

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTION 1

MR PETER NUTTING will ask the following question:

Last year (2011/2012) the surplus on the Collection Fund for Shropshire Council was £2.316 million; this followed surpluses of £498,000 (2009/2010) and £541,000 (2010/2011).

This surplus was shared between Shropshire Council, West Mercia Police Authority and Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority even though a significant proportion of the collection fund was collected on behalf of the town and parish councils in the county, who received nothing.

Based on precepts the Town and Parish Councils in Shropshire would share £82,698 of which Shrewsbury Town Council would receive £13,448 as per the attached summary.

The year 2011/2012 was probably slightly out of the normal but a surplus of around half a million pounds is not uncommon and is probably now more likely given the risk averse nature of the billing authority at present, who have further reduced its Collection Rate for 2013/2014. This also has an impact on the council tax base.

Therefore, will the Leader of the Council look into ways of distributing the surplus on the Collection Fund more fairly and return to the Town and Parish Council sector money collected on its behalf.

	Precepts £	Actual Distribution of surplus £	Revised Distribution of surplus £
Shropshire Council	128,986,000	1,910,000	1,826,674
West Mercia Police Authority	19,547,000	276,000	276,821
Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority	9,166,000	130,000	129,807
Parish & Town Councils	5,839,492	0	82,698
	163,538,492	2,316,000	2,316,000
Effective surplus per £1 precept		0.0141618	
Bridgnorth	518,157		7,338
Broseley	174,615		2,473
Church Stretton & Little Stretton	255,921		3,624
Ellesmere	188,777		2,673
Ludlow	330,988		4,687
Market Drayton	416,080		5,892
Much Wenlock	149,110		2,112
Oswestry	366,000		5,183
Shifnal	353,426		5,005
Shrewsbury	949,575		13,448
Wem	241,502		3,420
Whitchurch	364,637		5,164
Others less than £140,000	1,530,704		21,678
	<u>5,839,492</u>		<u>82,698</u>

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

There is no statutory mechanism to distribute collection fund surpluses or deficits amongst local preceptors. Legislation is clear about the mechanism for distribution amongst major precepting authorities which for Shropshire Council is limited to West Mercia Police and Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority.

This arrangement pre dates the unitary authority and was the same legislation followed by the former District and Borough Councils.

Now that Council Tax Benefit has been localised and is expressed as Council Tax discounts, the risk attached to the Collection Fund has increased and accordingly collection rates assumptions have been slightly reduced. The collection rates across the population are expected to be more variable, with a higher risk of reduced collection rates being borne by the major precepting authorities potentially in the form of collection fund deficits.

This risk is averaged out as the distribution of the collection fund surplus or deficit is based upon collection rates across the whole county, and this is the area covered by the major precepting authorities. To consider distribution at a local level would also bring into question collection rates at a local level. Before a local parish council could be given a share of the collection fund surplus or deficit, it would need to be established what the collection rate is for their local tax payers, otherwise some Town and Parish Councils would be unfairly cross subsidising others.

Town and Parish Councils do not bear a risk and instead receive their precept at the value they request. This certainty, the lack of a mechanism for distribution beyond major preceptors and the necessary administration costs associated with distribution of many small amounts of money are the reasons for the current arrangements.

QUESTION 2

MR PETER NUTTING will ask the following question:

I represent the Copthorne area of Shrewsbury and both The Kingswood Estate and The Redwood Estate suffer from serious parking problems caused by the nearby hospitals, and in particular The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital. The problem is partly due to a shortage of staff parking at the hospital and therefore some staff choose to leave their cars in nearby residential areas, but also because in the afternoons between 2.00pm and 4.00pm the visitor car parks at the hospital are jam packed and there simply is nowhere for cars to be parked on site. This problem is likely to get worse with the introduction of increased car parking charges at the hospital, the increase in workload due to the hospital introducing more day surgery and also an increase in students at the college facility. I welcome the increase in use of the site as it provides excellent employment opportunities for local people but the problems of car parking on site are not being addressed and this is causing distress to local residents. Swiss Farm Road is a bus route but poor parking means that buses cannot always use the road and poor parking by hospital staff and visitors near peoples' houses mean that residents are often blocked in their drives. The hospital has planning permission to provide an extra 100 parking spaces but seems reluctant to do the work required due to financial restraints.

Therefore can the portfolio holder look into this problem as a matter of urgency and ask officers to find ways to help ease the pressure on the local residential road network.

