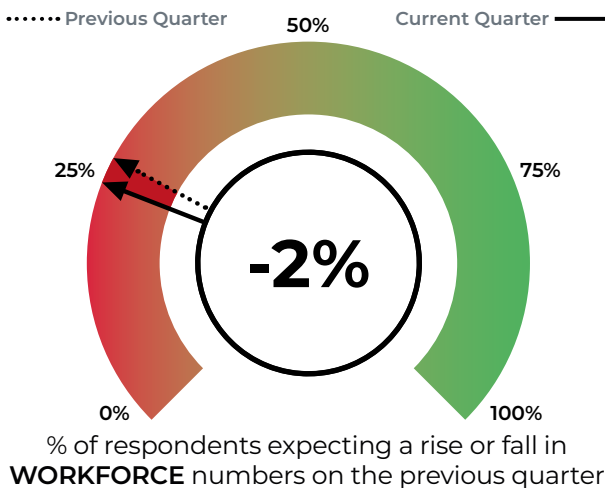
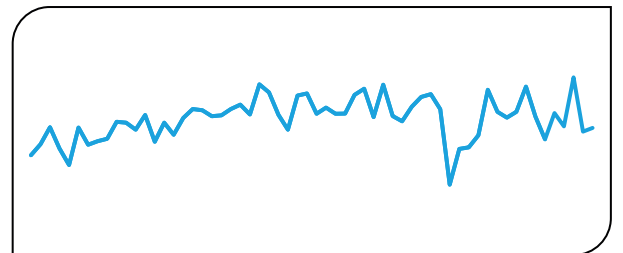
Professional Services Sector

*"Reliability and work ethic deteriorates year on year."*

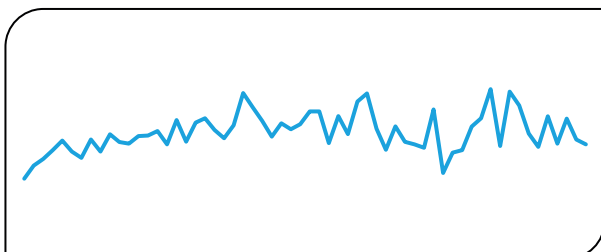
Marketing / Media Sector



2009      **Workforce Past**      2024



2009      **Workforce Future**      2024



### Workforce Future:

*"Finding and retaining sales staff with good Shropshire knowledge has been a huge challenge in recent years, and remains so."*

Marketing / Media Sector

*"Recruitment for skilled labour is very difficult, we need to attract more foreign labour again."*

Retail / Wholesale Sector

*"Lots of applicants applying from overseas hoping roles are 100% remote (they aren't!)."*

Professional Services Sector

## SKILLS & RECRUITMENT

### Companies Recruiting:

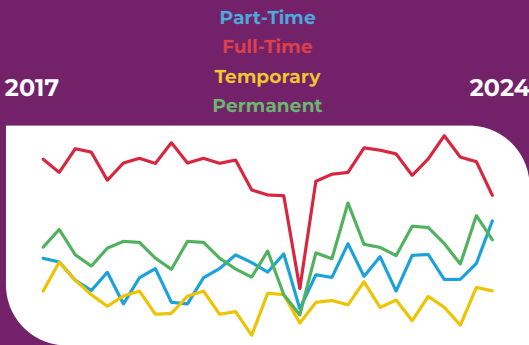
**2017** Recruited Faced Difficulties **2024**

*"We have to be very careful on our costs at the moment in an ever more competitive and shrinking market, therefore any recruitment has to be very carefully considered, as such I don't envisage any employment growth, unless we gain a significant amount of business."*  
Manufacturing Sector

*"Lack of clear communication skills. Over-ambitious with limited experience."*  
Professional Services Sector



### Staff Types:



*"We need staff skilled in leadership, time management & sales."*  
Retail / Wholesale Sector

*"The issue is not so much specific skills, as ability with those skills!"*  
Public Sector

*"We need people who have a good knowledge of the county. Hard to find or retain."*  
Marketing / Media Sector

### Post Types:

**2017** Clerical Professional - Managerial Skilled Manual-Technical Semi-Skilled & Unskilled **2024**

*"Fuel and travel costs are a factor for staff requesting to work from home."*  
Marketing / Media Sector

*"We have started to employ people from further afield in order to get the skills we need."*  
Marketing / Media Sector

## CASH FLOW INCREASES

### Cash Flow:

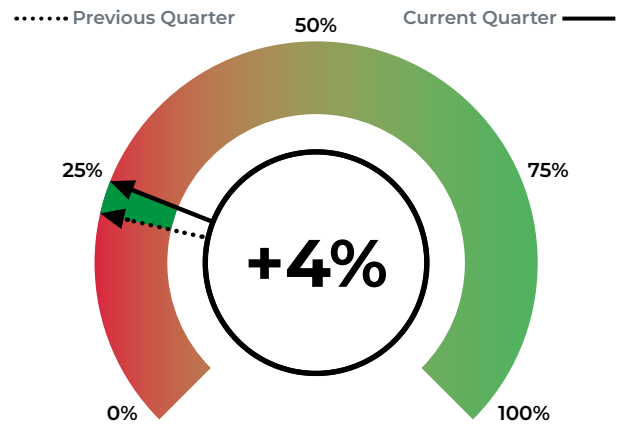
*"Essentially the same despite a slight rise in order levels."*

Manufacturing Sector

*"Cash Flow - Is a big concern due to late payments from suppliers we had to make some very uncomfortable decisions in the last 3 months."*

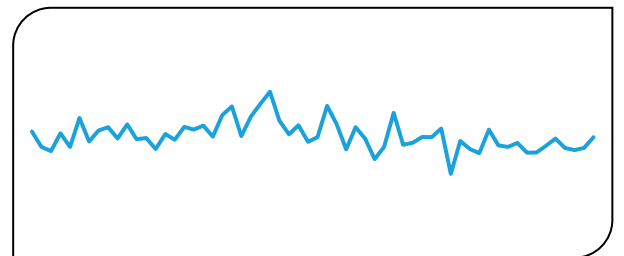
Professional Services Sector

*37% said their cash flow had decreased over the past three months.*

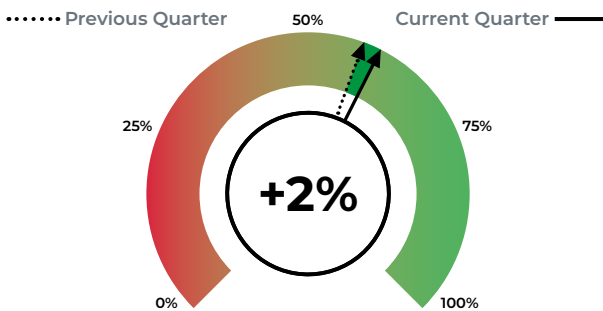


% of respondents reporting a rise or fall in increased **CASH FLOW** on the previous quarter

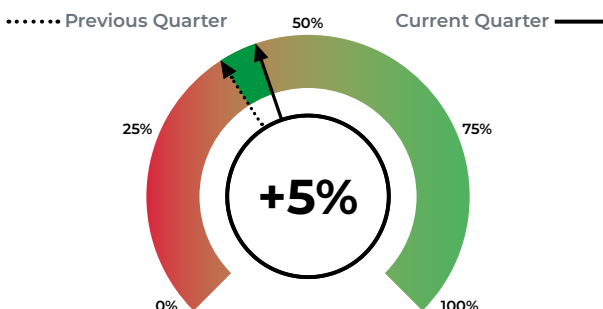
**2009** **Cash Flow** **2024**



## FEAR FACTORS



% of respondents seeing **INFLATION** as a fear factor compared to last quarter



% of respondents seeing **TAXATION** as a fear factor compared to last quarter

### Fear Factors:

*"Interest rates affect what my customers will pay and inflation reduces their margins."*

Professional Services Sector

*"The cost of living crisis is impacting all our customer base. There is less demand from consumers who have less disposable income. If the government do not get inflation under control this will be a serious situation."*

Retail / Wholesale Sector

*"Increase in taxes is extremely unfair on small growing businesses."*

Professional Services Sector

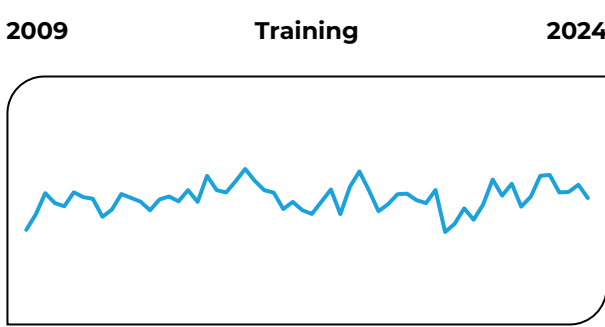
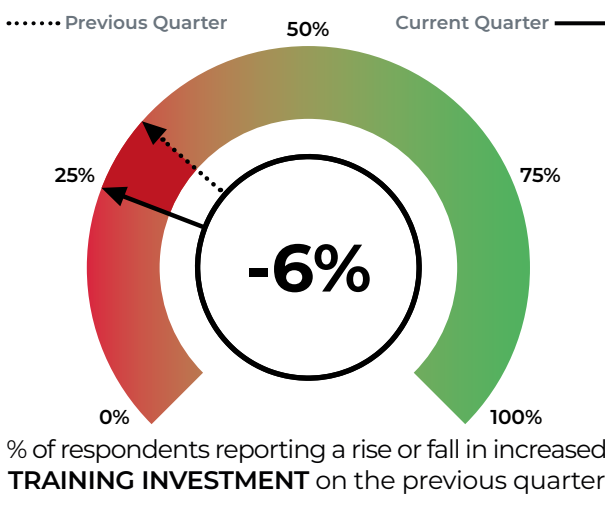
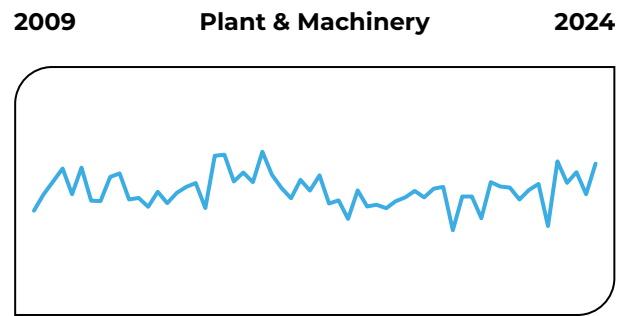
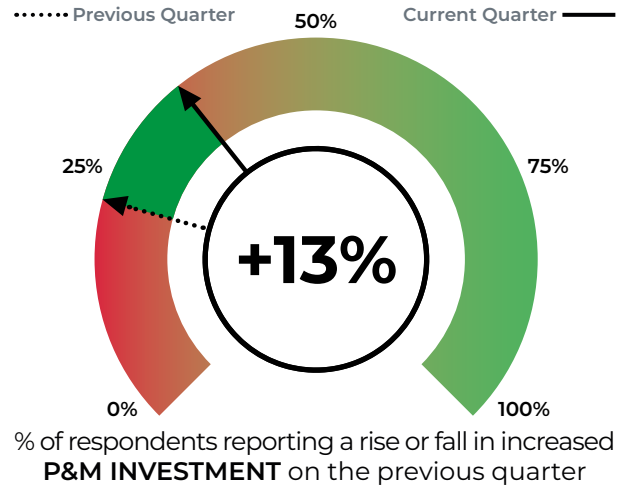
## INVESTMENT INCREASES

### Plant & Machinery:

*"We recently completed a purchase of some important equipment to help us diversify our product range."*  
Manufacturing Sector

*"We continue to invest in more equipment to increase productivity."*  
Manufacturing Sector

*23% said they had decreased plans for spend on plant & machinery.*



### Training:

*"Training, CIS cards, Mental Health Training, Health & Safety Training are what we have undertaken using courses on line for all staff."*  
Consumer Services Sector

*"We have recently completed Equality and Diversity Training with our entire workforce as part of our commitment to our employees to create a safe and happy workplace."*  
Manufacturing Sector

*54% stated they had not changed their plans for the level of training they would provide to their workforce.*

