



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Council
23 rd June 2011

<u>Item</u>
7
Public

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OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

1. Background

- 1.1 At Shropshire Council, we are committed to openness and transparency and believe that for democratic accountability it is crucial that residents have access to information about how the Council spends money on services and how it arrives at decisions made on their behalf.
- 1.2 We are harnessing and developing our use of technology to make it easier for people to access information in convenient formats. This is responding to increasing levels of public interest in Council activities and recognises that if people can quickly and easily find out what they need, it reduces our costs and increases our efficiency.

2. Transformation Programme

- 2.1 Shropshire Council is reviewing every aspect of the work we do through a full transformation programme, re-shaping how the council works and how it will run services for Shropshire in the future.
- 2.2 The transformation programme is centred around people, place and changing the way we do things, making sure we provide services that meet the needs of the people and communities we serve. As part of this programme, we are fully reviewing our approach to communication, making sure it is as efficient and effective as possible.

3. Helping local people to become “armchair auditors”

- 3.1 I am committed, on behalf of the Council, to being open and transparent, so that members of the public can be assured that we are acting appropriately and spending money wisely on their behalf. For some time we have been publishing details of Member’s allowances and senior management expenses for public scrutiny, and were one of the first local authorities to do this. Such information was published in advance of new Government publication requirements and, in a number of areas, we publish information beyond what is required, such as providing information relating to senior management expenses with monthly updates.

- 3.2 We also publish data relating to all ‘Supplier payments over £500’ (since October 2010) and are seen by independent websites as one of the leaders in making data available to the public. In addition to making such information available for public scrutiny, it is provided with a licence that empowers members of the public or commercial organisations to use the published information for their own purposes, free of charge. We have extended the data available to include our contracts register and are in the process of adding details of successful tenders. We aim to make additional information available where it is practical to do so and to meet public demand.

4. Responding to how people expect to communicate now

- 4.1 Our transparent and open approach will promote accountability to local people, providing more information for our residents about what we are doing, and we will be exploring new ways of bringing this information actively to people, including harnessing new technologies.
- 4.2 We have been working on the development of a range of new and innovative ways to deliver services and generate greater engagement with our communities, in particular to new and wider audiences who have previously been hard to reach. This reflects our understanding of how local people expect to communicate with us in the future. This includes rolling out new social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr, to bring a greater range of information to our residents in new and different ways.
- 4.3 We have also been working on social marketing projects around Local Joint Committees and Housing services. These projects will use social media to help build community capacity and resilience and we will shortly be piloting a new, and exciting, member led project in Cleobury Mortimer, as well as a joint agency led social housing 'hyperlocal' project in Tasley.
- 4.4 Recent events in Australia have highlighted the role social media can play in emergency and disaster relief situations. We are currently working on a toolkit for the use of social media in emergency situations, to be able to bring vital information to our residents as quickly as possible.
- 4.5 We will also be helping elected members embrace this new way for us to communicate, to ensure that they have the skills, support and confidence to use social media effectively to lead change from the heart of their communities.

5. Open source data

- 5.1 Opening up available information, data and data visualisation tools are key elements that will underpin any new ways we develop services in the future. We are currently trialling the use of open-source and available data, and mobile phone applications, as part of a leisure and culture

project to encourage participation in leisure activities across Shropshire. This project will also have a wider impact on the business and visitor economy and will serve as a pilot for the use of these new technologies in wider service delivery models.

6. Efficiency savings

- 6.1 Understanding and confidence are key to us successfully employing this new way of communicating. We are working closely with staff and councillors to provide an understanding of these new cost effective service channels, across a range of outcomes, including service delivery, customer insight and engagement. This includes reviewing all our marketing activity to ensure cost effectiveness.

7. Newsroom

- 7.1 We will continue to work closely with our colleagues in the more traditional media to help provide them with the information that they need to be able to report what we are doing accurately and provide independent challenge. To help with this, we have launched a new way to disseminate information about the Council's decisions and activities.
- 7.2 Shropshire Newsroom has been developed internally within the council and provides up to date information bulletins at the touch of a button. It provides a variety of ways for people to access council information; people can view our latest videos and reports; upload pictures and listen to the latest podcast, while still accessing the latest articles and news stories. Likewise, the media are able to receive the news alerts wherever they are, in real time.
- 7.3 Hosting news in this way ensures that the media and residents can receive accurate information, as it is released, in a way that suits them, as well as being assured that it is the most up to date information.
- 7.4 There is also a free Newsroom app available, that people can download to their iPhones and smart phones. This allows you to access the most accurate up to date news about Shropshire Council from wherever you are in the world!

8. Keeping residents in touch

- 8.1 Through the transformation programme, we have looked at new ways of delivering services that will allow us to have a closer working relationship with our communities. To do this, we have developed a new way for residents to report problems that matter to them at a very local level.
- 8.2 “Love Clean Streets” is on our website and gives people the opportunity to report issues such as potholes or graffiti via text, photos or through mobile applications. It then allows the public to review its progress through to successful completion, showing real time results for issues local people are concerned about.

- 8.3 Public engagement enhances our effectiveness and helps improve the quality of the decisions we make. We want to create better opportunities for residents to participate in shaping the way that local services are delivered and we will increase and improve opportunities for public participation.

9. Communication across the public sector

- 9.1 During September and October last year, we worked with our public sector colleagues to hold a successful series of major public events around the county, encouraging residents to 'join the conversation' and give them a real opportunity to help shape the changing face of public services in Shropshire.
- 9.2 It was the first time that all local public services, including Shropshire Council, the police, the fire and rescue service, the health service's primary care trust and Jobcentre Plus, came together to talk collectively with our residents about the strategic issues affecting the county.
- 9.3 The events were successful and truly did help all of us understand what was important to the people of Shropshire. The valuable information gained from the meetings is helping us shape how public services are delivered in the future, in the face of unprecedented Government funding cuts and a rapid drive to provide greater public value.
- 9.4 For Shropshire Council it has helped us develop our transformation programme that is bringing about a major rethink in the way we, as a local authority, deliver our services to local people.

10. Communicating service transformation

- 10.1 A clear acknowledgement of this will be evident in the way we are seeking to transform the future of Adult Social Care in Shropshire.
- 10.2 We are committed to ensuring that we listen and work with the people who use these services, their families and carers, as we embark on a journey of positive change to shift the balance of care towards personalised services in community settings, to help people achieve the outcomes they want and lead more independent lives.
- 10.3 We will work with the people who access our Adult Social Care services to bring together their views, thoughts and aspirations for the service, which will form the basis of a shared vision for future delivery.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 Openness and transparency will become the cornerstone of how we deliver all services in the future. We aim to further develop cost effective communication with people in ways which make it easier for them to understand our services, tell us what they think, and help us improve

what we do. This will give local people real influence over the decisions we make on their behalf and ensure that we are more accountable for the public money we spend.