

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 16

QUESTION 1

MR DUNCAN KERR will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment:

As you will be aware Bromford Housing Association, an organisation that made over £40m in profits in the last reported year, are closing the only supported specialist provision for young single people in Oswestry. Neither I nor Councillor Vince Hunt, who sits on the management meeting, can establish why this organisation, which receives most of its income from the public purse, has made this regressive decision which has denied many young people the chance of a fresh start. However given the timing, the impact of future housing benefit restrictions must be a key suspect. Would the Portfolio Holder undertake to use his influence to seek a full understanding of the economics that have driven this decision and to write to the Housing Minister expressing the Council's concern that a housing association with a very healthy balance sheet seems to be putting profits before the people they are supposed to serve?

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

Shropshire Council received notification from Bromford in September 2016 that they no longer felt it was viable for them to deliver a service at New Century Court. This was in part due to government decisions surrounding funding for supported housing, as well as them feeling that the business was not in line with what they wanted to deliver as an organisation. Bromford stated they had not made the decision lightly and had explored a number of options before coming to this conclusion, but ultimately due to funding issues for these types of schemes, were not able to put together a sustainable solution.

At the point of notification Housing Services worked with Bromford to again explore a number of options and alternatives but were not able to put together a solution to meet the needs of Bromford, meaning the decision was made by Bromford to dispose of New Century Court via the open market as they own the building.

Shropshire Council have always funded New Century Court via the supporting people contracts which are out for tender at present. Due to the need for supported accommodation projects in the county Shropshire Council have had an exemption granted on all supported accommodation projects and therefore the money Bromford would normally have received was available for them should they have wanted to continue to provide the service at New Century

Court. As stated above, despite this money being available, Bromford have decided to withdraw this service and dispose of the building.

I am aware that other Registered Providers are considering New Century Court as an option, but as Bromford only want to sell the property (as opposed to lease to another provider) it is a big ask for a provider to take it on given the current situation with unknown support funding. If another provider chooses to purchase the property and take it on we would look to support them via supporting people monies but we only have this guaranteed for the next 2 years. To entice a provider it would be beneficial for the Council to agree the funding for a period of 5-10 years, as this would provide a certain and secure income for providers at this time of government changes.

Housing Services are working alongside Bromford to ensure all clients currently placed at New Century Court are rehoused before the end of March 2017 and regular meetings are ongoing with residents and officers. We have committed to ensuring accommodation for all the young people currently housed at the project, regardless of statutory duty.

QUESTION 2

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

At the last Council meeting I asked whether you had given serious consideration to the decision by Surrey county council to hold a referendum on a council tax increase. In response you said, that a referendum would cost £700,000 a figure subsequently released to the press. In my supplementary question I asked for a breakdown of how you had calculated this and following a reminder in January you asked officers to reply.

I hesitate to use the term "alternative facts" but the Monitoring Officer was unable to account for your figure. The last two elections having cost less than £500,000. But of course by combining the referendum with the local election Surrey only have the additional costs of printing ballot papers and some extra administration. It would probably cost less than £100,000, I can't say for certain because clearly no one in Shropshire had been asked to calculate it and that in itself is telling.

The Big Conversation showed that 47% of residents would rather pay more tax than have services cut, and with ministers now supporting surreys actions we have a once in a four year opportunity to put the issue to the public. And if they turn it down then, as Surrey recognises, it will strengthen our hand with a government whose latest attempt at a solution simply made the problem worse. Will he let residents decide the issue or condemn them to the collapse of local government in Shropshire when the capital receipts on which we are surviving now run dry in three years' time?

THE LEADER, MR M PATE will reply:

Thank you for your question.

In response to your first paragraph, the figure of £700,000 is the amount that has been put aside in the budget to cover our local elections. The Monitoring Officer confirmed this to you, but did assist further by providing costs for the last Election (Police and Crime Commissioner) and the EU referendum. It is always very difficult to predict exact costs as they do increase over the years.