# CONFIDENCE INCREASES

## Turnover Confidence:

*"Relative reduction in revenue = reduced cashflow."*

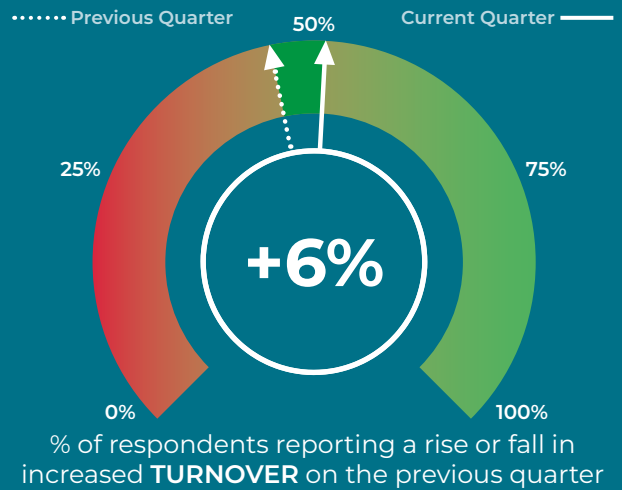
Public Sector

*"As demand lowers, competitors reduce their prices and we have to remain competitive as a challenger brand."*

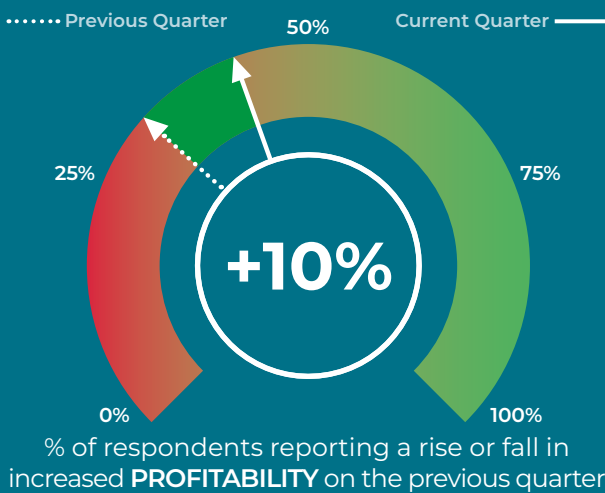
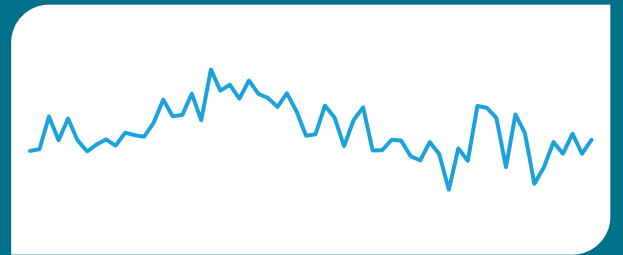
Retail / Wholesale Sector

*"We are spending more time than ever before chasing late payment."*

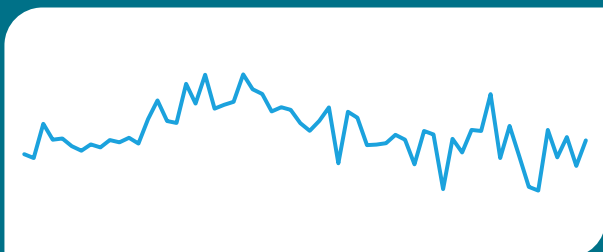
Marketing / Media Sector



2009                      Turnover                      2024



2009                      Profitability                      2024



## Profitability Confidence:

*"Just completed a round of price rises, some raw materials are however very volatile on the open market."*

Service Sector

*"Impact of NMW increases will affect our profitability."*

Professional Services Sector

*"Although income has gone up this is only in line with outgoings, so seen a small increase in net profit none of which has come from local sources."*

Service Sector

## CAPACITY | PRICE vs COST

### Capacity:

*“Investments in new equipment have increased our capacity significantly but only part of this has been absorbed by increased orders so far.”*

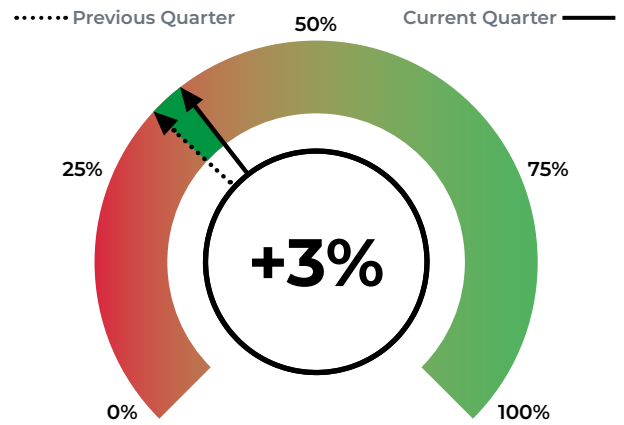
Manufacturing Sector

*“In need of more admin staff to increase capacity.”*

Consumer Services Sector

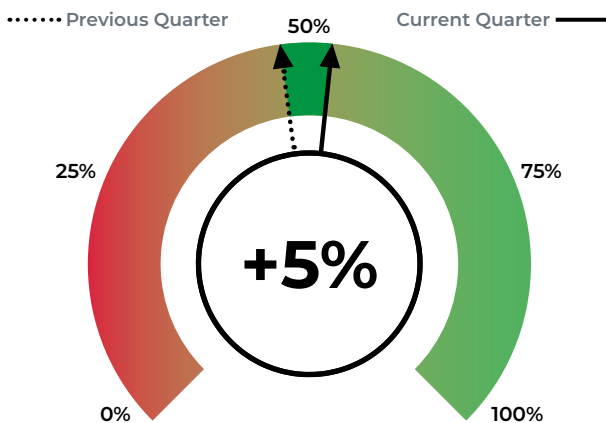
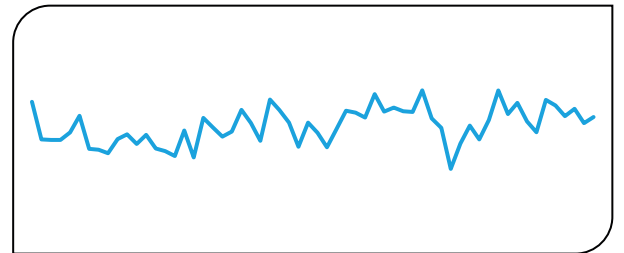
*“Full at the moment, but if we get investment, we will increase capacity.”*

Service Sector



% of respondents reporting a rise or fall in **FULL CAPACITY WORKING** on the previous quarter

2009                      Full Capacity                      2024



% of respondents expecting to **INCREASE PRICES** compared to the previous quarter

### Price vs Cost:

*“The Red Sea situation isn’t helping due to increased insurance and/or freight costs. Also, minimum wage increases, fuel prices and increases in hybrid car costs are not helping with overall cost control.”*

Manufacturing Sector

*“A complete price increase of all products and service being implemented April 1st to try and absorb increase in NMW and salaries.”*

Hospitality Sector

*Still the majority say they expect to increase prices to compensate for overhead increases.*





## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

### Business Pressures:

1

Are you having to offer higher wages to attract new staff?

2

As a result of higher cost do you anticipate having to lay off any staff?

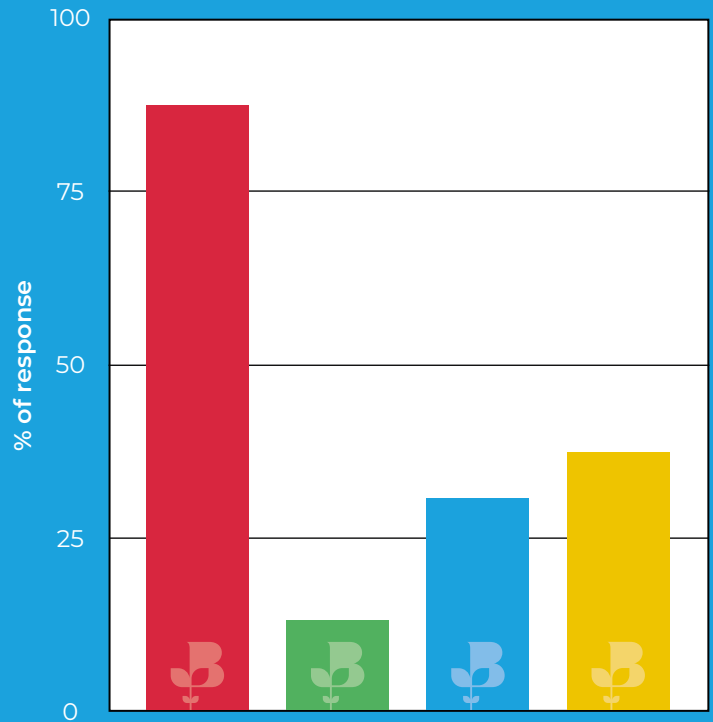
3

Are your credit terms getting worse?

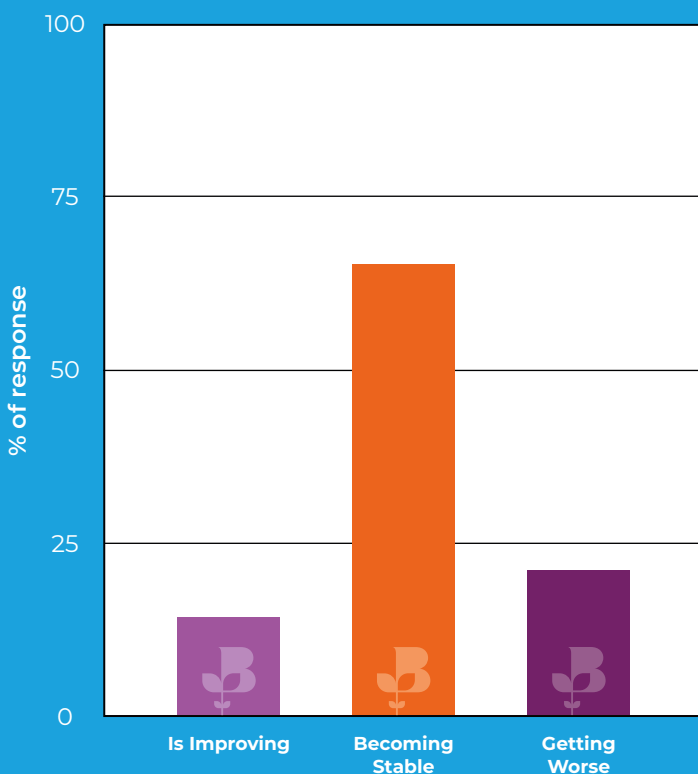
4

Are bad debts increasing?

Graph shows the % of those who said YES to each question



Graph shows the % of responses regarding the current Supply Chain situation



### Supply Chain:

*“Things were slightly improving until the Red Sea attacks took hold. Might I suggest a rather bigger more powerful Navy to combat these sorts of incidents.”*

Manufacturing Sector

*“Product price increases and air freight costs affecting supply chain.”*

Service Sector

**65% feel their supply chain is stable.**

# your voice MATTERS!

The greater the voice, the greater the influence we can have to support you

- ✓ Confidential
- ✓ Highly Respected
- ✓ Informs Government

Contact us  
TODAY!

Contact [policy@shropshire-chamber.co.uk](mailto:policy@shropshire-chamber.co.uk) today to have your name added to the Chamber survey invite list

## About the QES

The **Quarterly Economic Survey (QES)** is the flagship economic survey from the **British Chambers of Commerce**. **Shropshire Chamber** is responsible for the collection of data, for the survey, in both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. The data gives Shropshire Chamber vital economic indicators, facts which are used to lobby, inform Chamber strategy, as well as to support the local business community.

The national collated data, the largest and most highly respected survey of its type, is used to inform and lobby Government departments, assist the Bank of England, and inform a wide variety of other relevant bodies and economists. The survey happens four times per year.

## Every Single Business Voice Matters!

The greater the voice, the greater the influence we can have to support you and your business. **All businesses from Shropshire / Telford & Wrekin are welcome**, Chamber member or not, sole trader to multinational. It is anonymous to ensure you can speak freely.

If you would like to discuss partnering with us for the next **Quarterly Economic Survey**, please contact **Ruth Ross** on:  
[r.ross@shropshire-chamber.co.uk](mailto:r.ross@shropshire-chamber.co.uk)



# SMI is supporting young international hockey star

**A** Telford thermal insulation firm has signed a sponsorship deal with one of the town's up-and-coming international sports stars.

Grace Garbett is a member of the GB Women's ice hockey squad, as well as representing her country at inline hockey.

Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI), renowned for its thermal products which help to control temperature and save energy, has agreed to sponsor the 20-year-old for the season.

Grace, who also plays at club level for Solihull Vixens women's team and for Altrincham Aces men's team, has been looking for local sponsors and approached businesses across the region.

"My sport is entirely self-funded, so I really appreciate any support that companies can offer," she said.