MR SIMON JONES, the Portfolio Holder for Traffic Management and Road Safety will reply:

Parking at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital has been a problem for a number of years. The major concern is displacement of cars onto local roads and estates. Many of them are staff, with some visitors also, looking to avoid parking charges. This is not unique to Shrewsbury and it is common to have these issues at any major hospital.

The Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust are looking to make changes to their current parking as it reviews the existing travel plan. They are introducing an Automatic Number Plate Recognition system later this year, which will help to make more use of the existing parking spaces currently available. They are also introducing different charges, some to benefit long term patients and more regular visitors, others to encourage people to use alternatives to cars to get to the hospital. Simply offering free parking is not the answer; the physical number of cars for the available spaces is the problem.

As there are proposed changes to charges this has highlighted concern locally, with a fear that there will more parking pressures placed on local roads. For this reason Shropshire Council has been working with the NHS Trust to seek to minimise these impacts. We are working proactively and considering interim and longer term measures with the trust. Communication with the hospital has greatly improved recently and they are looking to appoint someone to specifically address these problems.

Early last year we undertook a consultation with residents on Swiss Farm Road, one of the most affected roads. There was a 70% return rate, of these 70% were in favour of some restrictions and 30% against. Of those in favour there was no clear consensus as to what restrictions to apply. We will continue to work as closely as possible with residents and the Trust and keep under review parking in the area. In reality there needs to be an integrated approach with investment, and changes on the hospital site, integrated travel arrangements and appropriate parking restrictions. It needs to be a balanced approach.

At this time the hospital have planning permission from 2010 for an additional 60 parking spaces, which they have not completed. They have completed a 191 space temporary car park, for which the temporary permission is about to lapse. We are discussing the future of these permissions with the hospital.

QUESTION 3

MR TED CLARKE will ask the following question:

Members will recall a headline in Shropshire Star of October 11th 2012, publicising the brave re-think on the previous savage axing of all Sunday bus services in the Shrewsbury area.

The Portfolio Holder responsible for public transport was reported as announcing that the extra revenue to be generated from introduction of on-

street Sunday parking charges in Shrewsbury, would be used to fund early reinstatement of the Sunday bus services across the town area.

I understand that although the long muted Sunday street parking charges were commenced in Shrewsbury some weeks ago, the entire town area still remains without any Sunday bus services, and the new Arriva garage continues to be closed on that day.

Could the Portfolio Holder please advise us and the many long suffering members of the public who are reliant on public transport, when we can expect our sorely missed Sunday bus services to resume in Shrewsbury, as was promised last October . . . ?

MR SIMON JONES, the Portfolio Holder for Public Transport and Car Parking will reply:

On the grounds of continuing low usage and the resulting high cost of subsidy, and in response to budget pressures at the time, the Sunday service network ceased in July 2011. This was necessary at the time to allow the focus of limited subsidy on continuing to provide access to work, health and other essential services Monday to Saturday, and was part of the Bus Strategy for Shropshire agreed by Members in 2011.

I fully appreciate the benefits of reintroducing Sunday bus services and as mentioned in the press article from October 2012 we had hoped to consider this following the implementation of Sunday on-street parking charges. I am still hopeful that we may be able to do this however we need to assess the full impact of the above on the Council's budget and the recently announced reduction in the overall financial settlement for the Council leading to a requirement for further savings.

QUESTION 4

MR ALAN MOSLEY will ask the following question:

Since May 2009 how many staff have left the authority with a redundancy and/or other compensatory payment. Please provide a summary of such staff by pay band.

What has been the total cost of such payments overall and specifically in terms of:

1. Redundancy payments and how many have received these?
2. Payments in lieu of salary and how many have received these?
How many staff have received in excess of one year's salary in compensation?
3. How many staff, and to what value, have been granted additional pension awards? What has been the additional strain on the pension fund?
4. What other compensatory payments have been given and how many have received these? How many staff went with a compromise agreement and how much did they receive over and above their redundancy and correct notice?

Could you please give details of the numbers who have received total payments of between:

- 10K – 49K
- 50K – 99K
- 100K – 149K
- 150K – 199K
- Over 200K

I would also like formal confirmation as to whether the former Chief Executive's employment with the Council is ended and whether any compensatory payments were made as a consequence.

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

Information is available on page 88 of the Statement of Accounts, Years 2011-2012.

The information in the following table updates this for 2012-2013.

