

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**AGENDA ITEM 6**

**QUESTION 1**

**MR TED CLARKE** will ask the following question:

Could the Leader/Portfolio Holder please give a full account of Shropshire Council's use of the £20/30 million cash balances it inherited from the former Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council in April 2009?

**MR KEITH BARROW**, the Leader of the Council will reply:

The General fund balance transferred from Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council was £2,078,000. Of this figure, £164,000 had been ringfenced to Town only activities and was, therefore, transferred to Shrewsbury Town Council. The remaining balance was used to partially fund redundancy costs necessary to deliver the savings relating to the formation of the Unitary Council, and was also used to offset a budgeted contribution from balances that had been supporting the base budget.

The new unitary Council also inherited £361,407 in earmarked reserves. Of this, £78,292 was again transferred to Shrewsbury Town Council, as it related to the Mayors Account and to the Market in Shrewsbury. The remaining reserves were earmarked for specific purposes by Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council and these were maintained by the unitary authority.

A usable capital receipts reserve of £16.3m was also inherited from Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council. Capital receipts are not allocated to particular scheme budgets and so this, in addition to other inherited balances from the old District Councils, has been used to fund Shropshire Council's agreed capital programme since 2009.

This Council's actions are normal in circumstances of local government reorganisation. The figure for SABC's cash balances stated by Councillor Clarke covers both revenue and capital funding, but (at £30 million) is grossly exaggerated.

**QUESTION 2**

**MR TED CLARKE** will ask the following question:

If the Council Tax collection rate again exceeds expectations will this authority now agree to share the surplus with all our Town and Parish Councils (pro-rata to their individual demand) as it does already with both the Fire and Police Authorities?

**MR KEITH BARROW**, the Leader of the Council will reply:

In line with the legislative framework of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) and the Local Authorities Funds Regulations 1992, the Collection Fund surplus/deficit distribution is only borne between Shropshire Council as the billing authority and its two major preceptors, West Mercia Police and Shropshire Fire Authority. We have no obligation or plans to distribute surplus to Local Councils, who can determine their own precept level without capping, and where the small amounts involved in each case would be outweighed by the administrative costs involved in such action.

### **QUESTION 3**

**MRS HEATHER KIDD** will ask the following question:

The Coalition Government has awarded Shropshire Council with £2.8million as a reward for house building. A number of local authorities are using this as a golden opportunity to invest the money in training (apprentiships) for the construction industry, helping to trigger more home building for local people, bringing old stock back into use and heating and insulation grants. Could the Council outline their strategy (including a timescale) for using the new homes bonus to give the best outcome for Shropshire's people, please?

**MR MALCOLM PRICE**, the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning will reply:

Shropshire Council welcomes the scale of this funding, as recognition of our enabling approach to local planning. Decisions on how best to deploy this will be taken to keep the home building programme in Shropshire vibrant, to stimulate new sustainable growth, and to further underpin our localism agenda. To this end, I am proposing a range of measures to both enhance the supply of housing and to support Flourishing Shropshire communities. These include:

- Working closely with the development industry to ensure an adequate supply of suitable developable land;
- Enabling, supporting and facilitating the work of the Homes and Communities Agency and our partner registered housing providers, to maximise their planned investment in Shropshire to meet our pressing need for additional affordable accommodation,( for instance supporting a new approach to Community Led Housing that we are jointly developing);
- Working with private sector landlords and owners of vacant property to ensure that we step up our efforts to reduce vacancy rates and bring more homes back into beneficial use;
- Providing focussed support to the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership to help marshal available resources and release further potential for growth that is sustainable and sensitive and which harnesses, rather than harms, our assets;
- Working with and rewarding communities for their efforts on bringing forward new Community Led Plans which facilitate growth in their towns and villages, thus supporting more sustainable places to live and work, thereby underpinning the conditions for growth that will benefit us all in Shropshire.

We are already developing sound governance arrangements for the management of the Community Infrastructure Levy, which seeks to bring Shropshire Councillors together with their communities on a regular basis to make key decisions about using resources in a way that is targeted to meeting local priorities. I envisage that the New Homes Bonus can make a significant contribution to this new and positive way of local working and will bring forward my proposals shortly.

#### **QUESTION 4**

**MR ALAN MOSLEY** will ask the following question:

Significant concerns are being expressed about the operation of our contract with Veolia including:

- last winter's collections and communications,
- the withdrawal of the cardboard collection,
- arrangements for plastics,
- the cost of us subsidising Veolia's planning appeal and
- the terms of the contract per se.

Therefore, does the Leader agree that an in depth scrutiny of the contract is necessary and hence, will he request that this is undertaken as soon as possible?

**MR KEITH BARROW**, the Leader of the Council will reply:

Councillor Mosley might have expressed concern at these things, but clearly these are not shared by local residents in Shropshire, who continue to enjoy a high quality and good value service from our contractor.