Grace, who is also studying towards a degree in construction, describes herself as 'a committed and determined athlete, focused on achieving personal and team goals'.

"Sport has enabled me to develop leadership and communication skills, improve teamwork and self-discipline, and offered amazing opportunities to work alongside elite athletes and coaches from around the world.

"My current training and playing regime sees me working with a Team GB strength and conditioning coach three times per week, alongside on-ice training with men's and women's teams.

"I'm so glad to have Seymour Manufacturing International on board for the 2024 season. As part of their kind sponsorship support, the company's logo will now go onto my stick for all my upcoming matches."

SMI finance and HR manager Jayne Meakin said: "We are so pleased to be sponsoring Grace – we're sure there are exciting times ahead for her and we're glad we can help her along on her journey.

"Given our expertise in the thermal insulation industry, it's a great fit to be sponsoring an ice hockey player – we like to think we know a thing or two about environments where temperature control is so important!"

SMI has been saving energy and money for some of the world's biggest and best-known businesses since the 1980s, and continues to be the market leader in the design of thermal insulation products.

Their client list is a who's who of blue-



Grace Garbett with SMI managing director Jill Seymour

chip brands including retailers such as Waitrose, Morrisons, ASDA, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, The Co-operative and Lidl.

The company also works with the NHS, the Ministry of Defence, and has become a leading thermal insulation supplier for the

protection of food, chemicals, agricultural and home delivery products.

The success is all thanks to Temprow – SMI's lightweight thermal insulation material which has been scientifically proven to cut energy loss by at least 25% in chillers, and 33% in freezers.



# International Bridge Alliance gathers for its inaugural meeting

**B**eaver Bridges Ltd are pleased to officially announce the launch of the newly formed International Bridge Alliance, a consortium of international bridge design, manufacture and installation specialists driving forward global infrastructure projects.

The inaugural meeting was recently held in Dubai along with alliance partners, Waagner Biro Bridge Systems, Bridge Brothers & Bridge IT NZ.

The International Bridge Alliance is made of from companies whose sole business is designing, manufacturing and constructing bridges, this unique consortium of bridging experts will be able to leverage the combined power of our international footprint to drive forward global infrastructure projects.

Our full Turnkey Solutions from 'Concept to Completion' with bridging manufactured from all material types will ensure that clients receive trusted buildability advice and value engineering right from the commencement of their respective projects.

Commenting on the formation of this unique industry alliance, Beaver Bridges CEO, Henry Beaver said "It took an unbelievable effort in time and money to get out to Dubai and have the character and conviction to collaborate with industry leading experts, who have only previously been behind the safety of the phone / email and engage honestly and openly in discussion, advice, support, knowledge sharing and commentary on their own businesses and share the global challenges in the bridging sector, this takes a certain mind set and approach and is definitely something we all have in common.

For further information on the alliance please visit <https://www.internationalbridgealliance.com/>



*Left-Right, Richard Kerschbaumer (Managing Director – Waagner Biro Bridge Systems), Henry Beaver (Chief Executive Officer – Beaver Bridges Ltd, Kim Bevins (Business Manager – Bridge IT NZ) & Elias Angell (Chief Executive Officer – Bridge Brothers Inc.)*

# Major employment law changes are on the way

**A**n employment law expert is warning Shropshire business owners to be aware of some significant legislation changes coming up this year.

Alasdair Hobbs, of Human Results in Telford, said it was important that employers were up to speed on a number of developments which would affect them and their staff.

He said: "There are four key legislative changes taking place this year, involving flexible working, employees who are carers or on maternity leave, and more duties for employers to protect staff from sexual harassment.

"The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act comes into force on April 6, which is designed to make it easier for staff to request flexible working arrangements.

"In basic terms, it means staff will have the right to request flexible working from the very first day of their employment. They will also be able to make two requests – previously it was one – in any 12-month period, and employers will have to make a decision on the request within two months rather than the previous three.

"Staff who care for their dependents with long-term needs will be entitled to one week of unpaid leave per leave, under the Carer's Leave Act, which also comes into force on April 6.

"Meanwhile, the Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023 will expand the current protections for staff who are on maternity, adoption or shared parental leave. From April 6, employees will be protected from redundancy from the moment of pregnancy notification to 18 months after the birth of the child."

Alasdair said another important change to be aware of was the introduction of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act in October.

He added: "This Act will place greater responsibility on employers to make their workplaces safer for

all staff, and in particular introduce a duty on employers to take 'reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

"If an employer is found to have breached this new duty, tribunals will have the power to increase the level of compensation by up to 25 per cent – so employers would be well-advised to take it seriously.

"A new statutory code of practice is due to be published soon which will outline the actions employers need to take."

For more information on these changes, contact Human Results by calling 01952 288361 or visit the website at [www.humanresults.co.uk](http://www.humanresults.co.uk)



*Alasdair Hobbs, of Human Results in Telford*

## Quiz and music at charity event

A law firm committed to helping clients find the answers to their legal problems will be posing a few questions of their own at a charity quiz to be held in April.

Lanyon Bowdler will be hosting the quiz at the Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery in The Square on Thursday, April 18 and teams of four are being urged to sign up now to take part.

The evening gets under way at 6.30pm with a 7pm quiz start time, and will also feature a raffle and live music. Money raised on the night will go to two charities – Y Bont and the Shropshire ME Group.

Amanda Jones, of Lanyon Bowdler, said the firm hoped for a good response so as much money as possible could be raised in support of the charities which do so much to make a difference to people's lives.

"Everyone loves a quiz and supporting worthy causes and we will be providing a great opportunity to do both on April 18. We are planning a fun evening and are looking for teams of four with an entry fee of £10 per person," she said.

"The quizmaster is Tony Price, whose quizzes include fun-themed rounds and are suitable for people of all abilities. There is a prize for the winning team and we will also be running a raffle, so any donations of prizes for that would be much appreciated.

"At the conclusion of the quiz there will be live acoustic music provided by local singer/songwriter Si Alton.

"Money raised on the night will go to Y Bont and Shropshire ME Group. Y Bont is a charity that helps people deal with the loss of a baby and provides support with pregnancy decisions.



*Si Alton will provide entertainment at Lanyon Bowdler's quiz, held on April 18*

"Shropshire ME Group is supporting people across Shropshire suffering from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, helping them come to terms with the impact of living with the condition.

"A bar will be available on the evening of the quiz. Only drinks bought from the bar can be consumed but people are welcome to bring along their own food and snacks.

"It promises to be a great night – a fun evening and the latest charity fundraiser organised by Lanyon Bowdler with the added benefit of supporting two worthy causes."

To book a team or donate a raffle prize, call 01743 280289 or email [chloe.millward@lblaw.co.uk](mailto:chloe.millward@lblaw.co.uk) for an entry form.

# Boosting employment via investment

**B**CRS Business Loans is to invest in businesses looking to grow and boost employment opportunities in Shropshire and the wider West Midlands through an innovative fund backed by a mainstream lender.

Lloyds Bank has become the first major banking group to finance loans for delivery through socially motivated Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) including BCRS Business Loans by backing the new £62m Community Investment Enterprise Fund (CIEF) which aims to invest in 800 small businesses nationally and support 10,500 jobs.

Funded by Lloyds Bank, along with social impact investor Big Society Capital (BSC) and contributions from the three participating CDFIs, BCRS Business Loans, Business Enterprise Fund and Finance for Enterprise, the CIEF will provide capital needed by small businesses.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce member BCRS Business Loans will offer CIEF investment to SMEs across the West Midlands and Wales who are unable to access finance from traditional sources by providing secure loans from between £10,000 and £150,000 to support growth and recovery plans.

The new fund for small businesses operating in economically disadvantaged areas, which follows a successful first phase of CIEF funding, will be managed by Social Investment Scotland (SIS).

Stephen Deakin, Chief Executive, BCRS Business Loans said: "The backing of Lloyds Bank is a game changer for business funding in the West Midlands and Wales, offering new opportunities to kickstart economic growth through the CIEF.

"BCRS Business Loans is delighted to support the delivery of the new CIEF, building on the impact we made by supporting a diverse range of businesses to grow and increase employment during the first phase.

"With the support of Lloyds Bank, the investment scheme will help ensure we continue to provide much-needed finance to small businesses across our region while stimulating local communities, creating jobs and driving economic growth. We look forward to building on our new relationship with Lloyds Bank to support business success for companies in some of the most economically challenged areas in the country to bring further positive social impact."

The CIEF announcement comes after BCRS Business Loans was appointed as a fund manager for the new £130 million Investment Fund for Wales and for the Midlands Engine Investment Fund II which will deliver a £400m commitment for businesses across the Midlands.

Since BCRS Business Loans was founded in 2002, it has provided loans worth more than £85 million to businesses. A social impact report for the last financial year showed BCRS lent £6.5m to 72 businesses, safeguarding 999 jobs and creating 473 roles, adding £33.7m in value to the economy of the West Midlands and surrounding regions.



Stephen Deakin, Chief Executive at BCRS Business Loans with Andrew Hustwit, Head of Business Development

## Agency finds pedal power through its partner Google

Employees of a Newport-based internet marketing agency can be seen riding around the town in style on a new bike – the result of meeting targets set by its partner, Google.

Ascendancy Agency, in Chetwynd End, picked up the Google Partners bike from the online Google Partners Store,



The colourful Google Partners bike. Keep an eye out for it in Newport.

with Ascendancy founder Helen Culshaw believing it is probably the first to hit the streets of Shropshire.

She said: "We're proud to be one of the leading Google Partners in the county, an ongoing partnership which continues to go from strength to strength and a testament to the Ascendancy team and the success we saw in 2023.

"Each quarter Google gives us objectives – often related to winning new business but there can also be targets like introducing clients to a certain type of campaign, or implementing new tracking methods.

"When we hit targets we are given reward points to spend in the Google Partners store, which is how we ended up with the Google Partners bike. It appeared in the online store in January and I got in quick to get one as I

expected them to go like hot cakes.

"We have been running Google Ads for clients for over 20 years. We work with a wide range of companies, which makes our day-to-day very exciting and varied, and it is great to see such successes.

"In Google's trademark colours, the bikes are so unique and instantly memorable.

"It's amazing to see something as attractive as this making its way to the offices of Google Partners and Google Ads agencies here in the UK.

"We hope those in and around Newport keep an eye out for our team members on our new steed. It's not every day you see a multi-coloured Google Bike in Newport!"

For more information about Ascendancy, please visit <https://ascendancy.agency/>

# Celebrating seven years in business

**This year marks seven years since Paul Naylor launched his first business – Media & You – and now he seems to have acquired a taste for it.**

"I'd spent almost 25 years in the newspaper industry and had enjoyed a varied career," said Paul.

"My first role was in administration for Shropshire Newspapers, but I was effectively headhunted by its sister publisher – Express & Star in Wolverhampton.

"My position evolved from a sales support role to become part of the production management team. I was planning manager for many years before making the leap to journalism."

By the early 2000s, Paul – like many of his colleagues – was more than aware of the changes in the industry. He consciously took on tasks beyond his role as group supplements editor, developing new skills along the way.

At the end of 2016 another round of voluntary redundancies was announced and for Paul it was as if all the stars aligned.

"I had this feeling it was 'now or never,'" he said. "I was 46 years old. This was either going to be a bold, brave move or a flash in the pan before seeking employment elsewhere. Not wishing to live life in regret, I took the plunge."

Clearly, all worked out fine, thanks largely to a fantastic work ethic.

"One of my greatest passions is creating books, magazines and newsletters," he said.

"Prior to setting up my own business, I was already familiar of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and the significant role it plays in the county – and beyond.

"I had redesigned the magazine and put it together Association, and not long after I'd set up on my own, was asked if I would like to continue working on the publication. I was delighted."

However, Your Chamber, Your Voice isn't the only business publication Paul is associated with. He designs and lays out Shropshire Business magazine, the highly regarded B-to-B must-read.

He has designed and assembled more than 50 books – including a growing number of titles he publishes under the Media & You brand. Paul is currently working on three books – two novellas and a collaboration with celebrated chef Gareth



**Paul Naylor launched MEDIA & YOU in 2017 and has gone on to co-create Granville Credit Control Services and Oscar's Tree Academy**

Johns who works out of The Wynnstay Hotel, Machynlleth.

"When I set up on my own, one thing I was acutely aware of was the silence and loneliness," comments Paul. "A friend suggested a networking group. It was a great opportunity to meet other businesses of all sizes and to diversify. Certainly something I'd never shyed away from."

Through networking, Paul met Mark Chester, a Herefordshire-based tree consultant.

