Shropshire Council Report: May 2025

Firstly, thank you for the kind words and support during the election.

The council's overall position was set in the budget, which was adopted last January. This is the envelope within which the new administration will have to operate this year:

* Savings required this year: £57m
* Reserves: £5m (audit says SC should have £15-20m)
* CIL money: £30m unspent
* Overspend: projected to be £34m. One department accounted for almost half of that.
* The last admin borrowed £26.9m in March to avoid bankruptcy and balance the budget. That will cost £1.3m in interest a year from the council's revenue.
* Price Waterhouse Coopers had been engaged by the previous council to identify savings, but PWC are costing the council £17,000 a day. Many of the existing savings identified aren't achievable.

Alarmingly, the council has had no controls in place for any contracts, making monitoring of performance and outcomes almost impossible. Yet Keir's contract was extended for a year just before the election.

Overall, there is a 2-year backlog for adopting new roads and for Traffic Regulation Orders. Channels of communication internally and externally are now very poor. The new administration is determined to improve this, transparency and partnership working.

Shropshire Council's corporate structure has already been moved away from departmental siloes to a leadership board, with staff reporting to multiple members of the board. The Chief Executive believes this will even out resources across the council structure and encourage more joined-up working. The new structure started in January, but the website still reflects the old structure. Copy of the new structure attached.

So far, the new administration group has selected a Leader and Deputy Leader and, this week, the cabinet members. These executive positions will be formally ratified at the Full Council meeting on May 22nd. The Leader-elect has asked me to join the Cabinet to oversee Planning, including the Local Plan. Once all of the remaining annual meetings are complete this week, I will be able to dive into my new role properly.

Members are now undergoing induction training, which isn't scheduled to conclude until July.

On Friday 9th of May, I signed my Declaration of Acceptance of Office at my first induction session, which included official photos, collecting passes and IT equipment. At the same time, my council email went live.

I would be grateful if members could send any Shropshire Council-related casework to: cllrdavid.walker@shropshire.gov.uk

I don't have a council mobile yet, but I will let everyone know the number when it becomes available. Members can be assured that I will be answering both.

Existing emails and numbers are fine, but it will keep things simpler from a GDPR perspective if Shropshire Council stuff is separate from my personal emails.

Since then, I have had a steady stream of casework, predominantly on planning matters and parking enforcement issues, along with the fallen tree limb on Twyford Lane fowling the overhead cables.

I have contacted Freedom Fibre and Ben Walker about the fibre rollout in West Felton, which seems to have gone very quiet - Freedom Fibre pulled out of Project Gigabyte in Cheshire recently. Residents have been concerned that they had gone bust at one extreme, to questioning the delays at the other. As far as I am aware, only Tedsmore is connected. I was expecting everywhere to become available in January/February. Freedom Fibre seemed quite evasive when I asked them about progress.

As soon as I was officially a member, I contacted Highways Maintenance officers to get an explanation of the rationale for the surface dressing between Queens Head and West Felton. I attended a briefing with Andy Wilde, Head of Infrastructure, last Tuesday. There has been a marked shift in the approach to road maintenance to push surface dressing much earlier in a road's life than I was trained to see nearly 35 years ago. Modelling has shown that the cost per meter repaired for early intervention is a tiny fraction of a later traditional intervention. So newer stretches of road will now also see work undertaken to keep them like new. The council is trying to spread scarce resources and improve the rating of the whole network. Overall, for every road type, Shropshire's roads are in far worse condition than the country's average. Mr Wilde said that some roads will get worse as a result and be pushed towards the critical end of the assessment. With 80% of the network being rural roads, it is easy to see where that will fall. I will be digging into this further, as this does appear counterintuitive.

Last Wednesday, the provisional cabinet met with senior officers and the LGA to discuss the shape of things to come. A further meeting will take place on Tuesday the 20th of May between the provisional Cabinet and the Leadership Board of Shropshire Council to develop that further.

So far, Heather Kidd, Leader-elect, has set out some broad themes around the garden waste collection charges, use consultancy, improving the way contracts are managed, improving the quality highways maintenance, and better partnership working with town & parish councils. She requested a government off-ramp for the £215m NWRR project, like the one Norfolk CC obtained. At present it will cost the Council £39m to stop the project or £215m to complete it. Neither of which the council can afford or deliver for Shropshire. The PWC contract has now been stopped.

There is a significant number of issues dating back some years that I will be picking up in relation to the Parish Council and more widely. I will be using my role to get some progress on those issues and to better communicate with both Parishes in Whittington Division. There is undoubtedly a very large job ahead on many fronts and I will keep everybody informed as things develop.

Cllr David Walker

Shropshire Council: Whittington Division