

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**AGENDA ITEM 8**

**QUESTION 1**

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

If the Housing and Planning Bill is passed it will threaten the provision of affordable homes for rent and buy through:

- forcing 'high-value' council homes to be sold on the open market,
- extending the right-to-buy to housing association tenants and
- undermining Section 106 requirements on private developers to provide affordable homes.

Therefore will the Portfolio Holder give an assurance that he will commission an urgent report to analyse and report on the likely impact of the forced sale of council homes, the extension of right-to-buy and the 'starter homes' requirement on the local availability of affordable homes and to analyse and report on any further likely impacts of the Bill on the local area."

**MR MALCOLM PRICE**, the Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply:

It is absolutely right that we understand the implications for Shropshire of the provisions in the Housing and Planning Bill 2015.

A lot of the detail will emerge from ancillary legislation and regulations to be published at a later date. The intention of the Bill is clearly to encourage private home ownership and the detail will determine to what extent the delivery of rented affordable housing will be adversely affected.

Councils will be compelled to dispose of higher value properties as they become vacant, and marketed openly rather than specifically to people in need. The revenue from such property disposals will fund payments to housing associations allowing their tenants to exercise their right to buy. Early indications from the Gov't initial proposed regional valuation thresholds, is that they could affect nearly 10% of the Councils stock, affect a property type hardest to replace and are located in one geographical area.

The new right to buy scheme is being introduced to housing associations on a voluntary basis rather than through statute and the assumption is that it will closely correlate to the scheme offered to Council tenants. There may be some discretion to refuse in certain rural areas or on particularly specific property but in that event, the Tenant must be offered a portable discount bonus on another property.

The intention in terms of s106 payments on development sites is that the "starter home" is defined as affordable. These will be valued at 80% of the open

market value up to a “price cap” of £250k and to aid the developer to deliver, the development will be exempt from all s106/CIL obligations. The property will then cascade or revert to full open market value after 5yrs of ownership.

The initial guidance suggested the release of unused and previously undeveloped commercial, retail, and industrial land for Starter Homes, and supporting the regeneration of previously developed brownfield sites in the green belt by allowing them to be developed in the same way as other brownfield land, providing it contributes to Starter Homes, and subject to local consultation. However, after the Summer Budget, the government published its Productivity Plan which stated that proposals would be brought forward to include Starter Homes on “every reasonably sized housing site”. In order for the 20% discounts from market price to be funded, and in the absence of any other government proposal, we must assume that these sites would have reduced levels of other affordable housing funded through planning gain (Section 106 agreements).

The position in relation to affordable housing payments is that the Shropshire council policy still applies; this follows the successful legal challenge earlier this year by Reading and West Berkshire Council’s to the decision of Brandon Lewis in his Written Ministerial Statement. Notwithstanding this the Council’s policy is under review to ensure that it continues to offer an approach relevant to the socio-economic circumstances that apply across Shropshire.

## **QUESTION 2**

**MRS VIVIENNE PARRY** will ask the following question:

- a) Will Simon Jones be extending the £1 parking to Ludlow on Sunday, on an all year round basis? We were promised this some time ago at the In and Out meetings, to have the same advantages as Shrewsbury.
- b) Will Ludlow ever get the free parking at Christmas on Tinsel Tuesday's? This would bring us into line with Shrewsbury, where there is free parking on Wednesdays, helping the shops compete with the larger towns.

**MR SIMON JONES**, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport will reply:

- a. The £1 tariff in Shrewsbury followed a long term action plan and trial period of parking charges through joint partnership working with the Shrewsbury Improvement District (BID)  
It forms part of a wider action plan for the town and places a number of targets and actions for the BID which will be monitored by both parties.  
The Council is happy to work with representatives in Ludlow such as The Chamber of Trade and Town Council, but it would need to be linked with a wider town plan and long term strategy with delivery on wider areas than parking for further consideration.
- b. Free parking was agreed with the Town Council and Ludlow Chamber of Trade and starts every Tuesday from 8th to 22nd December 2015 from midday in the off street car parks

### **QUESTION 3**

**MR ROGER EVANS** will ask the following question:

The recently published accounts for ip&e covering its third year of operation and ending March 2015 show Directors were paid a total of £23,824. How many hours of work in total does this cover and are these the full extent of their involvement in the running of ip&e. Have the accuracy of the associated time sheets and figures been audited by Shropshire Council staff?