Mark handed Paul a sketch. A simple felt-tip pen effort from his eight-year-old daughter, Sophie. In the last few years, Mark and Paul have developed a number of materials relating to trees. Their main focus is Oscar's Tree Academy – an educational resource aimed at Key Stage 1 and 2 school children.

"It helps youngsters become engaged with nature," said Paul. "It's been piloted in several schools throughout the UK and without exception has been warmly embraced.

"We recognise that schools have limited budgets and have therefore been reaching out to the business community to sponsor the project into schools through corporate social responsibility.

"I'm delighted to say we have gained



**Granville**  
CREDIT CONTROL  
SERVICES



**OSCAR THE OAK  
& FRIENDS  
THE TREE ACADEMY**

support from Siemens, with a targeted trial in the Norfolk area. We will also be working with Birmingham-based Willjo Education Recruitment to introduce children to the world of trees."

Towards the end of last year, Paul joined forces with Kim Kelly, Shai Patel, Sherry Barnard, Ami Patel and Ruth Goss to form Granville Credit Control Services (GCCS).

"I'd met Kim and Shai through networking and we'd often worked together on each other's business," said Paul.

"So when the opportunity presented itself, we formed GCCS. It's amazing how each of us brings something different to the table. We've already helped a number of businesses recoup five figure sums of outstanding sales invoices.

"In a culture where invoice payments have drifted from 30 days to 60, sometimes 90 and beyond, it is vital to improve cashflow for SMEs – well, businesses of all sizes really.

"We also provide the possibility to act as the credit control department for any business, either short term or as a permanent solution."

It's already been quite a journey, but you get the sense there is more to come from Paul, who it appears has become the accidental entrepreneur.





Coverage Care Services invests in My Life TV to support residents living with dementia. Pictured is Thomas Groves and Bryan Donnell from Briarfields in Shrewsbury with the interactive digital tables which are being used to stream My Life TV programmes and activities.

# Dementia-friendly TV proves a hit in county

**A special television channel for people living with dementia is proving very popular with residents of Shropshire's leading independent care home provider.**

Coverage Care Services has been piloting the My Life TV app in its homes, offering a wide variety of specially-selected programmes to help residents with dementia to reminisce, relax and even to eat better.

Debbie Price, chief executive of Coverage Care, said: "We bought the My Life TV licence to assess how we could use it to support residents with dementia, and it has

been a big hit already. It is an app which we can use on our smart TVs and interactive activity tables, and has a huge range of content which is relevant to the age range of residents, and which helps both stimulate and soothe their memory and emotional wellbeing.

"Shows include history programmes, quizzes, memory games, armchair yoga, wildlife and much more, and the residents love it.

"We're now looking at using some of the traditional cookery programmes, such as Fanny Craddock and Delia Smith, before mealtimes to encourage good eating habits – food and mealtimes are often difficult for people with dementia, so these programmes help prepare residents by getting them thinking about food."

Debbie added that ballroom dancing

and bird-watching programmes had been particularly popular, prompting some homes to consider setting up bird watching groups in the spring so that residents could observe the wildlife through their own windows.

She said: "Feedback from residents has been really positive so far and we will soon be looking to roll-out the channel to all homes following the successful pilot.

"My Life TV is the latest strand of our ongoing dementia strategy to make sure all of our homes are physically, mentally and emotionally as well equipped as possible to give our residents with dementia the best quality of life we can."

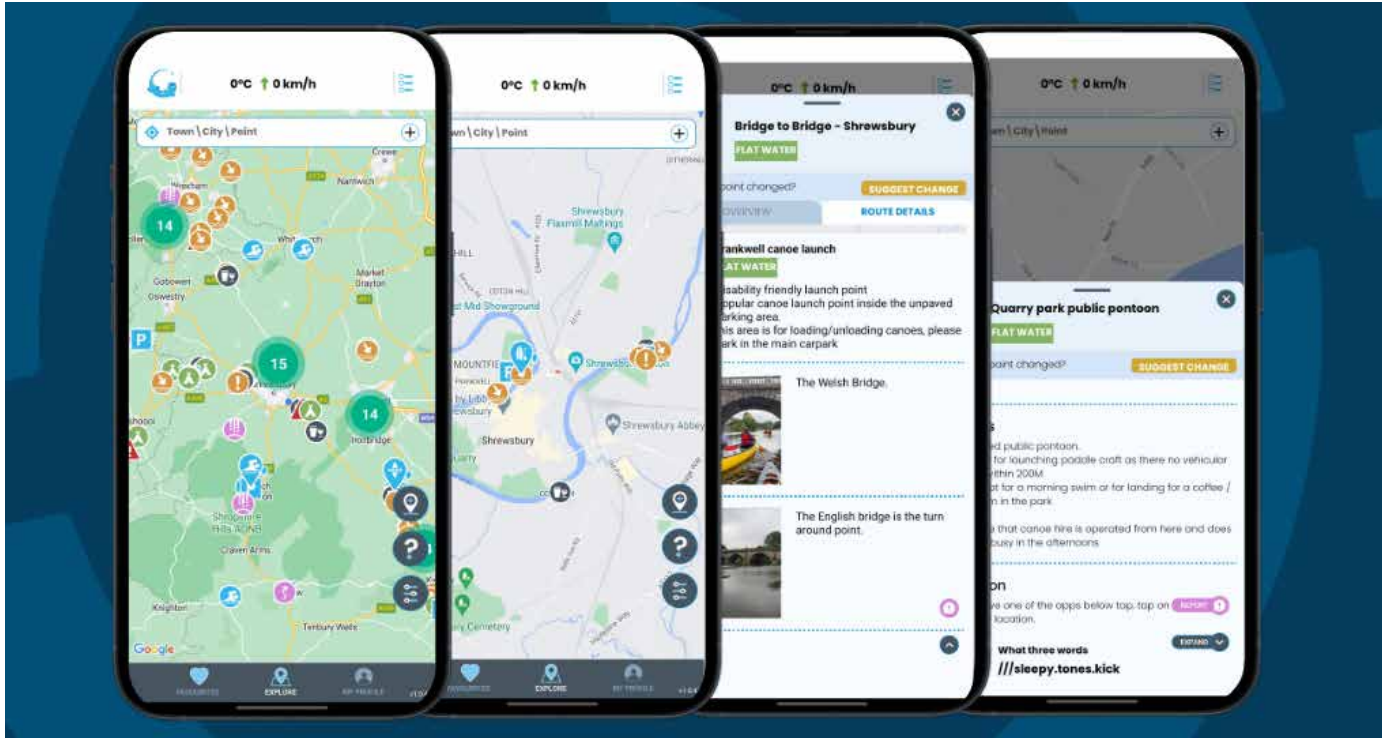
Coverage Care Services operates 11 care homes across Shropshire.

For more information, visit the website at [www.coveragecareservices.co.uk/](http://www.coveragecareservices.co.uk/)





# Making our waterways accessible to everyone



*"We've worked really hard to make sure that anyone who picks this app up will understand how to use it and be able to fully utilise Wild Otter's functionality within seconds," said head of design, David Bissell*

## Shoothill are proud to announce that Wild Otter an app developed by Shoothill is now available on the iOS App Store and Google Play.

Wild Otter is an app designed to make British waterways more accessible, be that through paddleboarding, canoeing or wild swimming. The app was first thought of by the local entrepreneur Kieran Johnson, the founder of local Shropshire business Hire a Canoe. Kieran drew on his vast experience with the nation's waterways to create this idea.

Kieran Johnson said: "Wild Otter offers a brilliant service to those keen to get out onto the nation's waterways in a safe and fun way.

"As it stands today the app offers plenty to users, we hope to implement more features in the coming months as we continue along the development roadmap."

The app itself uses a map-based structure to present users with a range of information that helps them to navigate rivers, lakes, and canals via destinations like pubs and cafes or facilities such as parking and toilets.

The design of this app learnt heavily into Shoothill's past experiences in map-based data visualisation, such as with GaugeMap and FloodAlerts, with the local connection as well Shoothill was the ideal developer for this app.

Rod Plummer, Managing Director of Shoothill said: "Working with such a creatively minded entrepreneur has been brilliant. It's been incredibly enjoyable seeing the project take shape and the

advancement of map-based visualisation since we first started working with the technology in 2006."

Head of design, David Bissell said: "As a direct-to-consumer app, Wild Otter is a little different to our numerous enterprise projects. We've worked really hard to make sure that anyone who picks this app up will understand how to use it and be able to fully utilise Wild Otter's functionality within seconds."

Wild Otter launches with map points nationwide, users can add their own as well. The admin team behind Wild Otter have assembled a range of different routes for users to follow. To make the app more convenient users also have access to a favouriting system.

To aid in accessibility the app provides users with difficulty rankings for sections of water as well as providing information of river flow and gradient. This means that newcomers to these pastimes have an easy way in to these hobbies provided through the app, however, more advanced canoeists and swimmers can find routes more suitable for themselves.

Wild Otter has an advanced hazard notification system designed to keep users safe. Users can flag hazards, such as debris on the app and this will show for other users to navigate around.

The app entered a beta testing period late last year to fine-tune the system before its public release. From this beta period, the app has received brilliant feedback from those involved praising the functionality of the system and its clear design and user interface.

If you'd like to find out more about Shoothill's way of improving time management, or even begin your journey with us, get in touch.



# Much to be proud of at a thriving school

**G**range Primary School is delighted to announce its recent achievement of a 'Good' rating with 2 areas of 'Outstanding' in behaviour and attitudes, as well as personal development, following a recent inspection by Ofsted. The school is immensely proud of this recognition, which underscores its commitment to providing a nurturing and enriching environment where pupils thrive.

Parental feedback echoes the sentiment shared by many, with one parent describing Grange as not just a school, but a family.

The school's emphasis on creating a supportive and inclusive community is evident in the way pupils feel safe, enjoy school, and are encouraged to pursue their aspirations.

At the heart of Grange Primary School is the 'Granger Code', embodying the school's values, which are instilled in every aspect of school life.

The focus on personal development is paramount, with pupils encouraged to dream big and fly high. The school goes beyond the classroom to provide a diverse range of experiences, ensuring holistic growth and development.

The Marches Academy Trust's effective support is instrumental in Grange's success, with leaders and staff embracing a clear vision for the school's future.

Their commitment to academic and social flourishing is reflected in initiatives such as the comprehensive reading programme, which cultivates confident and fluent readers from an early age.

Furthermore, Grange Primary School offers residential trips to all pupils, providing valuable opportunities for building confidence and independence outside the classroom.

Parents commend these experiences



*Grange Primary School remains dedicated to nurturing the potential of every child, fostering a culture of excellence, and empowering students to succeed academically and personally*

for their positive impact on their children's development.

Grange Primary School remains dedicated to nurturing the potential of every child, fostering a culture of excellence, and empowering students to succeed academically and personally.

Charlotte Summers, Headteacher comments, "I am so proud of our recent achievement and the exceptional dedication of our staff, the unwavering support of our parents, and the enthusiasm of our pupils. Together,

we continue to foster a culture where every child feels valued, inspired, and empowered to reach their potential.

"I am also delighted that From Easter 2024, we are able to accommodate children from 2 years old in our nursery, another positive development for Grange Primary School."

● **For more information on our school and nursery, please visit our website [www.grangeprimaryshrewsbury.co.uk](http://www.grangeprimaryshrewsbury.co.uk) or to book a tour, please call 01743 462984.**

# The unmissable event where serious fun is had doing business differently



Shropshire Business Festival will take place at Wrekin College in Wellington, on Thursday, April 11th. Last year's event by attracted more than 500 business leaders.

**S**hropshire Business Festival is back this April and the organisers from Shropshire Festivals expect to repeat the success of last year's event by attracting over 500 business leaders again.

The free to attend event will take place at Wrekin College in Wellington on Thursday, April 11th from 2pm – 7pm for networking, talks and all the fun of a festival.

Seminars confirmed so far include digging into the psychology of getting people to buy your products with Pippa Tait from Sales Geek and a talk on medical negligence from Lanyon Bowdler.

The Exhibition Hall will feature the who's who of Shropshire Businesses, with well-known companies such as Base Architects, Clear Design, and Shoothill amongst the lineup. Volvo Shrewsbury will be offering an electric car experience.

The leader behind the festival said businesses should be using it as a vehicle to fulfil their business goals. Beth Heath, Creative Director at Shropshire Festivals said, "This is your best opportunity of the year to get your business out there and in front of Shropshire's business leaders. Put your product in their hands, talk to them face-to-face in a relaxed setting, grow your contacts, and embrace a different way of networking."

