

Spring 2026 MP Roundtables – Key Takeaways

1. Cost Pressures & Economic Climate

- Businesses continue to face rising costs, including energy prices, employer National Insurance, and minimum wage increases.
- These pressures are limiting recruitment, particularly of younger people, and reducing business growth and confidence.
- Global uncertainty is also contributing to economic instability and cost of living pressures.

2. Infrastructure is a Critical Barrier to Growth

- Infrastructure gaps were a major constraint across all roundtables.
- Poor rural roads and potholes are impacting businesses and logistics.
- There is a need for more frequent and reliable public transport services and improved rail connectivity.
- Lack of integration between transport modes is holding back growth.
- Mobile and broadband connectivity remain insufficient in rural areas, restricting innovation and AI adoption.
- National grid capacity constraints are limiting business expansion and Net Zero progress.
- High energy costs continue to impact competitiveness and investment.

3. Rural Economy Challenges & Funding

- There is a strong perception that rural areas are overlooked in national funding decisions.
- Limited access to funding is restricting growth and investment.
- The absence of a Combined Authority is limiting influence and access to investment.
- Businesses highlighted the need for place-based solutions tailored to Shropshire.

4. High Streets & Town Centres

- Businesses are experiencing declining footfall and increasing vacancy rates.
- Long-term empty units and lack of landlord engagement remain key challenges.
- Parking costs and accessibility continue to reduce town centre activity.
- There is a need for stronger community-led regeneration and investment.

- Businesses emphasised the importance of tailored, town-specific approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

5. Skills, Workforce & Talent

- There is a need for stronger skills pipelines aligned with industry demand.
- Businesses highlighted the importance of adaptability and behaviour alongside technical skills.
- Recruitment challenges exist across key sectors, including vocational roles.
- There is a significant opportunity to unlock underrepresented and neurodiverse talent.
- Key barriers include employer confidence, lack of awareness, and fragmented support systems.

6. Business Support & Systems

- Businesses reported difficulty accessing and understanding available support.
- Grant opportunities are often poorly advertised and difficult to navigate.
- The system is fragmented, with limited coordination between organisations.
- There is a clear opportunity for improved alignment between employers, education providers, and support organisations.

7. Business Crime & Safety

- Retail crime and shoplifting are increasing concerns.
- Concerns were raised about illegitimate businesses and exploitation.
- Rural businesses remain vulnerable to crime and targeting.
- Cybercrime risks are growing, particularly in technology-enabled sectors.
- Underreporting of crime remains a key issue.

8. Energy, Net Zero & Growth

- Energy costs continue to impact business operations and expansion.
- National grid limitations are restricting growth and innovation.
- Net Zero is often viewed as a cost rather than an opportunity.
- Opportunities exist in alternative energy, microgeneration, and skills development.
- There is increasing alignment between energy, security, and economic growth.

9. Strategic Opportunities for Shropshire

- There is strong potential to grow key sectors, including advanced manufacturing and defence.
- Opportunities exist through improved skills, infrastructure, and supply chain development.

- Inclusive employment and innovation can unlock economic value.
- Shropshire has strong growth potential if key structural barriers are addressed.

Headline Summary

- Infrastructure remains the key constraint on growth across transport, digital, and energy systems.
- Businesses are under significant cost pressure, limiting expansion and recruitment.
- Rural and market town economies require tailored policy and investment.
- Skills challenges present both a risk and an opportunity, particularly in unlocking untapped talent.
- Business support systems require better coordination and visibility.
- Business crime is an increasing concern and requires stronger reporting and collaboration.
- There are strong opportunities in defence, innovation, and sustainable growth.

Spring 2026 MP Roundtables – Actions & Next Steps

1. Actions for MPs and Government

Businesses to provide specific examples of national grid constraints for escalation to Parliament.

Raise shortage of vocational licensing examiners through a joint MP letter.

Engage with local councils to support high street and town centre regeneration.

Continue policy engagement on VAT threshold, employer costs, and rural funding access.

2. Actions for Businesses

Submit responses to the Mobile Market Review consultation.

Support and promote the direct Shrewsbury–London rail link campaign.

Provide evidence on infrastructure, skills, and transport challenges.

Engage with available funding tools and grant support platforms.

3. Chamber-Led Actions

Coordinate business evidence for MPs on key issues such as grid, transport, and skills.

Lead collective consultation responses on behalf of businesses.

Act as a central hub to connect businesses with support organisations and providers.

Improve awareness and promotion of funding, support, and opportunities.

Facilitate introductions between businesses, partners, and key stakeholders.

4. Inclusive Employment Actions

Develop and publish a central directory of support organisations.
Improve awareness of support available to employers and individuals.
Position the Chamber as a bridge between employers, support services, and talent.

5. Crime & Safety Actions

Encourage all businesses to report crime incidents.
Develop awareness campaigns on retail, rural, and cybercrime.
Explore local communication channels to improve reporting and intelligence sharing.
Support pilot initiatives to strengthen business and police collaboration.

6. Skills & Workforce Actions

Strengthen links between employers and education providers.
Promote clearer communication of skills needs from businesses.
Support flexible and modular training pathways.
Encourage inclusive recruitment and reduce barriers to entry.

7. Ongoing Collaboration

Maintain regular engagement between businesses, MPs, and partners.
Support key local initiatives such as transport and skills partnerships.
Encourage business participation in policy discussions and pilot projects.

Headline Priority Actions

Gather and present evidence on infrastructure and skills challenges.
Lead a coordinated business response to key government consultations.
Develop a centralised business support and inclusion directory.
Support infrastructure improvements including rail connectivity.
Increase awareness and reporting of business crime.

The Spring 2026 MP roundtables have provided a clear and consistent message from Shropshire businesses:

There is strong desire for growth, innovation, and investment but structural barriers must be addressed through coordinated, place-based action.

The Chamber remains committed to working with MPs, local authorities, and partners to ensure these business voices continue to inform policy and delivery.