

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 16

QUESTION 1

MR DAVID LLOYD MBE will ask the following question:

Speeding traffic is a concern with many communities in Shropshire with too many road users showing scant regard for 30, 40, 50 and 60 mph limits.

Is Council willing to request the Road Safety Partnership to introduce additional activity, the cost of which is likely to be covered by increased income from penalties? Such a move would be helpful when calls for new road safety measures arise at a time of financial pressure.

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

All Parish/Town Councils can make direct requests to the Safer Roads Partnership (SRP) in West Mercia via the link on their website that is specifically for this purpose. This way they know that there is a community speeding issue. They will then duly take a look at the site in question and gather speed data over a 7 day period to establish if there is a genuine or perceived speeding issue. If the 85th%ile speeds recorded (the upper speed at which 85% of all traffic are travelling at) are at or above the Police enforcement level of 10% + 2mph above the speed limit

- in a 30mph = 35mph
- in a 40mph = 46mph
- in a 50mph = 57mph

then they will look to see what positive action can be taken and where and if they can site a mobile enforcement vehicle.

If there is no defined speeding issue then they will not go in and enforce.

Also, It must be noted that if the request relates to a speed limit that was not supported by the Police on its introduction (such as some that were introduced under the old Village Speed Limit Policy) then Shropshire Council would be expected to introduce further speed reduction measures to reduce speeds to those within national speed limit guidance, before the Safer Roads Partnership will review the situation.

Shropshire Council representative (Alice Dilly) attends a quarterly operational forum with the Police and SRP members to discuss matters and we put forward areas of concern also but they still need to be defined speeding issues for

enforcement to take place. This needs to occur, for any possible additional enforcement to take place, enforcement can only be identified and reacted to by the reporting of all speeding concerns, as detailed above. Therefore the first stage is for all towns and parishes to follow the clear criteria detailed above, as enforcement is undertaken on an evidential basis, and this must be the key criteria, in light of the detail provided.

This stresses the importance of the introduction or alteration of any current or future speed limits. They must be introduced with the support of the police and be in line with the Department of Transport Guidance Document on Setting Local Speed Limits – Circular 1/2013.

QUESTION 2

MR DUNCAN KERR will ask the following question to the Leader of the Council:

In responding to your invitation to take on Shropshire Council services, the principal town councils in Shropshire have reminded you that Shropshire Unitary Council's dire financial situation is a direct consequence of the successive budgets, prepared and approved by the Conservative group. If you had adopted a prudent approach allowing Council tax to rise by inflation or capping limits we would now be over £15m a year better off, instead it is those in the largest homes in the County who are hundreds of pounds a year to the good whilst those who get help with their Council tax bills get all of the pain but none of the gain.

Given the devastation that the proposed cuts will cause, would you like to reconsider your outright rejection of my proposal that all councillors show some contrition by taking an immediate 10% cut in their allowances?

MR MALCOLM PATE, the Leader of the Council will reply:

As a Councillor yourself you will know that allowances for Elected Members of the Council are set by an independent panel. Clearly, that panel has a difficult task of setting these allowances at a level where those motivated to represent and work for their communities can afford to do so. It's really important that allowances are neither a deterrent or the motivation to become a Councillor and that we are able to attract talented and particularly younger people to serve their communities.

Any Councillor who wishes to decline the allowances made available is free to do so and so if you wish to demonstrate your views by example you are perfectly within your rights. Indeed, you may if you wish, choose to not accept any of the allowances that might be due to you.

QUESTION 3

MR DUNCAN KERR will ask the following question to the Leader of the Council:

Since its creation Shropshire Unitary Council has been beset by mismanagement and corporate failure. From its Council tax policies to the doomed IP&E company and the largesse towards the university the public are wondering whether it would have been better to keep the districts and abolish the county.

It is, in the view of many residents, no coincidence that the mistaken policy choices made by SUC were a result of a lack of transparency, accountability and scrutiny which have become a hallmark of the Cabinet system forced onto Councils by a Labour government.

Will you commit to learning the lessons of history by joining the growing band of councils who are using the freedoms granted by the last coalition government to return to the democratic, transparent and inclusive Committee system of local governance?

MR MALCOLM PATE, the Leader of the Council will reply:

Shropshire Council was last graded as an 'Excellent Council' and although that system of grading has been abandoned, in so many ways we continue to be an excellent example to others. By becoming a Unitary Council we have so far saved over £160 million and, let us not delude ourselves, had we not become a Unitary Authority our financial situation across the County would be far worse. One has only to look at how other Councils are now combining to see that Shropshire is years ahead in terms of being the future of local government in terms of size, scale and being fit for purpose. Indeed, I should remind you that you have yourself recently asserted within the Council Chamber that Shropshire should look to combine further with other authorities and share staff, contrary to what you now appear to be recommending by going backwards to smaller scale, duplication of staff and increased bureaucracy.