In relation to a potential increase in Council Tax by holding a referendum to coincide with local elections, which could allow existing limits for an increase to be exceeded. This has been considered, but our conclusion is that a referendum is not appropriate at this time. The position of the Administration is that the costs of Social Care should not fall on the local Council Tax payer. To do so would be unfair as some UK populations, including Shropshire, have a much higher proportion of older people, which creates a disproportionate burden of cost. This is an ongoing argument and I have had several direct discussions and have exchanged correspondence with Government Ministers to drive home this point.

At this juncture it would not be practicable to run a referendum alongside local elections as our plans and preparations are too far advanced. If a referendum was held, our evidence shows it is unclear what the result is likely to be. We have tested public opinion through 'The Big Conversation' and this demonstrated less than half of all respondents (49%) said that they agreed with increasing Council Tax. In such circumstances it might be considered irresponsible to waste public funds on a referendum.

Thank you again for your question.

QUESTION 3

MR DEAN CARROLL will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure:

Will the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure join me in congratulating the staff of the Shropshire Archives at Castle Gates in Shrewsbury on the recent Archive Accreditation Award they have received? Would the Portfolio Holder please explain to Council what criteria and standards the Shropshire Archives have reached to receive this prestigious award?

MR STUART WEST, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure will reply:

Archive accreditation is the the UK quality standard which recognises good performance in all areas of archive service delivery. It is administered by The National Archives and replaces the previous inspection scheme for places of deposit of public records.

The Accreditation Standard consist of three Sections:

1. Organisational Health, including:
 - 1.1 Mission Statement
 - 1.2 Governance and Management Structures
 - 1.3 Forward Planning
 - 1.4 Resources: buildings and storage
 - 1.5 Resources: finance
 - 1.6 Resources: workforce
2. Collections, including:
 - 2.1 Collections Management
 - 2.2 Collections Development
 - 2.3 Collections Information
 - 2.4 Collections Care and Conservation
3. Stakeholders and their experiences, including:
 - 3.1 Access Policies
 - 3.2. Access Plans and Planning
 - 3.3 Access Information, Procedures and Activities

In order to achieve accreditation, archive services need to meet the detailed requirement of each section of the standard in terms of policies, plans and procedures. Over the last 12 months staff at Shropshire Archives have worked to develop and refine a full suite of policies and procedures in order to meet these criteria. This has involved research into customers and collections, including demand for varying types of access, as well as consultation with stakeholders.

To maintain accredited status, services are required to complete a review after three years and a full re application after six.

Full details of the standard can be found at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-service-accreditation-standard-june-2014.pdf

QUESTION 4

MRS PAM MOSELEY will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Services:

Shropshire Council, as many Local Authorities, faces huge challenges in funding Adult Social Care (ASC) for its citizens, with the issues of an older and ageing demographic profile, rurality and complex care needs well recognised. A recent Cabinet report called this “the Council’s greatest risk area in potential budget overspends” and stated that additional resources were to be used to model and identify all variables for spending on ASC – which would develop data sets to help to forecast future costs and understand historic cost patterns.

The cost to the Council of providing care has continued to increase massively over recent years, with the majority of the growth associated with purchasing

budgets in Adult Services, where care is commissioned and purchased externally.

One off savings, the short term use of resources, and the ability to increase the council tax precept specifically for care, by 2% for three years (with a recent option of 3% for two years) are all measures which the Council may, and has chosen to employ. At the same time, the amount of money remaining in the Council's controllable budgets has diminished, which further narrows options for funding care from other areas.

A recent report to scrutiny has shown a big increase in delayed discharge days in the 12 month period to November 2016 which are attributed to SC Social Care (38.2%) or to SC Social Care jointly with the NHS (44.7%). This delay impacts adversely upon both bed capacity in local hospitals, and the future health and care needs, and associated costs, of those whose discharge is delayed.

Can the Portfolio Holder give an absolute guarantee to Members and Shropshire residents, that the Council is confident that its work to date will ensure that appropriate, timely and good quality care will be provided - both now and in the future - for those who need it, and also that strenuous efforts will be made to reduce unnecessary time spent in hospital before patients are discharged?"

MR LEE CHAPMAN Portfolio Holder for Adult Services will reply:

In a word yes I am confident that we can ensure appropriate, timely and good quality care for those who need it and are ready for discharge from hospital.

