

## **CABINET – 11 MARCH 2026**

### **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

#### **1. Cllr Chris Lemon**

##### **Question:**

In March 2023 Council resolved 'To commit to ensuring that the county town of Shrewsbury retains a proper Bus Station by requiring that the masterplan brief for the Riverside redevelopment includes the requirement for an attractive bus station with excellent links to rail and town centre, making best use of the current location'.

In December 2024 Shropshire Council adopted the Shrewsbury Movement and Public Space Strategy. Fourteen 'next steps' were identified in relation to bus operations, several of which were key to determining the location and size of the future Bus Station and Bus Layover.

Please will the Portfolio Holder a) confirm that the locus for the new Bus Station will be on the existing bus station site, and b) provide Members with an update on progress on the fourteen 'next steps' for bus operations in Shrewsbury.

##### **Response from Councillor Rob Wilson, Portfolio Holder for Transport & Economic Growth**

Thank you for the question Chris.

It's important to state that in the public consultation on the Shrewsbury Movement and Public Space Strategy there was overwhelming public support for the retention of a Bus Station within the town centre. With 2/3rds of respondents wanting only 1 bus station in the town as a focal point for all bus services.

Further, and as a direct result of the 14 next steps that were identified in the MPSS in relation to bus operations, the Shrewsbury Big Town Partnership jointly working with Shropshire Council's Passenger Transport Team and its economic growth team have commissioned a 'Shrewsbury Public Transport Plan: A 10 year implementation plan and strategy'.

Within this document, that has just been completed, and should be made publicly available during next month, there is direct reference to a key strategic move being 'A centralised bus station in Shrewsbury Town Centre providing high quality passenger and driver facilities and improved interchange'. I believe that this is very important for the county as a whole.

The report aims to identify Shropshire Council's future bus needs and how to best operate local and inter-urban services. It also considers additional measures to achieve the Plan's goal of making buses the preferred option for local trips not feasible by walking, wheeling, or cycling, ensuring reliable and frequent cross-town journeys.

Alongside the MPSS and Riverside Masterplan update, ongoing talks with the Shropshire Bus Enhanced Partnership have gathered input from bus providers about requirements for a new town centre Bus Station and Layover. These insights have informed the new 10-year plan.

Utilising the new report, which specifically asked what area of Bus Station space is required (how many bays, what facilities it should incorporate etc) the Local Authority can now better incorporate the future needs of a Bus Station into the Masterplan for Smithfield Riverside, using this feedback from operators utilising it.

As you know there are flooding issues and abnormal ground conditions across the whole of the Smithfield Riverside development areas which have a huge impact on commercial viability so making best use of the whole site while incorporating a new Bus Station that can still operate in close proximity to the Railway Station and Darwin Shopping Centre is a key consideration that remains in all masterplan development.

## **2. Cllr Andy Boddington**

### **Question**

An out of control HGV ran into Ludlow Youth Centre on 28 April 2025. Since then, there has been no progress on bringing the building back into use.

- 1) When is expected that repairs on the youth centre and family hub will begin and when is it expected to reopen?
- 2) What has caused the delay?
- 3) How much extra is it costing Shropshire Council to host activities once at the youth centre in alternative facilities such as Helena Lane?

### **Response from Councillor Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder for Children & Education**

- 1) Currently projecting the works to be complete and handed over in July.
- 2) The process of agreement with the insurance company and loss adjustor is still ongoing with details being commercially sensitive as it involves a claim against a third party.
- 3) My understanding it has saved money to deliver services from Helena Lane.

### **3. Cllr Tom Dainty**

#### **Question:**

For over thirty years, Market Drayton has aspired to develop the Greenfields site, a vital project given the persistent shortage of sports facilities in the town. This lack has left local sports clubs in a fragile state, reliant on the tireless commitment of volunteers to keep offering opportunities for residents to participate in sport and physical activity. With rising care costs for Shropshire Council, it is increasingly important to prioritise preventative measures—such as promoting healthy, active lifestyles—to help mitigate future demands on health and social care services.

The Greenfields development must demonstrate its viability to external funding partners. Investors require clear evidence of robust local support and the ability of the project to deliver tangible benefits to the community before they will consider financial investment. Without such assurances, the project risks losing out on the external funding necessary for its success, potentially undermining the long-term advantages it promises for Market Drayton.

I urge the Shropshire Council Cabinet to provide unequivocal backing for the Greenfields development, in whatever manner the Active Market Drayton working group deems best. Can the Cabinet show firm interest and a clear understanding of the significance of this project for the town, particularly regarding enhanced health, wellbeing, and opportunities for residents? Your support is essential not only to unlock external funding, but also to secure the future sustainability and success of these much-needed facilities. Please clarify your commitment so Market Drayton can finally achieve this longstanding goal and ensure a healthier future for its community.

#### **Response from Councillor James Owen, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Leisure**

Thank you for your question. Cabinet recognises the importance of Greenfields for the residents of Market Drayton and the wider Northeast of the county. We value the contribution of the many volunteers who support the activities there including the Active Market Drayton Group have been instrumental in progressing the plans to develop the site. Shropshire Council and Cabinet continue to be happy to work with the group and all other relevant bodies to contribute where possible. Whilst the Council's current financial position prevents us from directly funding improvements, we are keen to provide our strong backing for this project, and the benefits it would bring, and will offer what support we can.

#### **4. Councillor Harry Hancock-Davies**

##### **Question:**

The report acknowledges that reduced council capacity has resulted in Internal Audit only being able to provide 'limited assurance' over some control environments and that weakened controls increase the risk of fraud occurring and remaining undetected. It also cites the NAFN 2025 benchmark showing an average of just over four counter-fraud FTE per council, yet Shropshire currently has none and is only proposing a minimum viable team of three posts costing around £150,000 — potentially not until the 2027/28 budget.