	<i>Total no of exit packages by cost band</i>			<i>Total cost of exit packages in each band £'000</i>		
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
£0 - £20,000	57	188	54	476	1,397	441
£20,001 - £40,000	30	58	19	887	1,620	551
£40,001 - £60,000	9	26	7	429	1,207	322
£60,001 - £80,000	9	16	5	613	1,126	334
£80,001 - £100,000	2	4	5	180	334	444
£100,001 - £150,000	3	3	5	373	351	588
£150,001 - £200,000	3	1	1	526	169	182
Total	113	296	96	3,484	6,204	2,861

These figures include pension strain, compromise agreements and ending of Fixed Term Contracts. The 2012/13 figures are up until the end of December 2012.

The Chief Executive's employment with Shropshire Council expired on 30th November 2012 by way of contractual notice and therefore no compensatory payment was made.

QUESTION 5

MR ALAN MOSLEY will ask the following question:

On 13th January I asked the following questions about the appointment, costs and outcomes of work by Odgers.

- When, and by whom, was the appointment made?
- What were the precise terms of appointment and when does any contract come to an end?
- Who have Odgers been reporting to?
- What is the total cost relating to his services and ancillary expenses, including payments to related third parties?
- What has the consultancy achieved?

Some of the answers can now be found in responses to a related FOI and I am pleased that a request that the Audit Committee look into various matters related to this has been agreed.

However, it would appear that other consultants have been used at considerable cost and that similar questions should be asked about their appointment and functioning. Therefore:

Since 2009 what other consultants have been used for matters related to IP&E development, Shared Services and other transformation processes, legal advice, financial advice and any aspects of the commissioning of services. What periods were they engaged for, by whom and at what cost to the Council?

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

Following a request by Councillor Mosley and Councillor Hartin, the Chair of the Audit Committee has agreed to undertake a review and a scope for this has been set. It would not be appropriate at this stage to respond to any matters that may be considered as part of that review before it is completed.

It is therefore recommended that a response to the question be deferred until such time as the Audit Committee has had the opportunity to report on its findings.

QUESTION 6

MR ALAN MOSLEY will ask the following question:

The post-Christmas community cardboard collection service in Castlefields, and other parts of the County were a great success with many hundreds showing their support for recycling and voicing demands that their kerbside collection service be reinstated.

Given the negative impact on recycling rates and on people's attitude towards the service, will the portfolio holder countermand the current policy of doing nothing and instigate an urgent review with the intention of reinstating the service at regular intervals forthwith, with a permanent full service in place by spring 2014?

MR MIKE OWEN the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Prosperity will reply:

Firstly we should remember that the decision to remove cardboard from the garden waste bin was forced on the Council and Veolia by a change in composting quality standards. It was not something that we wanted to do and it is not possible to return to that collection method as the new standards still apply and there is no indication that they will be changed.

Rather than doing nothing the response was to introduce an interim measure while looking at a number of alternative methods of collecting cardboard from the kerbside which could be implemented quickly.

A number of alternatives were examined including a dedicated cardboard collection and adding light card to the existing paper collections. Unfortunately, these all cost over £1m per year to run, and in the case of the dedicated collection scheme nearly £6m in the first year including the cost of containers. The principle reason for the increase in annual running costs was the need to either change or add to the existing collection fleet. Given the numerous other pressures on Council budgets the decision was taken to continue with the interim measure of bring banks, funded by Veolia, and use the time to look at

options for the medium term in which changes to the collection fleet could be made as planned within the existing contract. In the current financial climate it would be irresponsible to take on significant an extra burden if Veolia could begin service changes in 2014 at no additional collection cost to the Council.

Work has already started to review the entire collection service, in conjunction with Veolia and with support from the Waste Resources Action Programme, a government sponsored body which will provide independent advice at no cost to the Council. This approach will aim to identify options for an optimum collection service for Shropshire, increasing recycling and covering a wider range of materials including cardboard.

We want to make changes, but in a structured way rather than make major and expensive changes to the fleet in the short term to accommodate less than 2% of the total waste that we produce. In the last 12 months, investment by Veolia, particularly in plastics recycling and food waste, has seen the current recycling rate rise to 53%. So while we would like to improve this still further by collecting more material from the kerbside it is clear that the service is performing well despite the cardboard issue.

QUESTION 7

MRS LIZ PARSONS will ask the following question:

The Lord Hill Column has been fenced off now for some time and the public would like answers to the following questions:

When will the statue be repaired or made safe?