These accounts also show that during its third year of operation ip&e finally made a small profit of £28,029, having made a loss in each of the previous two years. Shropshire Council recently incurred costs in investigating a complaint concerning the actions of an ip&e Director. The notes of the investigation and the findings have recently been published. To carry out the investigation an external person was used. Can Council please be informed how much in total this investigation cost Shropshire Council? Further, can this total be split to show the cost of the Shropshire Council staff involved and the cost of using external persons to carry out the investigation? Will ip&e be invoiced for this and so reimburse the Council from its profits of £28,029.00 as it concerned one of their Directors.

On page 2 of the published accounts it states that the company will see some rapid growth during 2015–16. Much of this will come about purely by transferring Shropshire Council work and staff into the company. How much has the preparation for this transfer of staff and services to ip&e cost Shropshire Council and the tax payer in the first 6 months of this financial year? How much has been budgeted to pay for the staff cost in preparing all the documentation needed to transfer other staff to ip&e and P2P during the final 6 months of this financial year?

**MR STEVE CHARMLEY**, the Portfolio Holder for Business Growth, ip&e Culture and Commissioning (North) will reply:

A charge of £54,802 was made to ip&e Limited for 6 Council staff seconded for various periods during 2014/15 equating to approximately 1,400 hours in total. This charge was agreed between both the Council and ip&e Limited as representative of the time apportionment of the relevant staff. The charge of £23,824 for directors' remuneration relates to the proportion of time when two of the six seconded staff acted as directors of the company. This is part of the total charge of £54,802. The remainder is accounted for as wages.

The final cost of the investigation undertaken has not yet been calculated. External costs to date, however, total £9,782.80 excluding VAT. This investigation was instigated by Shropshire Council and there are no plans to invoice ip&e Limited for this. Officer time is not routinely recorded for individual pieces of work such as this.

Similarly, for all project work undertaken by the Council, officer time and cost is not routinely recorded, but absorbed within existing resources. There is no

additional staff cost for this work, however there is a resultant loss of resource to take forward other pieces of work.

#### **QUESTION 4**

**MR ROGER EVANS** will ask the following question:

During the last two years a number of questions have been asked re. the quality of ICT being used by Shropshire Council. Many staff and members have voiced complaints. Recently it has become apparent that investment is urgently needed. Have any extra staff been recruited, if so how many to help ensure our systems are made resilient. What is the estimated amount that will be needed to be spent on ICT in the 18 months commencing 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 and how much was spent in the 18 months ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015?“

**MR DAVID TURNER**, the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Finance & Support and IT will reply:

Thank you for your question.

As the relatively new portfolio holder for resources, including ICT, I have been on a steep learning curve over the past six weeks or so.

As you will know from the ICT Current Issues and Risk Report of October 2015 and the Internal Audit Reports over the last 12 months we have reached a point where future investment into our ICT has to be considered and some actions also need to be taken to make our current systems more resilient.

I am pleased to advise you that we expect to move our back up data centre to a new location offering enhanced environmental control and improved connectivity by the end of December 2015. Whilst users will not notice an increase in functionality, this will mean that our business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements will be significantly more robust. In other words, should our main data centre and it's local back-up be compromised, we can continue to work with our data through the back up facilities we have put in place. A breakdown of the work, plans and costs will be available to members on request. In addition, the cost of additional 8 short term staff to undertake the supporting ICT Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery core system testing and documentation is estimated to be £0.2m for three months.

The Council has undergone massive change since we last made major overhaul to our systems on becoming a unitary authority in 2009. We are currently reviewing the 150 plus services we offer, all of which are supported by ICT to some degree, and asking the public what they see as being most important to them through 'the Big Conversation'. We know that we can streamline our ICT to provide fewer separate systems and enable greater productivity of staff by reducing duplicate data input, extending mobile and flexible capabilities and improving business processes. We could also exploit cloud technology and remove the need to manage and maintain our own data

centres in the future. However, the business case for this investment will need to be proven in detail.