Given that this is a large unitary authority with a multi-hundred-million-pound budget and significant procurement and social care expenditure, can the Portfolio Holder explain how the Council has satisfied itself that its current arrangements meet CIPFA's Code of Practice for managing the risk of fraud and corruption — and what quantified fraud loss assessment has been undertaken to justify delaying the establishment of a dedicated counter-fraud capability until at least 2027/28?

##### **Response from Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance**

Thank you, Councillor Hancock Davies, for your continued interest in this subject.

Both the Council and I do recognise the link between effective internal control arrangements and the management of fraud risk. However, it is important to clarify that the previous limited assurance opinions on specific audits do not equate to a limited overall year-end Head of Internal Audit opinion, and more importantly in reference to certain of your words do they directly correlate to the level of Internal Audit resources.

Internal Audit operates in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards (previously Public Sector Internal Audit Standards), which require a risk-based approach to assurance. Where resources may be constrained, audit coverage is and has always been prioritised toward areas of highest inherent risk, materiality and public interest. Throughout the period of resourcing challenges within Internal Audit they have always maintained compliance with the relevant auditing standards and the Head of Audit is satisfied that the team have completed sufficient work across the Council for him to be able to form a year end opinion. This has been well documented in the performance reports to the Audit and Governance Committee. If you examine past committee records for example you will see that all elected members involved in this area have always questioned and have keenly monitored the resources available to carry out the work expected of the team.

Limited assurance opinions reflect the outcome of individual, scoped audits of particular systems at a point in time, rather than a judgement on the adequacy of the Council's overall governance, risk management and control framework. The year-end Head of Internal Audit opinion is derived from multiple sources of assurance, including:

- the cumulative results of audit work delivered during the year,
- management assurance and ownership of key controls,
- the Council's risk management framework and corporate risk registers,
- external audit findings and regulatory reviews, and
- ongoing fraud risk assessments and participation in national initiatives such as the National Fraud Initiative.

As set out in the Council's Counter-Fraud, Anti-Bribery and Corruption Strategy arrangements are aligned to CIPFA's Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption, which does not mandate a single delivery model or a specific number of counter-fraud posts. Instead, the Code requires that Councils demonstrate leadership commitment, clear accountability, risk assessment, preventative controls, and effective response mechanisms. These elements are currently in place through a combination of management controls, Internal Audit activity, policies, data-matching exercises and whistleblowing arrangements. Whilst Internal Audit coordinate counter fraud activity they are not the only resource in the Council, all service areas have a responsibility for managing the risk of fraud and ensuring appropriate controls are in place. Individual service areas maintain fraud risk registers which are used by Internal Audit to inform counter fraud activity each year. Work is underway to quantify fraud exposure through a targeted refresh of fraud risk assessments and review of historic and emerging risk areas, including AI, procurement, social care and cyber-enabled fraud. This evidence is being used to inform the proposed introduction of a dedicated counter-fraud team, ensuring it is sustainable, targeted and delivers value for money.

Whilst benchmarking data, including the NAFN Counter Fraud Survey figures, is a helpful comparator, the Council has taken a risk-based and financially proportionate approach to strengthening counter-fraud capability. A recent review against the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Framework concluded counter fraud governance processes are in place that set the foundations to support and drive a strong anti-fraud culture across the organisation. However, there is a need to review, refresh and raise awareness of these through a planned sustainable programme of communication and training which the Statutory Officers group have committed to. The Council therefore remains satisfied that, despite capacity and financial pressures, the arrangements are professionally compliant, risk-informed and subject to appropriate independent scrutiny, while recognising that further investment in counter-fraud capacity could enhance resilience and prevention over the medium term.

## 5. Cllr George Hollyhead

### **Question:**

Given that the newly approved Shropshire Hills National Landscape Plan embeds an ideological programme of behaviour change, net-zero compliance and 'nature connection' expectations — including calls for residents to reduce car use, alter daily behaviours, and reshape farming practices — how will Cabinet justify imposing these ideological aims on deeply rural communities where cars are essential, farms already face extreme pressures, and local priorities such as affordable housing, economic growth and infrastructure are being sidelined? What practical safeguards will Cabinet put in place to ensure that local people are not subjected to policy-driven social engineering, and that core rural needs are prioritised over ideological agendas developed far from the realities of the Shropshire Hills?

### **Response from Councillor Tom Dainty, Deputy Portfolio Holder for Highways & Environment**

1. The Plan is evidence-based and its content is in line with national and Council policy.
2. Many farmers are already pursuing and championing the changes in farming practices supported by the Plan and the industry itself is committed to improving water quality, maintaining soil health and reducing emissions. Farm grants available in the National Landscape have been very popular with farmers.
3. Net zero is a legally binding target for the UK. Strong action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is overwhelmingly supported by science.
4. Nature connection is strongly shown to benefit people's wellbeing. The Plan does not impose this but seeks to encourage those who wish to benefit more.
5. Provision of affordable housing is strongly supported in the Plan.
6. On transport, the Plan is in line with policy to encourage active travel and public transport, with benefits to health and reducing pollution, while recognising that many people remain dependent on cars. Electrification and other efficiencies can help to reduce car use while retaining people's mobility.
7. The Plan supports economic prosperity in a way that can be sustained into the future. The biggest threat to economic prosperity is breakdown in the living systems that support humans, and evidence is very clear that a more sustainable relationship with nature is needed.

8. The Plan has been prepared with deep engagement and involvement of a wide range of local stakeholders in the Shropshire Hills and has been subject to a public consultation.