When is the security fencing likely to be removed from around the statue?

How much has it cost so far to have the Column fenced off in this way?

MR R TINDALL the Portfolio Holder for Asset Management will reply as follows:

When will the statue be repaired or made safe?

The Conservation report for the Column has now been received and the recommendations/options within it to either repair or replace the statue are being considered by Officers and Members. English Heritage must be consulted on the options being considered before a solution can be adopted. The options will vary in terms of timescales and costs dependant on whether a decision is taken to repair or replace the statue. We intend to ask Local Members, members of the public, partners and stakeholders for their view ensuring that this is in accordance with English Heritage guidelines.

When is the security fencing likely to be removed from around the statue?

The fencing will have to stay in place until the statue has been repaired or replaced or until the statue has been temporarily removed for repair or replacement.

If the statue is repaired, then due to the overall condition of the statue the advice from the Conservation Surveyor is that, as a safety precaution, the Heras fencing should be put around the statue throughout periods of frost expectation every year going forward as it could not be guaranteed that further erosion and breaking off due to rain and frost could never be ruled out.

How much has it cost so far to have the column fenced off?

The fencing was placed around the statue first in May 2012 when the first debris fall was reported. Thirty panels were erected at a cost of £300 per month. Cost to December 2012, £2,400. On the advice of the Conservation Surveyor as above and his indicated timescales to effect repair/replacement, the decision was taken to purchase the Heras fencing at a cost of £900 rather than continue rental at £300 per month.

At the end of December 2012, further debris fall was experienced and the fencing had to be expanded outwards, the debris falling outside of the previous area. Twenty more panels have been on hire since then at a cost of £200 per month, cost to end of February for these is £400.

QUESTION 8

MR JON TANDY will ask the following question:

What has the Council put in place to help people who have lost their jobs -

What support they will get?

What phone number they should ring?

What plans have Shropshire Council got to bring high quality jobs to Shropshire?

MR MIKE OWEN the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Prosperity will reply:

What has the Council put in place to help people who have lost their jobs -

The Council through the Business and Enterprise Service run the Rapid Response Redundancy and Recruitment Support Team. This team is made up of colleagues from across the Council who provide support with skills training, benefit advice, housing advice, mortgage and council tax benefit advice, debt advice, business start-up advice and grant advice. We work in a joint team with Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau and ACAS.

Shrewsbury Prison is one of 7 prisons to close across England. It will formally close on 31/3/13.

Shropshire Council already have their Rapid Redundancy and Recruitment Support Team working with those whose jobs are at risk within the prison service to help staff to find work. Many of staff will move to nearby prisons.

In addition, Shropshire Council's Business & Enterprise Service is working jointly with the Ministry of Justice ensuring re-use of the site to regenerate that whole area of Shrewsbury. Uses being explored include hotel, residential, small business units, cafes and education use.

What support they will get?

The support they get is provided by the team highlighted above. Each element provides tailored support for the individuals facing redundancy.

What phone number they should ring?

The number to ring is 01743 252259 and contact is Peter Wilson

What plans have Shropshire Council got to bring high quality jobs to Shropshire?

Our plans for bringing high quality jobs to Shropshire are driven by the New Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy published December 2012. This was approved by cabinet at end of 2012. It has been put together by the Shropshire Business Board. The vision is to make "Shropshire's economy sustainable and businesses competitive and resilient. It has four priorities. These are 1) Accelerating business growth, 2) Infrastructure for growth 3) Stimulating our Growth Sectors 4) Our skilled and loyal workforce. As regards high quality jobs priority 3 is all about boosting business growth in our opportunity sectors:- that is land based industries such as food and drink manufacturing, the green economy and land owners and farmers then in our quality of life sectors which are the visitor economy, creative and cultural industries and the care industry. All of which is boosting knowledge based employment and increasing productivity, innovation and gross added value (GVA) from these sectors.

QUESTION 9

MR MANSELL WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

Laybourne Grange in West Malling, Kent is a similar development to Sutton Grange in Shrewsbury and featured prominently in the Taylor Wimpey Public Consultation exercise at the Lord Hill Hotel Shrewsbury earlier this year.

Will Shropshire Council ensure that Taylor Wimpey apply the same standards to their development at Sutton Grange as they have to their development at Leybourne Grange?

