

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 – QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6

QUESTION 1

MR P NUTTING will ask the following question:

There is considerable speculation in the media that the Council is considering the sale of the municipal golf course at Meole Brace, Shrewsbury.

The golf course provides an important green belt area for the south of the town and an important and highly valued recreational facility for residents.

Planning policies are also in place to protect sports facilities from development.

Will the Portfolio Holder inform Council whether the golf course has a long term future and has any discussion taken place with potential purchasers.

The Leader, **MR KEITH BARROW** will reply:-

An unsolicited approach was made to Shropshire Council by a third party who expressed an interest in acquiring the golf course.

This has not been progressed any further.

In terms of the long term future of the golf course, this forms part of Shropshire Council's portfolio of assets which will be considered as part of the transformation programme.

Therefore no decision has been made on the long term future of the golf course.

QUESTION 2

MR P NUTTING will ask the following question:

A Shrewsbury family, whose child will be 5 years old in October 2010, is having difficulty finding a place in their local school which is adjacent to the Junior School attended by the girl's two older siblings because it is at its maximum legal capacity. While there may be a place available in January 2011, there are no guarantees especially as the child is not at the top of the waiting list.

As the next two nearest primary schools are both at their legal limits, the family are being advised that they must send the child to a school that is 2 miles away and involves crossing several busy main roads. They consider it unreasonable to expect them to deliver 2 children to one school and then their younger child to another so far away.

What measures are being put in place to deal with the serious shortage of infant school places affecting the Copthorne, Porthill, Bowbrook and Radbrook divisions?

MRS A CAESAR-HOMDEN the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services will reply:-

Whilst not being able to make comment in Council regarding the specifics of this particular case I first wish to reassure Council that a full written response has been sent to Councillor Nutting.

Regarding the supply of Primary school places in Shrewsbury, I would reassure Council that there is no shortage of infant school places but indeed there are currently more reception class places than children to fill them. This has been the case for some time. All catchment area children whose applications are received on time can have a place at their catchment area school. In areas where the schools are popular with out of area applicants, late applications and those who move in after the application date may have to wait for a place to become available in a Reception or Key Stage 1 class where classes are limited by law to 30 pupils.

Our projections, based on actual numbers of children, indicate that the numbers coming into primary schools in Shrewsbury will continue to fall right through until 2015. The projections beyond this are currently unknown. The impact of housing allocations and developments have and will continue to be included in the forecast of demand for school places in specific areas of growth.

Adding extra reception classes at popular schools however would not necessarily solve the problem where the total pupil population remains constant, or in Shropshire's case, is decreasing. It is likely that additional places created would be filled by more out of area children, leaving unfilled places at other schools to be paid for elsewhere within

the schools' budget. Clearly this conflicts with the Council's proposals to reduce the number and cost of unfilled school places given budget pressures that the Council and schools continue to face.

School admission procedures can at times seem complex and, on occasion, appear unfair to disappointed families who are not offered a place at their preferred school. Shropshire Council's admission policy and procedures are designed to be fair and transparent, and are applied consistently in accordance with the Schools Admissions Code. These policies and procedures are approved and determined by Council and scrutinised regularly by the Local Admissions Forum.

Shropshire Council performs at the head of the local authority league table in terms of allocating school places in accordance with first preferences. To this end the vast majority of Shropshire children are allocated a place at their preferred school. To achieve this specific admission criteria apply. Information for parents is published annually at this time of year which sets out the criteria, process, and deadlines explaining how and when to submit an application for a school place for the next academic year. It does unfortunately remain that for various reasons families do not meet the deadline or submit alternative preferences. However, officers from the Schools Admissions Team provide advice and support for parents and schools, and administer the applications as they are received. They also attend appeal panels when parents choose to exercise their right to challenge the school place that they have been allocated.

QUESTION 3

MR DAVID ROBERTS the Portfolio Holder for
will ask the following question:

How much did your recent leadership course cost this Council

The Leader, **MR KEITH BARROW** will reply as follows:

The Leeds Castle Programme is a unique leadership development experience, run by the Local Government Leadership Centre, for Council Leaders and Chief Executives. Each cohort of 20 participants is selected to attend on the basis of having the potential to be the best in their field, and the faculty members contributing to the programme are world class authors, academics and leaders from the private and public sectors.

Participants attend 10 days of training over three blocks, one of which is in an overseas city, where an in-depth case study is carried out on how other countries are tackling the big challenges facing local government today. The cohort I'm part of includes, for example, the Leaders of Cornwall and Somerset County Councils. We have deepened our understanding of the connection between good

leadership and the success of a council - and of the locality it serves, "Great leaders make great places".

The total cost of the programme, not including the time of the Leadership Centre staff is £8,000, but the cost to participants is £5,000, with the balance funded from Government grant. Given the quality of the programme, its successes, and its benefits for local councils, this represents excellent value-for-money.

The programme is just one example of the investment this Council is making in developing all elected Members to be confident and capable in their roles. This will ensure that our towns and villages in Shropshire get the high quality of community leadership they need and deserve.

QUESTION 4

MR ALAN MOSLEY will ask the following question:

Does the Leader accept that the impact of the cuts in our budget are likely to affect young people, the most vulnerable and older people to a disproportionate degree? Will he ensure that the outcome of the cuts on these most affected groups will be researched through rigorous impact assessments so that action to mitigate the effects of the cuts on such groups can be instigated.

The Leader, **MR KEITH BARROW** will reply as follows:

The Coalition Government has already taken action to move people into work and off an unhealthy dependency on welfare benefits and support from the state. At the local level, we must decide to what extent our services for some residents should be subsidised by the taxpayer, as opposed to being paid for by those who use them.

Nevertheless, I have made a firm public commitment that the Council will continue to protect the vulnerable and most needy. Not all young people or older people fit into this category. We will also find new ways of helping those with the time and skills to put something back into their local community, as part of our plan to create the Big Society in Shropshire, so that neighbours help each other.

Our newly formulated Scrutiny Committees will, no doubt, look at our Budget proposals in depth. My expectation is that, as part of that they will examine the effects of changes in funding allocations to particular services on different groups in our local communities.