I am sure you will be aware that the pressure on funding that we are experiencing in Shropshire is being felt by most other local authorities, but not in equal measure. Despite an unfair funding system, which significantly severely disadvantages Shropshire, and being one of the most sparse and rural places in the UK where delivering services is far more challenging, we have continued to deliver high quality services at low cost and we come out very well by all comparison. It is time we recognised this and I congratulate members our staff and our partners for the amazing work they do to make sure vulnerable people are looked after, our environment is clean, cared for and beautiful. We have high levels of employment, low levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, we are tolerant and we have fantastic leisure and cultural experiences to offer.

Shropshire continues to be a great place to live and this is no accident. It does nobody any credit to talk Shropshire down when we should be so very proud. In short, our management is, in the circumstances, outstandingly good. Other

Councils who are better supported financially by Government and other parts of the public sector have much to learn from us in delivering efficiencies and improvement.

As you know, we have made representations to Government over just how unfair our funding is. Greg Clark, Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government visited us a few weeks ago and I spoke to him again only last week at the LGA conference. We are working on many levels to influence Government towards creating a more level playing field in terms of equitable funding for Councils. If you read the national press it would be obvious to you that it is becoming widely recognised that Adult Social Care is not properly funded. In Shropshire we have a disproportionately older population and it is wonderful that we live longer than the average. Our services for older people are an exemplar for innovation, low cost and high quality and these need to be properly funded by Government.

Whilst in principle we are always willing to look at democratic structures and operation, now is surely not the appropriate time. Not when the real challenge is to use the limited resources we have, our intellect, ambition, inspiration and imagination to continue our focus on delivering the very best outcomes for our communities. The public will not thank us if we waste effort in reorganising ourselves when we should continue to do the things that in the end will really make the difference. Whilst I can see the attraction to the opposition in our being distracted away from delivering results, it's clear that changing democratic structures will do little to provide solutions to the challenges we face. Rather than distract us from the task in hand, it would be helpful to receive constructive proposals which could be considered.

QUESTION 4

MR ALAN MOSLEY will ask the following question:

Can we be given a full report on the work which has been undertaken since the decision was made to close down IP&E.

Can you please ensure that this includes:

- The overall cost to the Council of the debacle surrounding the Company, including relocation, consultancies, staff time and opportunity costs.
- The circumstances of staff transferring back to the Council and how the various units of IP&E have been assimilated into the Council.
- The main conclusions about why the Company failed including comments on the extent to which obvious weaknesses in the governance of the Company contributed to its demise.
- When a full report is going to be published and available for public scrutiny.

MR MALCOLM PATE, the Leader of the Council will reply:

The overall cost to the Council of the debacle surrounding the Company, including relocation, consultancies, staff time and opportunity costs.

The report attached, though Exempt was subsequently published and is attached and provides a summary of the financial position of the company over its period of trading. Following the closure of the 2015/16 Financial Accounts, the table at paragraph 4.3 can be updated, demonstrating an actual surplus of £16,513 compared to the anticipated surplus of £83,000 as at 17.02.16:

Financial Year	Profit/(loss)
2012/13 (part)	(£69,802)
2013/14	(£114,701)
2014/15	£28,029
2015/16	16,513

- The circumstances of staff transferring back to the Council and how the various units of IP&E have been assimilated into the Council.

The teams who were seconded to ip&e, namely Public Protection and Help to Change have reverted back to the substantive posts in council. The two teams who were transferred to the company have been TUPE transferred back to the Council. The Business Design Team have been incorporated into the Human Resources and Development Function where they are better placed support business redesign and behavioural change. The Communications team are being reintegrated alongside the customer service centre to support the development of a single front door approach and comprehensive communication strategy for the Council.

- The main conclusions about why the Company failed including comments on the extent to which obvious weaknesses in the governance of the Company contributed to its demise.

The main conclusions were set out in paragraphs 5.7 to 5.10 of the attached report.

- When a full report is going to be published and available for public scrutiny.

The Council does not intend to issue a further report having taken the decision to cease service contracts with ip&e limited and to direct the company's board to dissolve the company and remove it from the companies register. The reasons for this are clearly set out in the Cabinet report dated 17 February 2016 which is attached and though Exempt was subsequently made public.

QUESTION 5

MR ALAN MOSLEY will ask the following question:

On 10 February 2016 Cabinet accepted a number of recommendations arising from the report of the Student Accommodation Task and Finish Group. This had been established following expressions of concern regarding potential problems arising from concentrations of HMOs being used as temporary units of student accommodation, given the difficult experience in other university towns.

In doing so it demanded work be undertaken as below (**bold**). Would the Portfolio Holder please give details of what progress has been made in each area 1– 5. Furthermore, items 1-3 were designed to acquire information with a view to having evidence to substantiate A4Ds. Would the Portfolio Holder please confirm what overall progress has been made towards that objective?'

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment will reply:

1. The Local Plan Review should consider specific policy formulation for HMO's:

Progress to date: The forthcoming Local Plan Review must be completed by March 2018. As part of that review, the Council will develop and introduce a specific HMO local plan policy.

