

RESPONSES TO MEMBERS QUESTIONS – COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2026

1. Question from Cllr. Rosemary Dartnall

The reply to my recent Cabinet question about North West Road project spending raises many further questions, including;

1. Two NWR delegated spending requests were agreed by Council allowing, first £17m and second, a further £17m, totalling £34m. At the time of the second request, the Oxon Link Road and NWR were combined into a single project, called NWRR. Opposition parties, on the second request, asked for spending to be halted until the position on government funding was clarified, but the Council went ahead. Why was £39m of tax payers money spent when only £34m was allowed?
2. How much spending was delegated for the Oxon Link Road?
3. Balfour Beatty's contract (£5.1m) went through procurement. But, it's implied by the words "the Council's term contractor" that both WSP (£25.4m) and Kier (£2.9m), were engaged as existing suppliers, seemingly without normal Council process. Were Kier and WSP contracted for NWR/OLR through competitive procurement? If so, please supply evidence
4. WSP's colossal £25.418m payment for preliminary works, included preparing the planning application. Planning permission was never secured because of concerns that subsurface development could damage Shrewsbury's water supply. WSP's subsurface investigation works should have established clearly whether, or not, this risk was present. It can only be said that WSP failed to carry out their work successfully. Will the council now obtain compensation from WSP for this costly failure?

Response from David Vasmer, Portfolio Holder for Highways & Environment

1. *The requests for further spend delegation mentioned refer only to the DfT funded North West Relief Road (NWRR) section of the full alignment. The western section, or "Oxon Link Road" (OLR), already had pre-existing spend delegation of up to £12.8m from the point of acceptance of the Marches LEP funding offer in 2017. As such, the spend cited above was cumulative across the two projects combined and remained within the total combined delegation values.*
2. *The OLR had £12.8m delegated spend on project commencement.*
3. *Both Kier and WSPs services are available to the Council in support of the NWRR without external competitive procurement, under their pre-existing wider Term Contracts with Shropshire Council, these both having*

been procured through full external competitive procedures at the time of their award.

4. *The NWRR projects Full Planning Application was considered by Planning Committee in October 2023 and February 2024 with the result being “intent to grant Full Planning permission subject to Planning Conditions and Section 106 agreements”. The pause on project progress halted the completion on the final outstanding Section 106 agreement, but other required 106 agreements and the draft Planning Conditions were already agreed in draft at that stage. Draft Planning Conditions included numerous elements that covered the security of groundwater supply during both the NWRR construction and future use phase. These specific conditions were drafted collaboratively with the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water. In drafting these, the full and comprehensive WSP risk register, based on the outcome of the Ground Investigation works, was used to develop the agreed management and mitigation practices that would be undertaken. As such, these elements of the project were completed by WSP in line with the project brief, and are therefore not a basis for any compensation claim.*

Like you Cllr Dartnell I was horrified at the £25m spent by Shropshire Council under the previous administration on our Highways Design Contractor WSP – and that was well before any construction works could start. The North West Relief Road was by the far the largest but not the only scheme where design costs were disproportionate, and in some cases meant that there was not enough money left to get the scheme implemented. We must understand what has gone wrong and how we can avoid unsustainable design costs in the future. That is one of the reasons why we will be proposing a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to investigate the North West Relief Road once the future of the project has been agreed later in our meeting today. The terms of reference should include an examination of both the commissioning and management of design costs.

2. Question from Cllr. Chris Lemon

There is growing anecdotal evidence that many new developments around Shrewsbury are not being adopted in a timely manner by Shropshire Council, with some residents being in situ for more than 10 years without enjoying the benefits of adoption. It is clear that residents in the recently built developments in Weir Hill, along Otley Road, and on the Bowbrook Meadows and Red Deer Road builds in Radbrook are all suffering from the consequences of non-adoption. Having spoken to residents, Shropshire Council officers and developers over a number of years, it remains unclear to me and my residents why the developments in my division have not been adopted, with no one able to give local councillors an estimate of when adoption will happen.

Can Shropshire Council provide an explanation for the continuing non-adoption of the Bowbrook Meadows and Red Deer Road developments,

provide a time-frame for the same and reassure residents that solving non-adoption issues, most acutely with inconsiderate parking generated in the main by the nearby Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, are a high priority for the Council. There does not appear to be any incentive for the Council to expedite adoption of new developments, can I be reassured otherwise?

Response from David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

The Council acknowledges that there are a backlog of roads waiting for adoption. These roads fall into a number of varying categories including those that are not considered to be in a suitable state to adopt through to those that are ready apart from Severn Trant have not adopted the sewers yet. We are working on a strategy to deal with the backlog of unadopted roads to try and deal with the backlog. We are also introducing a new system for new applications which should streamline and speed up the process for future applications.