To develop business cases for investment in our IT architecture, a lead consultant, Adrian Ridpath, has been appointed. He is recruiting a team of 14 agency staff who will all work alongside our existing staff between now and March 2016 to design a proposed new ICT architecture. Our aim is to have sufficient additional staff resources to redesign the whole of the ICT architecture in a comparatively short time. This should present us with some 'invest to save proposals' which hopefully will prove that by buying or leasing new systems, equipment and training our staff, we will overall, save money and improve performance. The functionality and user experience of our ICT should be improved as well as offering new digital capability to our customers and service users who increasingly access the Council through the Internet. New systems will also likely be in a 'hosted environment' or in other words we will no longer need to maintain our own servers and our systems will then be accessible via the Internet from anywhere where an Internet connection is obtainable. The cost of this short term team of staff to accelerate the work is estimated to be £0.6m for three months and expected to be delivered by March 2016.

Completing this design work in a short burst, matching it to the activity that the Council expects to continue to deliver over the next five year business plan cycle should put us in a position to ideally procure new ICT arrangements as appropriate to coincide as far as possible with the planned end date of contracts for existing systems. Unfortunately, until this design work is completed and business cases are proven, I am unable to provide you with a reasonable estimate of costs.

## **QUESTION 5**

**MR ALAN MOSLEY** will ask the following question to the Leader of the Council:

IP&E has been in existence for some 3.5 years and has been the subject of critical review ever since established. You have recently resigned from the Board and the information provided by Companies House show that there are now only 3 directors with only one serving as a member of Shropshire Council.

You have stated that a new Chair will be recruited externally and hence, this represent a further diminution in the capacity of the Council to impact on the decision making process.

It is also alarming to find the enormous turnover of directors with some 13 resignations and some 30 changes in total during its existence. One director seems to have been appointed and terminated on the same day while a number have served, resigned, been reappointed and again resigned, including yourself.

- Is the governance of IP&E in crisis and is it fit for purpose?
- Would it not be appropriate to make IP&E more open to scrutiny by members and transparent in its decision making, including the

publication of minutes and audit reports, notwithstanding the need for commercial confidence.

- Has IP&E held an AGM and if so why weren't members invited?
- As the quorum for a directors meeting is 4 how will business take place and will members of Shropshire Council be consulted on any external appointment to the Board.
- Are you considering proposing some external investigation and/or help for the governance of IP&E?"

**THE DEPUTY LEADER** will reply:

Governance arrangements in ip&e Limited are set out in the Annual Business Plan approved by Cabinet each year. While these are in the early stages of being adopted, an independent review of these arrangements has been planned. ip&e Limited produces and Annual Review and Annual Business Plan as required under the Strategic Contract with the Council. The Strategic Contract and the arrangements within it were approved by Cabinet in June 2013.

No AGM has been held for ip&e Limited since inception.

Board decisions cannot take place until the Board is quorate. Arrangements for appointments to the Board will be approved by the Cabinet. These arrangements are currently being considered.

## **QUESTION 6**

**MRS VIVIENNE PARRY** will ask the following question:

- a) In 2014 and to date in 2015, how many Environmental Crime Reports and how many Fixed Penalty Notices were issued in Ludlow and for which offences were these issued?
- b) In 2014 and to date in 2015, how many Fixed Penalty Notices were issued for parking offences in Ludlow, in council owned car parks and on highways, and what was the income from fines in council owned car parks and on highways?

**MR SIMON JONES**, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport will reply:

- a) Public Protection have issued 1 Environmental Crime Report for littering and 1 for dog fouling in 2014 and none to date in 2015 in Ludlow.
- b) We do not issue Fixed Penalty Notices for parking contraventions they are Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's). The financial data given relates to income for those notices issued in the periods concerned rather than the total income from PCNs (as this would include PCNs issued outside these time periods). The details for Ludlow for 2014 and 2015 are as follows:-

2014 - PCNs issued            on street - 1326            car parks - 515

Revenue received on street - £43825	car parks - £12290
<u>2015</u> - PCNs issued on street - 948	car parks - 286
Revenue received on street - £26819	car parks - £5457

## **QUESTION 7**

**MR MILES KENNY** will ask the following question:

It is estimated that poor air quality in Shropshire equates to over 120 premature deaths annually, which is more than those killed or seriously injured on Shropshire roads each year.