2. Subsequently, a HMO Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be produced to guide the development management process in the assessment of planning applications for HMO's. Within the policy there should be appropriate threshold levels in order to inform the decision making process:

Progress to date: The newly consulted on Type & Affordability of Housing SPD has a new section (Ch. 6) that offers some considerations for development management when considering an application for a HMO. At present, only a HMO of 6+ persons requires a planning permission. The final version of this SPD will be out in late summer.

3. The establishment of a HMO database identifying properties in HMO use with ongoing monitoring. Included in the monitoring should be the registering of complaints received related to HMO's:

Progress to date: Such information will need to be acquired throughout the Accreditation Mark process and mapped against current records to form the basis of the database.

4. A Student Accommodation Accreditation Mark be introduced in 2016 in order to set expectations of standards from an early stage in the

development of the University Centre. These standards to be endorsed by UCS:

Progress to date: A public consultation was conducted between 8th February 2016 and 18th March 2016. The consultation was also discussed with landlords at the National Landlords Association Branch meeting during the consultation period. A small number of enquiries were received during the consultation requesting the expected numbers of students attending the University and seeking clarification of how applications could be made. Only one consultation response was received which was from the National Landlords Association. A report is being prepared for Cabinet to consider and approve the Student Accommodation Quality Accreditation Mark and the fees for 2016/17.

5. This Group believes the Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme could be improved by the inclusion of some further measures within the Accreditation Checklist:

Karen Collier spoke with the Housing Manager at Worcester. The additional requirements recommended by the T&F Group are more appropriate to the mandatory licensing scheme operated at Worcester than to the voluntary scheme which is being proposed for Shropshire. Therefore, the inclusion of those additional matters in the Accreditation Mark has been determined depending on the level of risk and our ability to require landlords to comply with the requirements through the voluntary scheme.

a. Landlords will be responsible for the maintenance of the gardens of their let properties:

Progress to date: Advice will be given at the landlords training session but this will not form part of the Accreditation Mark.

b. Standardised tenancy agreements for students. Reason: To protect students.

Progress to date: Advice will be given at the landlords training session but this will not form part of the Accreditation Mark.

c. No pre-payment meters in student accommodation.

Progress to date: The requirements of the Accreditation Mark will be amended to include this.

d. The proposed scheme requires Landlords to pass a fit and proper persons test in line with national best practice. Officers are asked to explore the inclusion of a DBS check in line with DBS guidance.

Progress to date: Applicants will be required to sign a declaration regarding their fitness to hold an Accreditation Mark.

e. Consideration should be given to joint working with local recycling and re-use schemes such as Revive and Shrewsbury Furniture Scheme.

Progress to date: Advice will be given at the landlords training session but this will not form part of the Accreditation Mark.

QUESTION 6

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question to the Leader of the Council:

Shropshire has faced some major cuts in its income over the last few years, and proposals at present in place show that this is continuing. This is despite the rising cost of delivering services in this rural county, especially considering the disproportionate rise in the county's elderly population.

I note with others that at present the Leader and members of his administration will be casting votes soon to elect a new leader of their party and consequently a new Prime Minister who will in turn appoint a new Cabinet. Will he seek assurances from the candidates that funding to meet the rising cost of providing these much needed services in our rural county of Shropshire will be improved and so meet the rising costs that face us during the next few years.

MR MALCOLM PATE, the Leader of the Council will reply:

As you will know, we have taken a very strong line impressing upon Government that the funding of Shropshire is unfair and particularly that something needs to be done about the costs of Adult Social Care which should be a national burden, rather than a local one as is the case for example with the NHS.

Last week we both attended the LGA conference and I hope you were reassured by seeing me approach and challenge directly Greg Clark, the Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government. I was very pleased and I am sure you will have noticed that as soon as the Secretary of State had delivered his speech, I was the first person he talked to. I am certain that our case is understood, though it may take some time to secure appropriate changes. Nevertheless we now have created an important position of influence and I was assured by Mr Clark that our Chief Executive will be placed on the national group advising Government on the future of funding for local authorities. This is another fantastic achievement for Shropshire.

I will continue to fight for a fair funding settlement for the people our County and particularly those who are vulnerable and need the excellent support we provide.

QUESTION 7

MRS TRACEY HUFFER will ask the following question:

The Future Fit exercise is due to recommend that Shropshire and Telford are served by a single A&E unit. Telford and Wrekin Council has been lobbying hard for that unit to be at the Princes Royal Hospital in Telford.

An A&E in Telford will be to the considerable disadvantage of residents who live in the south and west of the Shropshire, and those in the Shrewsbury area. It will take injured patients longer to get to treatment and it will be more difficult for relatives and friends to visit. An A&E based at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital will better serve the needs of our county's population.

Why is Shropshire Council not campaigning for the single A&E to be based in Shrewsbury?

MR MALCOLM PATE, the Leader of the Council will reply:

As you know, Shropshire Council's position is that the configuration of NHS services should be a clinical decision. Through our Health and Wellbeing Board, Chaired by Councillor Karen Calder, we will continue to challenge our NHS partners to ensure that the important services they offer are safe and the best that can be provided to all parts of our County.