3. Question from Cllr. Elizabeth Barker

Across the United Kingdom, thousands of our own people are sleeping rough, including many who have worn the uniform and served this country with honour. At a time when British veterans, British families and vulnerable British citizens are struggling to secure a roof over their heads, it is vital that this council stands firm in defending their interests first and foremost. To pull from the Veterans' Survey 2022 (ONS) statistic Official data shows that around 1 in 400 UK veterans are homeless, rough sleeping, or living in a refuge and to also pull from Rough Sleeping Snapshot 2024 (UK Government) it recorded 4,667 people sleeping rough across England on a single night in autumn 2024, the majority of whom were UK nationals, these are the brave men and women who put their lives on the line for us, being left behind and neglected when they need help the most.

According to new shelter research, 124,210 families faced homelessness in 2024/25 from that figure, 70,630 single-parent households in England faced homelessness in 2024/25 That is 1 in every 24 single-parent families. This is not a fringe problem, this is a national failure that has crept into every region.

Therefore, could the council Leader set out the administration's position on the Government's pilot scheme to build council-owned housing specifically for asylum seekers? And should such a scheme ever be proposed for Shropshire, can the administration confirm whether it would oppose any initiative that redirects local authority land, funding, or resources away from the needs of British citizens the very people this council is elected to serve?

Response from Heather Kidd, Leader

The Council recognises the strength of feeling expressed in this question and shares the concern about the growing scale of homelessness nationally,

including the unacceptable reality that some veterans, families and vulnerable individuals continue to experience homelessness and rough sleeping. Locally, Shropshire continues to experience the impact of these national pressures with the most recent rough sleeping snapshot recording 21 people sleeping rough in Shropshire on a single night in November 2025. While comparatively low in national terms, the Council recognises that every individual sleeping rough is one too many and continues to work with partners to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping wherever possible.

The Rough Sleeper Team work hard to support individuals rough sleeping in Shropshire with daily outreach across the county. The Council is proud to have re-opened its rough sleeper hostel in 2025 which provides 10 beds for individuals at risk of or have experienced rough sleeping. We work in close partnership with organisations such as Shrewsbury Ark to ensure people can access the support, advice and assistance they need.

Shropshire Council remains committed to supporting veterans, local families and vulnerable residents through:

- Early homelessness prevention and Housing Options advice*
- Partnership working with veterans' organisations and support services*
- Use of the Armed Forces Covenant principles in local service delivery*
- Targeted support for those with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse*
- The Council has now been allocated a further £183k from Government to support homelessness and rough sleeping to enhance this.*

Responsibility for accommodating asylum seekers sits with the Home Office, not local authorities. The Government has announced a pilot scheme enabling some councils to build or refurbish council owned homes for temporary use as asylum accommodation, with the stated aim of reducing reliance on expensive hotel provision. These properties would typically be funded by the Home Office, leased back during the pilot period, and may later revert to general housing stock.

There is no current proposal for Shropshire Council to participate in the Government's asylum housing pilot. Any future proposal would be considered transparently, through democratic decision making, and assessed against its impact on local housing need, value for money, and community cohesion.

4. Question from Cllr. Harry Hancock-Davies

In light of the proposed 9% Council Tax increase, expected to generate £8.8 million, how does the administration justify imposing this significant rise on residents while more than £20 million in arrears remains unpaid of which £10–£15 million is likely to be recoverable? Why has maximising collection of existing debt not been prioritised before raising Council Tax for those who already pay in full?

Response from Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Thank you, Councillor Hancock Davies.

I have been for the last few years concerned at the increasing amount of council tax owed to our council plus the length some of it has been there. I note your recent questions that you share this concern.

As an opposition member, this concern was never followed up by the previous administration.

Further to this recent question.

The Council is still collecting council tax in respect of the current financial year; the actual collection rate will not be known until 1 April 2026.

I assume you agree that no form of taxation is going to collect 100% of the amount due. In 2024-25 English billing authorities reported an average in year collection rate of 95.9%. Shropshire Council reported an in-year collection rate of 97.7%. This resulted in £258m being collected and £6m uncollected. This led the cumulative increase in gross arrears outstanding as of 1 April 2025 to total £28.1 million.

Increased council tax arrears is a national issue, and not specific to Shropshire Council. In July 2025 the Government reported that the total amount of council tax arrears outstanding in England on 31 March 2025 was £6.6 billion which was an increase of 11% compared to the figure at the end of March 2024.

Action has now started to be made, and this debt has since reduced to £23.5 million (£4.6 million reduction).