In common with all our externally procured services, the contract with Veolia is being reviewed, to explore whether even better value is possible, as the public would expect in these difficult times.

#### **1. Last winter's collections and communications**

The waste collection and disposal service ran very well during the exceptional and extreme winter weather conditions which severely disrupted kerbside waste and recycling collections across Shropshire and the rest of the country, between 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009 and January 13<sup>th</sup> 2010. A report on the service during the bad weather conditions was submitted to the Development Services Scrutiny Committee at the January 26<sup>th</sup> 2010 meeting. The outcome from this meeting was that there were no concerns regarding operations, but it was felt necessary to review how timely information was provided to residents and elected Members in such circumstances. A revised protocol was presented to the Protecting and Enhancing our Environment Scrutiny Committee on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2010. The protocol involved a clearer and simpler message to residents explaining how the service would operate in bad conditions and what action they should take. Last winter saw similar severe weather conditions, but complaints were significantly less and the revised plan was considered to be a major improvement. This highlights a clear case of improved service delivery through listening to local people and learning from previous experience.

## **2. The withdrawal of the cardboard collection**

Members have already had very full explanations of this, and there is no need to go on fuelling the myth created by Local Labour Party Members that this is an issue of widespread concern for local people, which it is not.

The unexpected revision by the Government of the national quality standard for compost BSi PAS 100 prevented the collection of cardboard with garden waste in a large number of local council areas across the country. To mitigate against this national change, Veolia, working with Shropshire Council, introduced some 20 cardboard bring banks across the county, with the focus on Market Towns where possible. This interim arrangement for collection of cardboard will remain in place, whilst an affordable alternative solution to reintroduce kerbside recycling of cardboard is sought. A 6-month trial is being undertaken in the Whittington area and an interim progress report will be available within 3 months. Approximately 200 tonnes of cardboard have been collected from the cardboard banks since their introduction in December 2011.

## **3. Arrangements for plastics**

A county wide introduction of kerbside plastic bottle collections commenced in Spring 2010 on a phased basis starting in Oswestry. The programme was completed in October 2011, with Bridgnorth being the final phase of this programme. This means that every household in Shropshire now receives a plastic bottle kerbside collection service. So, what is there to be concerned about, given this welcome service improvement.

## **4. The cost of us subsidising Veolia's planning appeal and**

## **5. The terms of the contract per se.**

Again, where is the evidence that this is a matter of widespread public concern? On September 27<sup>th</sup> 2007, Shropshire County Council, acting as contracting Authority for the Shropshire Waste Partnership, signed a 27 year waste PFI contract with VES. This arrangement remains a very good deal for local people.

This included the requirement for indemnification by the Council of Veolia's appeal costs in accordance with clause 10.4 of the contract in the event of the Council not approving the Waste Treatment Facility (WTF) planning application. The details of the costs of indemnification to Veolia are commercially sensitivity.

The Council and Veolia have in place a robust and professional working relationship and remain committed to the delivery of high quality and cost effective waste management services for the residents of Shropshire for a long time to come.

## **QUESTION 5**

**MR CHRIS MELLINGS** will ask the following question:

Following Ofsted's recent comments, what steps are being taken to support improvement in those 31 Shropshire schools identified as part of the 3000 "stuck" schools nationally?

**MRS CELIA MOTLEY**, the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills will reply:

Twenty-nine primary and secondary schools in Shropshire have had two consecutive Ofsted judgements of satisfactory. The two most recent inspections for these schools have taken place between the summer term 2005 and January 2012 and have been conducted under three different inspection arrangements. Inspection judgements have therefore been made against changing criteria, with each new inspection framework increasing the expectations on schools. Schools which have improved significantly can therefore be judged satisfactory in successive inspections. A number of the schools are not “stuck” but have been improving at a significant rate.

Against this background of higher expectations of schools, 42 schools have maintained a judgement of good across two inspections and 29 have improved from satisfactory to good. Seventeen schools have maintained or improved to a judgement of outstanding. Eight new schools, created through amalgamation, have only had one inspection. The remaining 30 schools have either improved from inadequate to satisfactory or better, or have dropped a grade.

The LA’s school performance monitoring policy involves bi-annual reviews of school performance and following these reviews schools are identified for additional levels of LA challenge and support. They may be offered additional School Improvement Adviser time and other support, for example through the LA’s Education Improvement Service or a Local Leader of Education who is a headteacher from a high performing school. Action plans are put in place, with clear targets for improvement. An additional programme focussing on supporting a move from satisfactory to good has also been offered to a number of primary schools, and a programme to strengthen leadership and management has been offered to secondary schools.

Five schools which have remained in the satisfactory category were within the Council’s school organisation statutory proposals, and three are undergoing closure.

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