The Visit Shropshire & Telford Tourism Expo will take place

ahead of the main festival from 12pm-2pm. Tourism and hospitality businesses will come together for several topical presentations, including one on what the budget means for the tourism industry. There will also be a county-wide leaflet swap.

New for 2024 will be a novel way to enjoy business talks from Silent Seminars, who are sponsoring the concept at the event. Visitors will be given headphones to tune in to a live business talk whilst on the move, maximizing their time at the event.

Managed Service Provider, Start Tech, will be hosting a Cyber Security Zone to promote ways to keep businesses safe from cyber threats. Along with some insightful speakers, you can challenge your cyber security knowledge with a giant game of snakes and ladders.

Chrisbeon will be celebrating its 50th birthday with a custom-built office racecourse for remote-controlled cars.

Lanyon Bowdler has announced they will be holding a lawyers' lounge at the event where businesses can get free legal advice from the local team.

Beth adds, "Shropshire Business Festival works because of the relaxed atmosphere we create with fun activities which break down the barriers to get chatting. Whether you're throwing axes or parking a lorry, we give you reasons to talk to the CEO next to you so you can leave with new, meaningful business relationships."

To register for your free ticket visit [www.shropshirebusinessfestival.co.uk](http://www.shropshirebusinessfestival.co.uk)



Protect, care and invest  
to create a better borough



# Awards for employers who support the armed forces



*In 2023 there were 14 gold awards as a result of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, recognising the commitment and actions that companies take to support the armed forces*

**N**ow in its tenth year, the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme recognises the commitment and actions that companies take to support the Armed Forces community within and outside of their organisations. There are Bronze, Silver and Gold awards levels, each of which have different qualifying criteria.

We asked Phil Sinclair, Regional Employer Engagement Director for the counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, to tell us about the scheme and how your organisation can be recognised by the Ministry of Defence for actively supporting the Armed Forces community.

“The Silver and Gold Awards are run on an annual cycle with this year’s application

submission window open for Golds until 13th March and 17th April for Silvers.

“In 2023 we were pleased to award, within our Association’s West Midland region, twenty-six Silver Awards and fourteen Gold Awards at specially dedicated events. This year, those numbers look set to increase with over 40 expressions of interest submitted for the Silver Award, and 17 for the Gold Award – we wish all organisations every success in their submissions!

“The silver status requires employers to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged in their recruitment and selection process, and that all positive policies relating to defence personnel are internally publicised. Organisations should endeavour to employ at least one individual from the Armed Forces community that their nomination emphasises, but if not, ensure that all the necessary HR policies’ established to encourage recruitment from the military talent pool are in place. This can then demonstrate that, if required, the organisation will support Reservist mobilisations.

“To win a Gold award from the Ministry of Defence, organisations, in addition to meeting all of the silver award criteria, must

demonstrate that they are exemplars in providing support to the cadet movement. Must provide ten extra paid days leave for Reservists, whilst also offering additional leave provision for Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, and have a supportive HR policy in place for Reservists, Veterans, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and the spouses and partners of those serving in the Armed Forces.

“They must also advocate the benefits of supporting those within the Armed Forces community, by encouraging other organisations to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and engage with the Employer Recognition Scheme.”

The submissions for these awards run annually. To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme please contact the Regional Employer Engagement Director for Shropshire – Philip Sinclair at [wm-reed2@rfca.mod.uk](mailto:wm-reed2@rfca.mod.uk)

To find out more about the Employer Recognition Scheme and how your business can benefit from supporting the Armed Forces community visit [www.wmrfa.org/employers](http://www.wmrfa.org/employers).

To view the list of organisations who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant visit [www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk](http://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk)





Rachel Raybould-Dear, Amelia Edwards, Kiran Kaur and Iain Morrison, chairman of mfg Solicitors

# Newly qualified solicitors take on permanent roles

## A trio of promising Midlands solicitors are celebrating after becoming fully qualified lawyers.

Lawyers Rachel Raybould-Dear, Amelia Edwards and Kiran Kaur have now completed their 18-month training contracts at law firm mfg Solicitors, with all three moving into specialist departments at the firm's offices in Shropshire, Birmingham, and Worcestershire. All three worked at the firm for 12 months prior to the commencement of their training.

Rachel has joined the firm's Commercial Property division where she will handle a variety of commercial leases, sales and property acquisition deals with clients across the UK. Based in Telford, she will work closely with David Raymont and Lynsey Cater.

Meanwhile, Amelia becomes a permanent member of mfg's highly-respected Contentious Probate team based at the firm's Kidderminster headquarters. She will work alongside revered Legal 500 partners Robert Weston and Andrew

Chandler on a range of complex wills, probate and inheritance cases.

The third of the newly-qualified trio, Kiran, will now be part of mfg's successful Corporate division. Based at the firm's Birmingham city centre offices, alongside partner, Laura Charles, as well as partners Clare Lang and James Hayes. Kiran will advise clients on a number of complex business-related matters, including corporate and commercial transactions, shareholder agreements and joint venture deals.

Iain Morrison, chairman of mfg Solicitors, said: "It's been brilliant to see Amelia, Rachel and Kiran thriving over the past 18-months during their respective training contracts.

"They have worked across all our departments gaining vital experience and positioning themselves for successful careers. All three are certainly considered to be amongst our rising stars and are already building excellent day-to-day and long-term relations with our clients.

"Everyone across the firm is thrilled to see them qualifying and I'm certain they will each play key roles in our success in the years to come."

Based across the West Midlands, mfg Solicitors provide a portfolio of commercial, agricultural and private client services. Readers can find out which office is closest to them by visiting <https://www.mfgsolicitors.com/site/contact/>

***"They have worked across all our departments gaining vital experience and positioning themselves for successful careers. All three are certainly considered to be amongst our rising stars and are already building excellent day-to-day and long-term relations with our clients."***

# Adventurer Mark raising funds on the high seas

**A** Shropshire man is heading off on a 'once in a lifetime' adventure this week for two months of being cold, wet, unable to wash, rarely able to change clothes, sleep deprived – and on a yacht in the North Pacific Ocean.

Mark Perkins, of Tilstock, has wanted to take part in a Clipper Round the World race for almost 25 years – after he first saw an advert on the London Underground while working in the capital.

The 55-year-old will now be one of 20 crew on a 70-foot yacht taking on gruelling conditions as the vessel sails from China to America – and Mark is doing it in aid of regional cancer charity Lingen Davies Cancer Fund.

"I am quite apprehensive but also very excited about the trip," he said.

"I took the opportunity to raise funds for Lingen Davies Cancer Fund as they do great work across Shropshire and beyond and I hope to raise £1,000 for them. Sponsorship has been good so far and I am keen to raise money for their vital work, as people I know have used Lingen Davies in the past.

"I think people know 'anything can happen at sea' so it will be a challenge for me, but I have complete faith in the skipper and first mate we are sailing with. During the four weeks of training we had the worst weather possible in the English Channel, and we are expecting the same during the race, which can be stressful.

"I also suffered sea sickness in the first few days of training too, so I am expecting that again. I won't be getting much sleep, all 20 people on board will share beds and sleep in shifts, we have no showers and I've been told we will change our underwear one day a week and that your sleeping bag is the most important bit of kit."

Mark, who was in the Royal Navy from 1984 to 1991, is an experienced sailor and has been on two one week sailing trips in the past – but on these they docked each night, had showers and other luxuries. He now works as an IT system engineer and has been given time off work for the race.

The father-of-three flies to Hong Kong on Thursday (FEB 29), before a ferry ride to mainland China to begin his challenge. He is taking part in leg six of the eight leg



*Mark Perkins, of Tilstock, will make his voyage aboard his boat, Zhuhai*

competition and hopes his boat, named Zhuhai, will beat the other 11 taking part.

His section of the race will see him sail from Qingdao, the site of the Olympic village in China, to Seattle where he will be met by cheering crowds.

"There is normally quite a group that gathers," he said.

"We aim to land in Seattle on April 27th and I can imagine I will be looking forward to a good night's sleep."

While at sea Mark will only have access to one email a day, with no images, and his friends and family will be able to track his progress on the Clipper Round the World website.

Helen Knight, Head of Fundraising at Lingen Davies, said: "This is an incredible

challenge and we wish Mark the best of luck with the race.

"We are delighted he has chosen to support the vital services we offer for those affected by cancer and we look forward to welcoming him safely back to Shropshire."

Lingen Davies Cancer Fund works to raise awareness about cancer in the wider community, helping to encourage more early diagnosis and greater outcomes for people. It also exists to fund equipment, technologies, support services, and rehabilitation projects for those living with and beyond cancer throughout Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, and Mid Wales.

For more information about Lingen Davies Cancer Fund visit the website at [www.lingendavies.co.uk](http://www.lingendavies.co.uk)

# Opportunity to sponsor building

Construction is well under way on SYA's new multi-million pound headquarters and with it comes a unique way for local businesses to get involved in the charities exciting future.

The project has been made possible thanks to a £1.5m Youth Investment Fund grant, which is funded by the Government and delivered by Social Investment Business in partnership with National Youth Agency, Resonance, and the Key Fund.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Social Investment Business made the announcement last year – revealing SYA as one of 43 youth services across England to be awarded a grant to transform and level up opportunities for young people.

Sadly, the funding doesn't cover the furniture needed to prepare the building for its most important guests – SYA's young people. SYA is reaching out to local corporates and supporters to ask them to sponsor a room which will allow the charity to purchase new furniture and equipment needed to open the shiny new doors this summer.

Claire Purcell, Community Engagement and Fundraising Manager at SYA, said: "We are very excited that construction has started on our new headquarters and can't wait to see the building when it is finished.

"PSG – a subsidiary of Shropshire Council – was commissioned as independent construction consultants to manage the project and Shropshire Council agreed a 99- year lease under the capital asset transfer scheme ahead of us starting the planning permission process.

"It has come together really well and culminated in local firm R1 Construction starting on the building. We are eagerly looking forward to seeing how it all takes shape over the coming months.

"Our work continues unaffected, delivering on our commitment to running youth clubs, groups and projects for young people and support of voluntary groups across the county."

Alex Swancott, commercial director of R1 Construction, added: "We are delighted to have been appointed to construct what will be a fantastic facility for SYA and their future endeavours.

"It's great to be delivering projects on our doorstep – Shropshire has an enviable network of contractors and suppliers, which we look forward to collaborating with to deliver for our community".

The sponsorship package will come with added bonuses for supporters, please contact Claire at SYA for more information on what is offered or to express your interest in sponsoring a room. [claire.p@sya.org.uk](mailto:claire.p@sya.org.uk) 01743 730005

# Investment managers welcome charity specialist Rupert Cecil to firm

**S**hrewsbury based investment managers EFG Harris Allday have welcomed Rupert Cecil as head of charities and philanthropy.

Rupert will be working with local investment experts Dominic Curran, Harry Marsh, Andrew Barr, Stewart Mackness, Oliver Williams and Nick Williams-Wynn, to support both existing and new charity clients with their investment needs. An experienced trustee himself, Rupert is able to support trustees of charities small and large with their investment policy statements and to provide trustee training if required.

Guidance from the charity commission outlines the duties of a trustee when it comes to investments. It states that the 'principal duty is to further your charity's purposes', and covers the importance of reviewing the service provided by your investment manager

Whilst all charities monitor their investments on a regular basis, this is a little different from doing a full review.

A full review may involve coordinating with other investment managers to put forward a proposal for comparison and to undertake a full

review to ensure that all trustees are appropriately furthering the charity's purposes.

Underperformance is commonplace and costly. A large difference in long-term investment performance could significantly affect a charity's funds – particularly if operating costs continue to rise. This can really add pressure to volunteers or fundraising efforts, or even lead to cost-cutting.

Providing a benchmark to measure performance relative to the peer group can help trustees to monitor their investments. Provided they are happy that the Investment Manager is ahead of the mean of the peer group, and they have done a proper investment review every three to five years, they can rest assured that they have fulfilled a large part of their role as a trustee. If not, then it could be time to take action.

If you are looking to review your charity's performance, we would be happy to provide you with a proposal enabling you to make a comparison with your existing manager.

Our bespoke approach to investment management allows us to work with trustees and create a portfolio in line with your charity's ethos.

This should not be construed as investment advice; each charity's circumstances are unique and should be considered on an individual basis.



Rupert Cecil, head of charities and philanthropy





Enjoy Staffordshire Tourism Awards – winners Weston Park

## Weston Park celebrates awards

**One of the region's top tourism and hospitality venues is celebrating new success after scooping two prestigious honours.**

Weston Park, on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border, has been named best self-catering accommodation of the year in the Enjoy Staffordshire Tourism and Good Food Awards for the second year running.