No room for complacency here. Until recently, air quality was improving in Shrewsbury town centre, but not now. Shrewsbury is an Air Quality Management Area with some parts well in excess of national targets.

Road vehicles, in particular diesel cars and vans are the biggest contributors to poor air quality. The situation is made worse with engines idling at traffic lights and some remedial work has been carried out with lights changing when pollution reaches certain levels. New signage proposals directing traffic away from the town centre will help as will emission controls on diesel vehicles.

However these measures alone will not be enough to improve air quality. Diverting traffic from areas of poor air quality to areas where air quality is not so poor does not resolve the issues nor reduce overall air quality

So what else do you propose to do? Does this include “greening” the town with green walls? Discouraging traffic from using the High Street? Promoting alternatives to the private car such as public transport, walking and cycling?

**MR SIMON JONES**, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport will reply:

The Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will shortly be reporting on the most recent air quality Updating and Screening Assessment due to be submitted to Defra early in 2016 which covers the years 2009 – 2014. Whilst Cllr Kenny has highlighted the significance of air quality issues the situation in Shrewsbury in 2014 has stabilised somewhat with peak nitrogen dioxide levels not exceeding EU hourly average limits at any point during 2014 which is an improvement on previous years. The issues within Shropshire reflect the national picture with market towns showing elevated air quality levels due largely to vehicle emissions and the unique geography of Shrewsbury making management of the situation difficult.

The Shrewsbury Integrated Transport package (SITP) approach to traffic management within Shrewsbury is leveraging in £12m of external funding, combining;

- a) To improve junctions around the inner bypass (inner ring road and main arterial links to the town centre at; Meole Brace roundabout; English Bridge Gyatory; Reabrook roundabout; Longden Coleham), to encourage greater use of the inner bypass for trips across the town, rather than using routes through the town centre. The anticipated outcomes from this will be improved journey times and journey time reliability assisting commuters and business travellers alike. Further to this will be safety improvements by providing crossing facilities at many of these junctions.
- b) To enhance the central Shrewsbury area, including Pride Hill, to further its financial viability.
- c) To develop the existing SCOOT signalling networks in the town with additional phases on the inner bypass and main entry points to the town centre. This will also include variable message signing around the town for traffic and car parks.
- d) The development of a wayfinding and signing strategy to assist pedestrian and drivers visiting the town.
- e) Pedestrian and cycle links which are currently “missing” from the network in order to encourage travel by modes other than the private car.
- f) A review of traffic management within the loop of the river.

There have been a number of key initiatives recently that are aimed at trying to reduce air quality impacts and these include:-

- 1) A research project funded by DEFRA to provide real time nitrogen dioxide sensors near to traffic signals in Shrewsbury to enable us to trigger changes in the timings at traffic signals and provide reactive traffic management reflecting air quality. Currently with urban traffic control, our priority is to try and move congested traffic out rather than assisting with moving traffic into the town, thus eliminating the backup effect.
- 2) Implementation of a revised taxi policy that introduces for the first time requirement for all taxis to meet European emission standards
- 3) Upgrading of the main buses serving Shrewsbury with cleaner, more modern vehicles
- 4) We are currently evaluating locations near to the Shrewsbury railway station for the installation of a novel green wall system designed at both reducing air quality impacts and promoting biodiversity with support funding from Natural England.

The main issue with air quality is avoiding extended exposure to elevated pollutant levels and in addition to trying to minimise pollutant levels through traffic management we use the development management regime to manage and mitigate the impacts of both increasing traffic from developments and ensuring that new residential sites are not in areas of high exposure and we remain committed to tackling this major public health issue with all of the opportunities available to the council.