During 2016/17 Shropshire Council has worked in collaboration with its NHS partners to ensure that it continues to support the health and social care economy to facilitate discharges from hospital as quickly and appropriately as possible. This has been in the context of increased Care Act duties and the national trend of a step change in demand for health and social care services with pressures now felt all year round and not just over the winter months. We are seeing increasing numbers of older people in need of care and support with multiple long term conditions. Nationally the number of people who remain in hospital longer than they need to continues to rise and delays due to health and social care have increased. In the last nationally reported figures, the main reasons for social care delays was patients awaiting care packages in their own home.

In response to these circumstances the Council has sought to give high priority to helping people home from hospital. The Shropshire Integrated Community Services Team (ICS) is a joint team with social work staff from the Local Authority and occupational therapy and physiotherapy and clinical staff from Shropshire Community Health Trust (SCHT). Staff are co-located at Medway House on the William Farr site. This team has a particular focus on moving people back home if at all possible.

We also have a Brokerage system which up until the last few weeks has been very successful in sourcing packages of care for patients in a timely manner. However, the pace and speed of flow through the acute hospitals and increased pressure to enable early discharge has put significant pressure on the domiciliary and residential care market. In Shropshire In January 2017 we facilitated 236 discharges and 177 of these required package of care at home compared to 46 sourced in 2016.

The demand for care at home has meant that care providers cannot keep up with the requests. If we cannot source care within 3 days then we spot purchase residential care beds as we know it's not in the best interests of the patient to remain in hospital whilst waiting for care and that such an option is more appropriate than the person either remaining in hospital or returning home without the support they need.

We have prepared a detailed action plan which can be provided to Cllr Moseley (and other interested Members) should she wish to see it. This sets out how, amongst other things we plan to ensure that sufficient domiciliary care is available in the market and how it can be procured in a timely manner. We have re-procured the block re-ablement domiciliary care contract with quicker response times with 1500 hours per week being available across Shropshire and arranged access via Brokerage. We have commissioned a 6 month pilot for Emergency Response Out of Hours Domiciliary Care via Carers Trust 4 All to respond to requests from EDT and ICS.

QUESTION 5

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure:

Can an update be given on how the Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) money has been spent?

What is the up to date position regarding the libraries in Shropshire, including the mobile library network please?

MR STUART WEST, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure will reply:

Can an update be given on how the TCA money has been spent.

To date TCA money has been spent in support of the completed transfer of five libraries – Bishops Castle, Cleobury Mortimer, Broseley, Shifnal and Albrighton - to town and parish councils and local charities and on capacity building across the VCS and parish and council sectors. A final account reconciliation is still to take place but this amounts to approximately £360,000 against a total TCA budget allocation of £520,000.

Projects that meet TCA funding requirements (a transfer to a third party organisations on an overall “invest to save basis”) are continuing to be developed.

What is the up to date position regarding the libraries in Shropshire, including the mobile library network please

Summary of existing library service provision in Shropshire:

- 21 Libraries:
 - 6 principal libraries run by Shropshire Council – Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Market Drayton
 - 8 smaller community libraries run by Shropshire Council – Gobowen, Ellesmere, Church Stretton, Bayston Hill, Wem, Lantern, Pontesbury, Much Wenlock
 - 7 smaller libraries run by local community groups / town councils – Albrighton, Bishops Castle, Broseley, Craven Arms, Highley, Shifnal, Cleobury Mortimer
- 4 mobile libraries
- Stoke Heath Prison Library
- Specialist library services:
 - Home library service
 - Community Directory
 - Music & drama service
 - Reading group service
 - Visitor information services
 - Customer Service Point

QUESTION 6

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation:

How many Shropshire schools have a 20mph zone outside their school?
How many requests for having a 20mph zone outside their school have been received?
How much has been spent in each of the last 4 years implementing 20mph zones outside schools?

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

How many Shropshire schools have a 20mph zone outside their school?
20 schools with a 20mph speed limit/ zone

How many requests for having a 20mph zone outside their school have been received?
18 total over the last 4 years.

How much has been spent in each of the last 4 years implementing 20mph zones outside schools?
£262,000 in total - £40,000 spent 2013 and £232,000 for schemes completed in 2016.