And the Granary restaurant – widely respected for its estate-to-plate philosophy of using produce grown at Weston and local suppliers wherever possible – picked up the silver award for best independent restaurant just 6 months after receiving an AA Rosette.

The awards were announced at a glittering black-tie ceremony at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas last night (March 14).

The estate's holiday cottages retained the title for the region's best self-catering accommodation in recognition of the unique holiday experience they offer visitors.

Weston Park head of marketing Andrea Webster said the team was delighted with the latest success, which underlined the estate's reputation for excellence.

"We are hugely proud of the experience we give all our visitors to Weston, but it is always tremendously gratifying to have that acknowledged by independent experts.

"The Enjoy Staffordshire awards celebrate the very best

achievements in the tourism and hospitality sector across the county and we are honoured to have been recognised in this way.

"To have retained the title for our holiday cottages is very special. They offer a stylish and unique getaway in the outstanding surroundings of the estate and show that UK holidays can compete with anywhere in the world when the offer is right. You only have to read the feedback from visitors who have spent a few days there to know just how treasured they are.

"The award for the Granary is a testament to the fantastic work of head chef Anna Jones and her team, who constantly strive to create amazing dishes and take the restaurant to even greater heights."

More than 40 of Staffordshire's best tourism and hospitality businesses were shortlisted across 20 categories after a rigorous judging process which considered more than 140 entries.

Weston Park is no stranger to success at the awards, with chief executive Colin Sweeney last year receiving the Graeme Whitehead Award for outstanding contribution to tourism, alongside the gold medal success for the holiday cottages.

For more information about Weston Park, visit the website [www.weston-park.com](http://www.weston-park.com)

**More than 40 of Staffordshire's best tourism and hospitality businesses were shortlisted across 20 categories.**



# Dig out that jumpsuit and your flares...

'I Can Dance Shrewsbury' is bringing 70's Disco Fever to Shrewsbury Quarry!

On Saturday 18th May 2024 'I Can Dance Shrewsbury' will host a one-off 70's Disco Workshop where you, your friends and family can congregate to learn a fun and extremely funky Disco routine with hundreds of other locals.

You will find yourself cutting the rug to a medley of disco classics from Freak Out – Stay Alive and so many more.

To add more glitter, they are urging everyone to dress up to create a sea of 70's Boogie wonderland on the Quarry!

As well as throwing your finest Disco shapes, you will also be supporting the work

of Shropshire Mental Health Support Charity (SMHS).

The theme for Mental Health Week this year is 'Move for your Mental Health' and your presence will help them raise awareness of how movement, be it dance or any other exercise, benefits our mental well-being in many ways! They guarantee that this 1-hour workshop will leave you smiling!

Their fun-family dance event also seeks to raise funds to help SMHS purchase a new well-being vehicle so more people across the county can access FREE mental health support.

They hope to raise at least £3000 to help them achieve their goal. Please help

them reach and exceed this target in true Disco Inferno style! They are asking for a £2 donation to take part or if you can spare more it would be hugely appreciated. You can donate using their Just Giving page or bring cash on the day to throw in one of their fundraising buckets.

Do you remember in 2018 when they got 1096 people dancing 20's Charleston on the Quarry? Well, let's do it again 70's style!

Contact Sarah Bright and Ruth Pemberton for details.

e: [hello@icandanceshrewbury.com](mailto:hello@icandanceshrewbury.com)

For donations on our Just Giving Page: <https://shorturl.at/ghR24>

# A nonagenarian's birthday donation

**A** lady from Wem has raised over £850 for charity by asking for donations instead of presents for her 95th birthday.

Doreen Ivison collected the money for Lingen Davies Cancer Fund to help people living with cancer and their families across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, and Mid Wales.

Doreen chose the charity because her daughter Liz Houghton is currently undergoing chemotherapy for cancer at Royal Shrewsbury Hospital's Lingen Davies Cancer Centre.

She said: "Lingen Davies is a huge source of support to Liz so there was never any doubt about where I was going to raise money for.

"They do such brilliant work for people all over Shropshire and beyond and I was just pleased to be able to support them.

"I have raised much more than I thought I was going to. I was hoping for £250. I decided I didn't need anything myself for my birthday, you don't when you're 95, so I just wanted to use the occasion to help others.

"I am thrilled to have been able to donate so much money, my friends and family have been very generous and I am very grateful to them for it. This will make a difference."

Doreen has three other daughters and two sons who live locally, in London and in Canada.



Doreen Ivison and her daughter Liz Houghton

More than 50 members of the family came together to celebrate at Hawkstone Hall in December.

The money will be used by the charity to continue funding projects and equipment to benefit those living with and beyond cancer, as well as raising general awareness about the signs and symptoms of cancer in the wider community.

Karen Roberts, Fundraising and Volunteer Coordinator for Lingen Davies, said: "I am very grateful to Doreen for

choosing to support our cancer fund as she celebrated her birthday.

"It is wonderful to see that this is how she wanted to mark the occasion and we are pleased she had such a great celebration and was able to collect such a fabulous amount of money.

"This will go towards vital services for those affected by cancer."

For more information about how you can donate visit the website [www.lingendavies.co.uk](http://www.lingendavies.co.uk)



# Silence isn't golden

**P**ete Brophy, fresh from a 30 year career in the public sector, has recently embarked on a new challenge as CEO of a small national charity, Omega, which has its home firmly anchored within the centre of Shrewsbury Town Centre. He tells us about Omega and his ambitions for the Charity over the coming years.

"You may be asking who Omega are. To be honest, that was a question that I also asked prior to my appointment in December 2023, and I was surprised to learn that the charity has been in existence since 2007, located in my home town and that I had probably driven past the office on thousands of occasions, I'd just never noticed it, or seen it, or read about it. It was historically geared to supporting primarily lonely, isolated elderly people in our communities so perhaps it hadn't resonated with me."

This anonymity is something that Pete is determined to tackle and has already embarked on an ambitious change programme which has included a rebranding of the Charity to better reflect its new wider aims.

"We have decided to redefine ourselves to Omega: Ending Isolation, Ending Loneliness which provides a clearer message to anyone who comes across us.



*Alexandra Meek, Pete Brophy and Sandie O'Brien*

We are also intending to expand our offer of services, to any person who is suffering with the mental or emotional strain of being alone, regardless of their age."

He said "I would like Omega, eventually, to be one of the first 'loneliness' befriending charities that you think of when somebody doesn't know where to turn to. I want us to be able to help or at least signpost to support, as many people as possible. We offer a number of services including both a telephone chat and pen pal service which are proven to improve the mental and physical health of our clients so why wouldn't I want to help more people?"

Pete is realistic about the challenges ahead but can also see the benefits of chamber membership and how it can aid charities.

He said "To grow, we will need a number of things. Like any charity we need financial support from sources including corporate partners as part of their commitment to corporate social responsibility. But we also need volunteers and an increasing number of service users. This is how membership of the Shropshire Chamber can help Omega, by giving us a greater degree of exposure locally, to those companies who want to make a difference, either financially or through volunteering to help to reduce social isolation and loneliness. It's a big ask, but I'm determined to get there."

For more information about Omega and the work that they do or to find out how you could help please call 01743 245088, email [info@omega.uk.net](mailto:info@omega.uk.net) or visit [www.omega.uk.net](http://www.omega.uk.net)

## SYA is headline charity for a 'krazy' race

SYA is a Shrewsbury based charity that supports as many as 4,000 young people across Shropshire every week.

They host a variety of youth clubs and enhance their offer through early intervention health and mental health sessions, UK Youth Parliament, Young Leader training, drug and alcohol awareness sessions and clubs specifically for young people with SEND and those who are part of the LGBTQAI+ Community.

SYA have been lucky enough to be selected as Headline charity for Shrewsbury's Krazy Races this year and are calling on local businesses to ask for their support.

They need teams to build and enter karts to race for them, volunteers on the day to help run stalls and activities and sponsors for some of their many groups who will be out in force fundraising for them.

If you have what it takes to enter a team, would like to help run a stall or activity or have a sponsorship offer then please contact Claire at SYA on [claire.p@sya.org.uk](mailto:claire.p@sya.org.uk) or call 07300213275.

If you can't help but would like to attend the event, then please book your tickets though their unique code which will divert 10% of ticket sales directly to SYA.

Search 'SYA does Krazy Races 2024' or visit [www.sya.org.uk](http://www.sya.org.uk)



*SYA needs teams to build and enter karts to race for them*



# New CEO has hopes for exciting future

The new boss of a charity has vowed to breathe new life into one of Telford's "hidden gems".

Wayne Jenson is the new CEO of Meeting Point Trust, based in Meeting Point House in Southwater, which has a long history of supporting the community in Telford.

Mr Jenson said he planned to strengthen the Trust's offer to the local community, along with expanding the range of events and facilities provided at Meeting Point House.

"The building has been at the heart of Telford since 1988, but many people don't realise just how much we offer," he said.

"We have 10 meeting rooms, all of which are recently refurbished or in the process of being upgraded, and are very reasonably priced for use by businesses or community organisations.

"Then we have the Octagon room, which is a wonderful bright and airy space for all kinds of events, from yoga sessions to birthday parties.

"We are extremely proud of our in-house Hummingbird Cafe, which



**Wayne Jenson, CEO of Meeting House Trust**

provides good quality freshly cooked food at subsidised prices – it's fantastic value for money and is increasingly popular.

"I really think Meeting Point House is one of Telford's hidden gems and we are excited about spreading the word and expanding what we do – whilst staying true to the charity's principles of inspiring, connecting and enabling the local community."

The building is home to 12 charitable organisations, including Telford Stay and Yellow Ribbon, and the cafe is regularly used by Telford Mind for drop-in events.

Mr Jenson, who previously worked in the hospitality industry in Shropshire, said there was a lot of potential for hosting more events in the future.

"We are just around the corner from Telford International Centre, one of the largest exhibition spaces in the country, and we offer a cost-effective solution with excellent facilities for events which are on a smaller scale," he said.

"For instance, we have hosted The Poultry Club's National Egg Exhibition for the past two years, and are keen to bring more events to Telford.

"Every penny of income we generate goes back into the building and providing community activities, so if we can maximise our potential, it's great news for everyone."

For more information, visit [www.meetingpointhouse.co.uk](http://www.meetingpointhouse.co.uk) or call 01952 292268.

# The Museum of the Gorge reopens

**O**n 31 January 2024, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust reopened the Museum of the Gorge in Ironbridge following essential conservation work.

Historically the Museum of the Gorge has been the place where first-time visitors to the Gorge go to find information and orientate themselves. It closed at the beginning of 2023 for substantial maintenance work funded by the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Now, one year later, this free museum located in a former warehouse used to transport goods by river during the Industrial Revolution, has reopened.

Visitors can still find information about the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ironbridge Gorge and its museums. However, they can also explore the building's architecture, learn about its history and see a small display of reproductions of historic maps of Shropshire. One panel addresses the subject of flooding, at the museum and more widely in the Ironbridge Gorge. Located on the banks on the River Severn, the building and its neighbours are regularly affected by flooding, most recently in January 2024.

The maintenance work in 2023 followed previous work in 2021, paid for by Historic England, to make urgent repairs



**The Museum of the Gorge in Ironbridge**

to the roof of the grade II\* listed building. Thanks to other generous benefactors it was also possible to reinstate the pitched roof of the Lady Chapel and install replicas of the ornate chimney pots which once crowned the building's towers, one of the striking gothic features noticed by visitors today.

Following the conservation work the building is now structurally sound and waterproof, and the next phase of the project will be to develop the interior. This phase of the development is currently

being planned by the Trust, a heritage conservation and education charity, and will be completed once funding has been secured.

The Trust's intention is that the building will be used by its local community as well as by visitors to the Ironbridge Gorge. Visitors today are invited to make suggestions and give their views on how the building could be used.

In the meantime, the museum will continue to welcome some of the many visitors who visit Ironbridge each year.



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# Community radio station is on the crest of a wave

**S**hropshire's community radio station INTune Radio has been busy making use of its brand-new mobile broadcast desk – thanks to Start Tech, the Shrewsbury-based IT services company, who kindly donated the portable production studio.

The 'desk' is a small, essential and very clever bit of equipment that has already had a big impact; allowing INTune Radio to produce broadcast quality content, including interviews and podcasts, from just about anywhere.

It has already seen action producing interviews with INTune Radio patrons AStar Homecare (based in Whitchurch), the 2023-24 High Sheriff of Shropshire (Mandy Thorn MBE DL) and the Shropshire Community Foundation. In addition, the desk (a 'RØDECaster Pro' for the techies out there) makes INTune's monthly local charity updates easier to produce – and sound even better.

