FINANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 SEPTEMBER 2026

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. John Palmer

Question:

In the recommendations allied to Key Risk #13 (red-rated at 9, the highest) in the External Assurance Review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, published and publicised in mid-August, it says:- "The council should identify those assets that can be sold, and develop a strategy for how this can be done to secure best value. To be completed by December 2026". Is the scrutiny chair and the committee keenly asking if disposing of five more key Shrewsbury assets is being considered? These are Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, Quarry Swimming and Fitness Centre, Shrewsbury Castle, the shopping centres, and Theatre Severn?

Response:

Thank you for this question. This has been raised with officers who confirm that they are, due to the declared Financial Emergency, reviewing the use of all Council assets, starting with those that have previously been identified as being suitable for disposal. That is why as Scrutiny we have asked for the briefing on Assets we will be receiving later.

We understand that none of the sites you set out are included on any initial disposals list, but thanks to your question we will be alert to their possible inclusion subsequently.

2. Andrew Sceats

Question:

I have submitted critical questions about Cornovii Developments Ltd to Council, Cabinet and the Housing Supervisory Board in the present and last administrations.

With the publication of the CIPFA Shropshire Review and the paper into the future relationship between the Council and Cornovii 'the chickens have come home to roost' with the projected closure of Cornovii.

The CIPFA review omitted to mention the importance of the large financial loss incurred through the Shrewsbury shopping centres purchase but has stated several times no further council funds for Cornovii activities. It does say that the Council's revolving loans are only repaid, substantially, monthly but doesn't explain where the remainer goes or its amount.

One of my previous questions stated that the only purchase of council land by Cornovii was through the issue of worthless Cornovii shares.

The officer produced paper about Cornovii's future being considered today;

- Doesn't mention any aim of Cornovii being to financially benefit the Council (1.1)
- Essential history of Cornovii is minimised (1.6)
- Why worry about legalities -original legal advice in 2019 was ignored (2.11)
- Cornovii internal and external audits were satisfactory and provided assurances! (page 11)
- Work to date on the Shirehall project is almost £900,000 (page 13) but no details about its approval (page 13).

My question is;

'With the history of Council inactions or incorrect actions regarding Cornovii, an independent enquiry is needed with full public access. Elected counsellors should decide which of the options is agreed or whether they want to propose different options.'

Response:

The report presented to Scrutiny today addresses the current financial issues relating to the Council's ownership of Cornovii. It does not, and was never intended to, as I understand it, provide an analysis of the history of the company. It is intended to provide an analysis of a very complex current problem in the simplest of terms and set out options looking forward that seek to minimise the potential financial exposure for the Council, in our declared financial emergency.

The Cabinet will I'm sure in due course consider all options, but in the circumstances the advice of the Council's s151 Officer for Scrutiny to consider is clear, and is I understand intended to present the lowest risk of any further financial disadvantage.

In considering recommendations set out in the report before us, Scrutiny may also wish to propose the need to carry out a retrospective and independent review of the Company, although naturally this would need justification às a further cost to the Council.