Taylor Wimpey (TW) according to their plans for Leybourne Grange (source TW) clearly indicate:

- * The establishment of a Community Development Trust (CDT).
- * All new homes to be built to "ECO-HOMES EXCELLENT" standard.
- * All affordable homes to conform to Code 3 (or Building Regs.equivalent)
- * The site will provide for 10% of energy from renewable sources, with a number of homes having solar panels. [Please note well that TW tell us Solar Panels are not popular with buyers. The implication is that we are stupid in Shropshire when compared with Kent]
- * TW claim they are committed to homes using no more than 32 cubic metres of water per year. Homes will be fitted with the necessary technology to achieve this.
- * A 'significant' number of homes will have grey water recycling facilities.
- * TW state a commitment to the use of building materials having "low embodied energy and toxicity".

- * 30% of materials by value will be from reclaimed/recycled sources.
- * 40% by weight will be sourced locally within a thirty mile radius of the development.
- * Homes will be to 'Lifetime Homes' standards i.e. designed to allow future flexibility and adaptability to serve changing family needs.
- * Private and affordable homes to be indistinguishable and fully integrated throughout the development
- * Recognised standards – 'Secured by Design', 'Lifetime Homes', 'Inclusive Design', 'Building for Life' will be used throughout the development.

The above features are included in the Laybourne Grange Development in Kent. However very few are being incorporated into the Sutton Grange Plans: Are we therefore to conclude that in relation to Sutton Grange the development is being destined to reach 'bog standard' mediocrity?

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

The Shrewsbury South Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) is one of two sustainable urban extensions identified to meet the town's future housing and employment needs in Shropshire Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document

The Shrewsbury South SUE Masterplan has been drawn up in response to this, and includes proposals to create approximately 900 new homes together with employment land, a neighbourhood centre, community facilities and public open space.

In October 2012, following a period of public consultation, the Shrewsbury South SUE Masterplan was approved by Shropshire Council. The masterplan is now being used to inform all future planning applications for the Shrewsbury South SUE area – including Sutton Grange. Details of the masterplan and the Sutton Grange consultation proposals are available to view on the Council's Website.

Sustainable development is not simply a matter of energy reduction. Councillor Williams has referred to a number of attributes of a scheme promoted by Taylor Wimpey in Kent including provision of solar panels, grey water recycling and low energy design. Although these factors are important, sustainable development is also achieved by promoting alternatives to car use, maximising connectivity to local facilities for cyclists and pedestrians, enhancing green networks and open space for communities and providing sustainable drainage systems to mitigate the potential for surface water flooding all of which are being integrated to the Sutton grange proposals. Officers will, in addition to this, work with the developers to facilitate a development that meets the aspirations of the adopted masterplan.

Councillor Williams also refers to community benefits arising from the scheme in Kent where a community development trust is being established, supported by a financial contribution from the developer. In Shropshire, housing schemes are of course subject to the Community Infrastructure Levy which could make contributions toward to pay for local facilities identified by local communities such as public transport, roads, leisure, education and health.

QUESTION 10

MR MANSELL WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

How can we get more resources into building genuine low-cost homes on a substantial scale?

All schemes in which a few "affordable" houses are tacked on to a large private development, (and others where the developer somehow ducks out of it altogether) will never make a real shift to meet the ever-growing need.

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

This question about how we can get more resources into low-cost housing on a substantial scale is of course one that has exercised many Government bodies and housing associations for some time, and if there was an easy solution it would have become apparent by now.

Locally the solution is a combination of:

- Obtaining contributions to affordable housing from developers through planning policy mechanisms, and keeping contributions as high as possible within the bounds of viability and the NPPF, as we are already doing;
- Working with local registered providers through the Marches Housing & Planning Partnership and the Shropshire Social Housing Forum;
- Working with Registered Providers who are considering branching into the low-cost end of market housing (the appetite for this varies between different RPs);
- Influencing the type and mix of market housing that developers build, encouraging a greater proportion of low-cost market where that is supported by evidence and doesn't render development unviable, through the Type and Affordability of Housing SPD in combination with local housing assessments that will in future be included the Place Plans;
- Improving the viability of development in Shropshire by ensuring a plentiful supply of housing land through the SAMDev Plan. Lower land values as a result of competition in land will improve the viability of development, which in turn enables the local planning authority to ask for more contributions to affordable housing and a greater proportion of low-cost housing.

In other words, we lever in resources directly and indirectly from developers and landowners through the planning system, and are supportive of Registered Providers' attempts to deliver more through new models of delivery, working closely with them to achieve our common aim of increasing the supply of both affordable and low-cost housing.