INTune founder Wayne Flynn (owner of the station's creative partner business Mr Flynn Creative), said "We interviewed Start Tech at the Shrewsbury Food Festival last summer and things went from there. They wanted to support the great work our volunteers do by giving local charity and community organisations a much-needed platform to reach many thousands of people across the county each month.

"The desk can assist us in so many ways and our volunteers are excited to be using such advanced equipment – it's another great step forward."

Ian Groves, MD at cyber security specialists Start Tech, said: "Having heard about INTune Radio and the great work they do, we wanted to get involved and I hope the desk will make a real difference to Shropshire's many charities, community organisations and businesses. This support resonates completely with our core values, and we had no hesitation providing INTune Radio with some hi-tech broadcast equipment."



Wayne Flynn, founder of INTune Radio, shakes hand with Ian Groves, MD of Start Tech



# Aico and SYA Kid's Club is great success



*The Kid's Club was led by experienced and qualified leaders from SYA and supported by Aico colleagues across a number of departments, all of whom are fully safeguarding trained and DBS checked*

**This February half term, Aico welcomed 35 children to their Headquarters in Oswestry for four fun-filled days of activities. Working in partnership with Shropshire Youth Association, the initiative brought together local children to encourage creativity, teamwork, and personal developments.**

Shropshire Youth Association (SYA) is a registered charity supporting a wide range of youth clubs, groups, and organisations across Shropshire as well as Telford and Wrekin.

Aico regularly welcomes school groups to their headquarters for educational activities. With the popularity of these

school visits and the great success of the summer club held in August 2023, Aico was keen to continue welcoming children to engage with local families and alleviate potential pressure during school holidays.

The Kid's Club was led by experienced and qualified leaders from SYA and supported by Aico colleagues across a number of departments, all of whom are fully safeguarding trained and DBS checked.

Running from Monday to Thursday, the schedule included a variety of activities, from hockey to badge making, board games to cookie decorating. The children also enjoyed an exciting trip to Lazer Tag at Black Hawk in Oswestry.

The closing day included an informative Fire Safety Workshop run by staff from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. The workshop incorporated a spot the fire hazard activity and joining in with the stop, drop and roll! The day ended with a disco in Aico's auditorium.

Simon Clay from Shropshire Youth

Association commented: "SYA colleagues and the children have had a fantastic time here at Aico this week. The venue space and facilities work really well. The Aico volunteers were extremely helpful and supportive. The children were also able to socialise with groups they may not usually be able to. It is fantastic that a local company offers a service like this to its community. Thank you again for providing such a great venue and lovely volunteers!"

Aico are proud to say that the children left with smiles on their faces and goodie bags in hand and hope to continue this successful initiative to support SYA and the local community.

Aico wants to say a big thank you to everyone involved who made the Kid's Club such a success – SYA and their youth workers, Freya Rickman from J&PR, Black Hawk, Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service, and the Aico colleagues who volunteered.

To find out more about the work Aico In The Community does, please visit: <https://www.aico.co.uk/in-the-community/>



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At the Telford Skills Show to launch awards are Carl Jones and Chris Pritchard from Shropshire Business Live TV with Dan Smith (centre), from Yarrington

# New apprenticeship awards are unveiled

**A brand new apprenticeship awards competition has been launched for Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin – the first of its kind in the county.**

It will celebrate the brightest and best workers who are ‘earning while they are learning’ – as well as recognising employers driving ambition and education through their support of apprenticeships.

There will be an overall star apprentice crowned for the Shropshire Council area, and an overall champion for Telford & Wrekin. There are also awards for small, medium and large sized employers.

Individual apprentice of the year categories include Construction & Civil Engineering, Health & Social Care, Engineering & Manufacturing, IT & Digital Industries, Hospitality Leisure & Tourism, Creative & Media, and Business Legal & Finance.

The competition is backed by some of the county’s biggest and best names, led by headline sponsors Aico – the reigning Shropshire company of the year – and Telford College, the largest further education centre in the region.

Other sponsors include Dyke Yaxley, In-Comm, McPhillips, Northwood Hygiene Products, Pave Aways, Purple Frog Systems, and University Centre Shrewsbury.

The competition is being organised by award-winning Shropshire events company Yarrington, which has years of experience running major awards in other parts of the UK, including apprenticeship awards in the Black Country.

They are working in partnership with Shropshire Business Live TV, which will be filming and streaming the awards for broadcast on multiple platforms.

The awards are free to enter, and nominations are now open. The closing date for entries is June 28th.

Shortlisted finalists will be notified in July, and the awards will be handed out at a glittering presentation night in front of the SBLTV cameras in October.

The competition was officially launched today at Telford Skills Show, held at the town’s International Centre.

Mark Allsop, managing director of Yarrington, said: “It’s a celebration of the brightest and best apprentices in the county, and the businesses which go the extra mile to support the next generation of skilled staff.

Carl Jones, producer and presenter at SBLTV, added: “Being shortlisted for one of our awards brings many benefits to you or your business. It could boost your reputation, help you stand out from the competition – and also bring you new customers. What have you got to lose?”

To qualify for an individual award, apprentices must be on a current programme in the relevant sector, with a company which is based in either the Shropshire, or Telford & Wrekin local authority areas.

To qualify for a company award, businesses must have at least one operational base in either Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin, and employ current or past apprentices.

For all the details – including some remaining sponsorship opportunities – log onto [stwaa.co.uk](http://stwaa.co.uk)



# Seating options with employees in mind

One of the most used items businesses will ever buy is an office chair, and when you consider just how often your employees – or your clients and customers – are likely to be sitting on it, it's extremely important to invest in the right one.

A chair is a necessary addition to the majority of working environments, training rooms, reception areas, waiting rooms, boardrooms, educational and conference settings, medical areas, restaurants and cafes and the home office – and the right choice will be beneficial to your company brand, employee good health – and to customer comfort.

A chair that meets the requirements of a healthy posture while being comfortable for long hours at a time will also positively impact productivity within the workplace.

Fortunately, Chamber Patron Chrisbeon has all the options covered through an extensive selection of chairs on display in their Telford showrooms in Stafford Park 4.

If you or your employees are struggling with back issues, Chrisbeon is also able to offer a range of posture-enhancing and orthopaedic seating options, including:



**An appropriate seat helps with posture and results**

- Lumbar airbags
- Pelvic supports
- Thoracic support
- Memory foam
- Variable depth seat pan adjustment
- Coccyx cut-outs
- Ergonomic or orthopaedic chair

And the chairs, many of which are on display now in the Telford showrooms, come in a wide range of:

- Fabrics
- Vinyl coverings
- Leathers

These include specialist stain-resistant fabrics and healthcare Anti-Bacterial/anti-MRSA and Anti-Microbial for industries that have specific client and customer needs.

Richard Hughes, Partner at Chrisbeon, says: "Because it is important to get the chair best suited to individuals, we offer a 'try before you buy' service for businesses looking to improve the needs of their employees.

Employees can also pop into our showrooms and see the types and colours of our chairs in situ – although we can also match chairs to brand colour and style for businesses who want to ensure new chairs match existing furniture and brand. We can work with employers to discuss the options and determine what is right for them."

Chrisbeon is committed to providing excellent customer service, and its team is available to offer advice and answer any questions customers may have face-to-face.

The team is also happy to talk about requirements over the phone, so if you are looking to replace or refresh office chairs or other furniture and equipment in 2024 do give them a call on 01952 292606.

# Experts share predictions for 2024

## Accountants at a Shrewsbury firm have been sharing their predictions for 2024 when it comes to buying or selling a company.

The team at Dyke Yaxley Chartered Accountants, in Old Potts Way, is part of the nationwide Corporate Finance Network which has been collating the experiences of corporate finance advisers in the owner-managed business sector.

Mark Bramall, for Dyke Yaxley, said the Network had also been exploring how the market may progress in 2024. As a member of the Network, we were asked to contribute our opinions to the report and once everyone's thoughts were combined, there were some real key highlights."

Mark said the report showed:

- OMB sellers need to be more prepared for sale, so they stand out in a competitive market
- Buyers are increasingly nervous of higher funding costs so the deal structure needs to accommodate this
- The political uncertainty will have some impact next year, but sensible transactions will still complete

In the report, 53.3% of advisers thought it was a buyer's market, but said that due diligence is taking longer as purchasers were making sure that the risks were known and could be kept to a minimum.

Unrealistic expectations of deal valuation from vendors were mentioned by 26.7% of advisers, so understanding the drivers for increasing market value would be a key part of exit planning for any business owners looking to sell in the next few years.

Tech, software, AI, ecommerce, telecoms, professional services and insurance were all sectors where consolidation activity was high. But many advisers said they expected further sectors would experience an increase in deal activity.

Mark said: "With this report showing that due to next year's General Election, advisers believe that 46.7% and 33% of buyers would become more nervous about deals from Q1 and Q3 respectively, business owners who are looking to exit need to ensure they stand out in the market."

Chairman of The Corporate Finance Network, Kirsty McGregor, said "Exit planning includes working on a business to increase its value and finding the best time to sell. This applies to the lifecycle of the individual company, but also being in the right place at the right time when consolidation activity increases. Tax policies are unlikely to move adversely during 2024, but 2025 is less certain. Business owners who want to take advantage of current rates and reliefs should make decisions soon."

**Mark Bramall**  
from Dyke Yaxley  
Chartered  
Accountants





# Showing some TLC to Haybridge campus



*The investment at the Haybridge site follows several months of consultation with staff and stakeholders. Work is due to start later this year, with the project scheduled for completion by the end of 2025.*

## Telford College has revealed ambitious plans for a £1.8 million-plus upgrade of its Wellington campus which will transform it into a technical and vocational training centre of excellence.

It is part of a major expansion for the college which will also see a new Maths & Digital Skills Hub opening in Telford town centre's 'Station Quarter' in September – closely followed by a new sixth form centre.

The investment at the Haybridge site follows several months of consultation with staff and stakeholders. Work is due to start later this year, with the project scheduled for completion by the end of 2025.

Principal and chief executive Graham Guest said: "This reconfiguration is part of an ambitious strategic plan which will elevate Telford College to new levels.

"Significant changes in curriculum, the development of a student-centred community, and the creation of dedicated

departmental study areas are all part of our strategy for the Haybridge site.

"Responding to the needs of local businesses, we will introduce novel learning experiences for students, including specialised adult learning spaces that will bring added advantages to employers."

The investment will include:

- A new Student Hub, remotely linked to the Digital & Maths Skills Hub in Station Quarter
- Expanded area for Business curriculum, with real-life working environments
- A new restaurant and coffee bar, open to the public during parts of the week
- Greater use of virtual and augmented reality learning technology across the campus
- Improvements to Creative and Music studios and learning facilities
- A dedicated learning space for degree-level and Higher Education studies
- A new outdoor study area to widen the Early Years provision
- Expansion of the Engineering workshop, with more industry-standard facilities

- Creation of a new energy-efficient 'Passive House' for use by Construction students

- Expanded learning facilities for Hair and Beauty programmes

Mr Guest said: "These are incredibly ambitious and exciting proposals which will further establish the reputation of our Haybridge campus as a technical and vocational centre of excellence.

"Coupled with the new Digital & Maths Skills Hub and a new sixth form centre in the heart of the Station Quarter, it not only broadens the range of the Telford College curriculum, but makes the college more accessible than ever.

"We are building a unique and ambitious alliance between industry and education to raise everyone's aspirations and support local employers to develop the sort of workforce they require."

Telford College's new Digital & Maths Skills Hub will be opening in The Quad at Station Quarter in September this year.

The new town centre sixth form centre – which will include the addition of several new A levels such as theatre studies and politics – is set to open in the autumn of next year.



Paul Inions, McPhillips managing director



Today McPhillips provides industry leading design, construction and development

# Civil engineering and building contractor is celebrating 60 years

**S**afety, Quality, Value and Production – the watchwords of Jim McPhillips, founder of McPhillips Wellington, words that continue to underscore the work of the company today as it celebrates sixty years of trading in 2024.

In the beginning it was all about digging footings and drainage for local house builders. This was followed by expansion during the 1980's into larger industrial buildings for businesses moving into Telford. Further expansion saw complex civil engineering projects bearing the name of McPhillips on site banners.

Today McPhillips provides industry leading design, construction and development to the residential

infrastructure, public civil engineering and building sectors throughout the Midlands, North West England and Wales. This diverse experience of civil engineering and building contracts provides a unique 'single source' solution.