- i. Lack of experienced staff to focus on recovery of council tax has impeded our reducing this debt.*
- ii. A recent service review has highlighted that resources within the revenues and benefits team are too low, and therefore £1.1 million has been invested to increase staffing levels within the service by 21 and a business case with a proposed restructure is currently under consideration.*
- iii. The review benchmarked collection rates and confirmed that Shropshire Council has continued to deliver upper quartile council tax performance was also above the national average for unitary councils.*
- iv. The review also highlighted that it is common when dealing with an increasing arrears position a lot of time can be spent on attempting to recover amounts that are basically uncollectible. The team have already been focussing on writing off uncollectible bad debt and £464k old debt has been written off so far in this financial year.*
- v. For extra information and needs to be noted is that council tax arrears can be attributed in part due to enforcement options for council tax collection continues remain limited. The main options are attachment of earnings orders, attachment of benefits and enforcement agents. This can lead to*

debts being stacked up in the system over several financial years. There are also a lot of special arrangements which span multiple years. There is also a change in emphasis to debt collection and focus on resident welfare with an appreciation that council tax is increasingly unaffordable for some people. Also, the promised provision of HMRC employment data to enable Councils to undertake attachment of earnings has not yet materialised from the Government. This is not only an issue for Shropshire Council but is a national issue

5. Question from Cllr. Chris Naylor

I'm delighted this new Lib Dem Administration has made it a priority to fix Shropshire's potholes, and very pleased indeed to see updates on the tens of thousands of potholes filled and the many miles of road resurfaced.

I know this is thanks to the Cabinet Member and many hard-working staff and contractors, however I wonder if he might help me understand firstly how priorities are set for pothole filling and for resurfacing, and secondly what plans he has to enable local councillors to contribute to that prioritisation process division by division.

More specifically in Burnell I have - east of the A49 - gardens in Church Preen which were open for international visitors now closed because coaches won't travel the potholed lanes, a car dealer in Frodesley losing trade because the roads are too bad for test drives, and many other farmers and businesses suffering vehicle damage and losing custom. Let alone residents who refuse to use their own near-impassable lane, forced to go 'the long way round'.

Most obviously the Church Preen-Kenley lane, which the Cabinet Member has kindly visited – described by a Highways staffer recently as 'shocking' – is still unrepaired. Works have been promised again and again but nothing has been done. Whereas I get a series of alerts for 'surface dressing', 'sweeping', 'resurfacing' west of the A49 - which are of course welcome, but to me seem much lower priority.

How do I get a chance to help set priorities locally?

Response from David Vasmer, Portfolio Holder for Highways & Environment

Pothole repairs are primarily driven by the Council's Policy and Highway Safety Inspections. Potholes and other defects recorded on inspection, are categorised and scheduled for repair, based on the severity and type of road. We know pothole numbers have increased year on year due to significant under investment in the highway network, which places pressure on budgets and resources. That said, we continue to deliver high numbers of repairs through the mixed economy model, but we do recognise this time of the year is particularly challenging, as is the case for all Council's across the country.

In terms of planned investment, this is managed via a data-led process which draws together intelligence on network condition, customer enquiries and reactive defects recorded on the link of carriageway. This intelligence is analysed to determine a priority programme of maintenance, which is validated by area highway teams. This structured process for decision making follows the current 'best practice approach' called Asset Management, which is endorsed by the Department for Transport and linked to funding allocations. The Council's agreed Highways Asset Management Policy is publicly available on the Council's website.

With regards to working with Parish Council's, this is a high priority and we are delighted to be working with Church Preen to develop a Parish Road Warden Pilot Scheme. A key part of the Wardens' role is to work closely with local landowners to help reduce water run-off onto the highway, which is currently contributing to ongoing damage to the road surface.

Tackling this together is really important and if issues, such as excessive water run-off, lack of ditch maintenance, and verge damage caused by agricultural or heavy goods vehicles aren't addressed, any repairs we make to the road will continue to deteriorate quickly. By working together and dealing with these root causes, we can reduce repeat damage, lower maintenance costs, improve safety, and help protect the long-term condition of local roads.

This pilot has the potential to become a model that could be rolled out across Shropshire, helping to connect and support more rural communities. By empowering local parishes to work proactively with landowners and the Council, rural areas can benefit from quicker issue-spotting, local pothole repairs under Council supervision, and stronger local collaboration. Ultimately, this approach can help ensure that even the most remote parts of the county receive the care and attention needed to keep their roads safe, accessible, and well-maintained.

6. Question from Cllr Susan Coleman

I recently asked officers about the lack of a forward plan; this is the decision-making process for all projects.

After 10 months in charge, I would have expected the current administration and executive management team to have formulated a plan, indeed the administration campaigned that they would be transparent, so could the Leader please tell us when our council taxpayers will find out what exactly their plan is.

Response from Heather Kidd, Leader

In terms of the forward plan itself, the dates have only just been finalised for meetings for 2026/27, therefore some of the future policy and report items have not been finalised yet in terms of dates or added but will be shortly. All of these are in line with the Plans put forward by the Administration (the New

Direction, CPC Action Plan, Improvement and People Plans and forthcoming Corporate Plans) and detailed policy decisions falling out, noting that not all the plans and policies will need to come to Cabinet or Council, however regular updates on the Improvement Plan and the key actions within it, will be brought to both the Improvement Board and Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny meetings.