McPhillips have always been based in Shropshire, the firm moved to its current purpose built headquarters at Hortonwood, Telford in 1989. Over the decades McPhillips has recognised the value to the business of directly employing its workforce. In contrast to a growing industry trend for subcontracting on a project by project basis, McPhillips employs over 240 personnel including a 170 strong in-house workforce for on-site labour, eighty percent of whom live within 20 miles of Head Office in Telford.

Over 20% of McPhillips's direct workforce began life as apprentices. Every year a fresh intake of apprentices are placed into suitable teams, each fulfilling genuine roles within the company, they receive a competitive wage whilst also

studying towards an NVQ Level 2 in Construction Operations at Telford college.

Paul Inions, McPhillips Managing Director commented: "The company gets under your skin, it's easy to feel a valuable part of it, which is why people tend to stay here for a long time. I think my fellow board members would agree that we're the custodians of a very special company. We owe it to everyone concerned over the past 60 years to ensure that we keep building on our successes to date."

Telford based McPhillips (Wellington) Limited are an award-winning building and civil engineering contractor. The company has enjoyed sustained growth over the last 50+ years and currently employs over 240 people delivering design, build and maintenance solutions for the UK housing market, specialist buildings and highways infrastructure improvements.

For more information visit: <https://www.mcphillips.co.uk>



# Festival sponsor confirms a second year of support



*Ed Bevis, commercial and marketing director for The Bike Insurer, said: "Last year, we were blown away with the unwavering commitment for the event from bikers across the country. It feels only fitting to be returning for a second year, offering our support to further contribute to the lifesaving work of the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity, which invaluablely helps to protect the biker community."*

**F**ollowing the success of the Bike4Life 2023, leading motorbike insurance price comparison website, The Bike Insurer, has announced its second consecutive year of headline sponsorship for Midlands Air Ambulance Charity's huge motorcycle Ride Out & Festival, Bike4Life.

Taking place on Sunday 28th April 2024, one of the UK's largest motorcycle Ride Outs will be returning to Shropshire's roads for its twelfth year. Usually attracting 6,000 enthusiastic bikers and pillions on the ride out and 10,000 visitors to the festival, the 26-mile ride will start at Meole Brace in Shrewsbury and will finish at the festival's new home at Weston Park in Shropshire for its highly anticipated, family-friendly festival.

Midlands Air Ambulance Charity's

pre-hospital emergency service rapidly reaches and provides advance treatment to a motorcyclist each week on average, giving them the best chance of survival and good recovery from major traumatic injuries. Aiming to promote biker safety, with support from West Mercia Police, attendees at last year's event helped to raise more than £116,000, helping to fund an impressive seventy-five lifesaving missions.

Ed Bevis, commercial and marketing director for The Bike Insurer, said: "Last year, we were blown away with the unwavering commitment for the event from bikers across the country. It feels only fitting to be returning for a second year, offering our support to further contribute to the lifesaving work of the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity, which invaluablely helps to protect the biker community."

Emma Wood, head of fundraising and engagement for Midlands Air Ambulance Charity, added: "The Biker's Insurer's sponsorship for last year's incredible ride out and festival ensured the event's most successful year to date. We are really excited to have their support for a second year,

which has helped us secure our perfect new venue which will no doubt make the festival bigger and better than ever!

"We hope that our loyal biker community, along with enthusiastic family-event goers turn up together and help raise vital awareness and funds for our lifesaving helicopter-led emergency service."

To find out more about the event and to book tickets visit [bike4lifefest.com](http://bike4lifefest.com). Tickets are now on sale for the Ride Out costing £15 per biker, or £25 for a biker and pillion. Both include free entry to the Bike4Life Festival. Tickets for the Festival alone are just £7.50 per person and those aged 15 and under go free.

To find out more about Midlands Air Ambulance Charity's vital, lifesaving work in your local area visit [midlandsairambulance.com](http://midlandsairambulance.com) and follow the organisation on social media.

Join the Bike 4 Life conversation by tagging the event on social media or using the hashtag #Bike4Life.

For information on The Bike Insurer or to compare motorbike insurance quotes visit [thebikeinsurer.co.uk](http://thebikeinsurer.co.uk)

# Getting behind a food festival bursary scheme



*Ian Groves, Managing Director at Start Tech and Beth Heath, Director of Fun at Shropshire Festivals at the Start Tech office in Shrewsbury*

## **A** local IT service provider has announced it will support up-and-coming businesses at this year's Shrewsbury Food Festival.

Start Tech will cover two thirds of the cost to exhibit at the two-day festival for up to three small, local businesses.

Beth Heath, Director of Fun at Shropshire Festivals, said, "We are delighted that Start Tech is the official Bursary Sponsor of Shrewsbury Food Festival 2024. We understand the struggles of being a family-run, independent business in the current economic climate. It's really tough starting out and having the capital to pay for stands at festivals and shows, so it's fantastic that Start Tech will be providing this opportunity for up to three small businesses.

"Bursary places are for small, fledgling businesses that would struggle to cover the cost of an exhibitor space but would

greatly benefit from the platform. If you're interested in applying for one of these spots, please email [fun@shropshirefestivals.co.uk](mailto:fun@shropshirefestivals.co.uk) to express your interest."

Start Tech began partnering with Shropshire Festivals' events last year. In 2024 they will also be sponsoring Shropshire Oktoberfest and providing a Cyber Security Zone at Shropshire Business Festival on April 11th.

Ian Groves, managing director at Start Tech, said he is thrilled to be helping the next generation of small businesses in the area. He said, "Shrewsbury Food Festival offers a brilliant platform for local businesses to get their products in front of customers. Not only is it a great event for sales, but it's where you

can build brand awareness and generate new leads. After getting involved with Shropshire Festivals' events last year, we know first-hand the impact they can have on Shropshire businesses.

"We are looking forward to finding out who gets accepted onto the bursary scheme and seeing them trade at the festival in June."

Shrewsbury Food Festival is taking place on June 29th and 30th at the Quarry. There will be 200 food, drink, and home stalls, two live entertainment stages, a field of free kids activities, chef demonstrations, a chef school, a kids cookery school, and an educational field to fork area. Early bird tickets are available for a limited time at the website [www.shrewsburyfoodfestival.co.uk](http://www.shrewsburyfoodfestival.co.uk)

**Start Tech will cover two thirds of the cost to exhibit at the two-day festival for up to three small, local businesses**



# THE MARCHES EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

*A £2.5 million funding package to boost skills training in the manufacturing, engineering and construction sectors – with a particular focus on 'green' technologies – has seen organisations across the Marches secure their share*

# Key business sectors receive Government's £2.5m training boost

**E**ducation organisations across the Marches have secured a £2.5 million funding package to boost skills training in the manufacturing, engineering and construction sectors – with a particular focus on 'green' technologies.

It will see new training centres opened and new courses delivered across Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire and Herefordshire, under the Marches Education Partnership banner.

The project involves Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Group Training Association, In-Comm Training Services Ltd, SBC Training, Shrewsbury Colleges Group, and Telford College – supported by Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

The funding from the Government's Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) addresses specific skills needs identified in the latest Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) compiled by Shropshire Chamber on behalf of the Department for Education.

It will see the launch of 14 new training centres and the creation of at least 30 new courses to meet what the partners

describe as some of the region's 'most significant sectors', working closely with local employers.

The investment will address staff and skills shortages in the manufacturing and engineering sectors, including food and drink and construction, and build a 'green skills' construction workforce with a focus on environmental technologies.

The aim is to ensure that people seeking careers in growing sectors such as green energy, digital and construction – or looking to upskill for career development – can access improved skills training, helping them secure good jobs closer to home.

The projects are due to be delivered before the end of 2025. Around £1.2 million will be spent on new equipment and technology, with the remainder contributing towards curriculum development, staff development, promotion, and project management costs.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan said: "This investment is about boosting local industries, building people's skills and ultimately futureproofing our economy

and the career prospects of the next generation."

- As part of the government's work to support more people to gain the skills they need to secure rewarding careers, the Chamber of Commerce network and other employer representative organisations were commissioned to lead work to develop local skills improvement plans, published summer 2023, so the training on offer better meets the current and future skills needs of local areas.

- Colleges and other providers are receiving a share of the £165 million from the Local Skills Improvement Fund to invest in the projects outlined in these plans.

- This comes on top of the success of the Strategic Development Fund, which has already made £157 million available to the FE sector to invest in a range of projects that have already helped level up communities up and down the country.

- Training providers will receive a share of £44 million from the Skills Injection Fund to support more people to take Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

***The funding from the Government's Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) addresses specific skills needs identified in the latest Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) compiled by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce on behalf of the Department for Education.***



# Check your business credit score

## Shropshire businesses have been warned their credit score could significantly impact their success.

The message comes from Sarah Hartshorn at Dyke Yaxley Chartered Accountants, in Shrewsbury, who said businesses of all sizes should take note and be aware of their position.

"Whether you're a small start-up or an established business, understanding the importance of your business credit score can be essential for long-term growth and sustainability.

"Just as a personal credit score can affect your ability to secure a loan or get approved for a credit card, your business credit score will affect your company's financial health."

Sarah said a business credit score represented a company's creditworthiness, and reflected a business's ability to responsibly manage debt and meet its financial obligations.

"It's not just a number – it's a critical tool used by creditors, lenders, suppliers and even potential customers to gauge the financial risk associated with entering any form of financial transaction with your company."

Sarah said any company looking for long term finance or even just a short-term cash injection would find their business credit score would play a significant role in the process.

"Lenders and creditors will assess your business credit score to measure the level of risk they'd be taking by offering you credit. If you have a good business credit score, it can open up more favourable interest rates, increased credit limits, and more flexible repayment terms."

Businesses should also be aware that a good score could be useful when it comes to credit terms and the credit limit offered by suppliers.

"If you have a higher score, you could use it to negotiate extended payment terms or even secure discounts for bulk orders.

"This can help boost your cash flow and solve the immediate need for working capital."

Sarah said for any business

that was looking to expand or scale up, a favourable credit score was vital.

"Maybe you're looking for a larger office space, or you want to invest in cutting-edge equipment, or you're planning to expand your workforce? Whatever your plans, the ability to secure funds when you need them is essential for a successful growth strategy.

"With economic downturns or unexpected business expenses, having access to affordable finance can be a lifeline, and a good business credit score increases your chances of securing emergency funding when you need it most."

If you need to know more about your business credit score, experts at Dyke Yaxley are working in partnership with Capitalise and can help you to access your Experian business credit report and reveal the factors that are affecting it.



Sarah Hartshorn of Dyke Yaxley

## Apprenticeships week

Apprenticeships are a successful way to get hands-on experience whilst gaining knowledge and skills for life, making them an essential career pathway for individuals across the UK.

93% of apprentices remain employed on completion, with the median earnings of these individuals being £24,920 after just 5 years (source: [nav.appawards.co.uk](http://nav.appawards.co.uk)), indicating the sheer success of choosing an apprenticeship pathway.

National Apprenticeship Week is held annually in February to highlight the impact and benefits of apprenticeships.

It is a celebration that brings together businesses and apprentices across the UK, shining a light on the positive impact apprenticeships make to individuals, businesses, and the wider economy.

Aico advocates apprenticeships as a valid career route and has been supporting this year's National Apprenticeship Week by attending a variety of relevant events.

Colleagues attended Moreton School Careers Fair to discuss potential career options with pupils. Harry Bower, Finance Clerk Apprentice, was amongst those who attended and said: "It was inspiring to see the enthusiasm and curiosity of the students at the Careers Fair. National Apprenticeship Week is a critical reminder that apprenticeships offer a fantastic alternative to traditional education, providing valuable hands-on experience and real-world skills. I was happy to give them an insight into what my apprenticeship entails, and many students and families viewed it as a valid alternative to other options such as University."

Several colleagues attended an 'All About Apprenticeships' event, held at Shrewsbury Town FC, where a range of local employers showcased opportunities available via apprenticeships.

A number of the team delivered an Enterprise Challenge to over 100 students at local school, St



Harry Bower at the Apprenticeship event

Martins. The workshop was designed for them to learn more about teamwork and the various progression routes Aico has to offer.

Aico prides itself on high levels of employee development and encourages career progression, making it the perfect environment for apprentices.

We work in partnership with SBC Training, based in Shrewsbury, to provide training and support to ensure apprentices progress through their apprenticeship programme.

With more than 1,500 apprenticeship job roles across the UK currently available (source: [amazingapprenticeships.com](http://amazingapprenticeships.com)), there is no better time to create your own story and become an apprentice.

To find out more about apprenticeships at Aico, visit: [www.aico.co.uk/about-us/careers/apprenticeships/](http://www.aico.co.uk/about-us/careers/apprenticeships/).



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