

MEMBER QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

COUNCILLOR DAVID TURNER will ask the following question to the Leader

The Council's financial position has recently been branded as "a catastrophe" by the Opposition. Would the Leader agree with me that, far from being catastrophic, the numbers in the financial strategy speak for themselves - they are broadly the same now as they were a year ago and further back for that matter?

COUNCILLOR PETER NUTTING the Leader will reply:

Thank you for your question.

The fundamental principles and underlying trends identified in the Financial Strategy have been consistent for a number of years. Savings have been, and continue to be, made and earmarked reserves have been freed up to protect, as far as possible, services that are so valuable to our communities.

The Financial Strategy comprises of projections which are refreshed and reviewed on a regular basis and reported, transparently, through to Cabinet and Council. Increased demand for Social Care (in Children's and Adults) alongside other pressures have escalated costs, and with falling Government funding have increased the projected funding gap. As reported in the media, this is consistent with national trends and so this is not isolated to Shropshire. The issue of expenditure exceeding income remains and this cannot be sustained by 'one off' measures. We have been clear about this in the Financial Strategy and we have set out our approach to tackle this over the coming months. In short, we are taking action to address this.

The claim of our finances being 'catastrophic' referred to an in-year projected budget overspend of £5 million. This, again, is in the main due to increased demands in Social Care and represents a projected overspend of less than 1% (0.90%) against our gross budget. We have also taken action to address this and this has been laid out in detail in the Financial Monitoring Report approved by Cabinet on 15 November; identifying that with planned action we can reduce the overspend to £0.428m. In summary, I have every confidence in our Officers that they can bring the budget back into balance as far as possible.

QUESTION 2

COUNCILLOR HEATHER KIDD will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services.

Could the portfolio holder tell me

- i. How many local needs affordable houses have been built in rural areas since 2012 listed by year.
- ii. How many local needs affordable houses have been given planning permission since 2012 listed by year.
- iii. How many single plot affordable dwellings have been built in rural areas since 2012 listed by year.
- iv. How many single plot affordable dwellings have received planning permission and how many have been refused since this policy was first adopted.

In answer to the above questions I would like to use the definition of Rural Areas as villages where the total electorate is less than 3,000. These are affordable houses to rent or buy or both.

COUNCILLOR ROBERT MACEY the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services will reply:

Q i. How many local needs affordable houses have been built in rural areas since 2012 listed by year.

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017 Q1
21	21	60	45	46	46

Q ii. How many local needs affordable houses have been given planning permission since 2012 listed by year.

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017 Q1
170	123	177	225*	133	26

*Holyhead Rd (S'bury) Extra Care scheme for 85 units is in Bicton Parish.

Qiii. How many single plot affordable dwellings have been built in rural areas since 2012 listed by year.

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017 Q1
19	20	15	20	17	1

Q iv. How many single plot affordable dwellings have received planning permission and how many have been refused since this policy was first adopted.

Planning Approval	401
Planning refusal	9

QUESTION 3

COUNCILLOR PAM MOSELEY will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support

Could you answer the following questions relating to the use of agency employees by Shropshire Council in the 2017/18 financial year, excluding those who work in Shropshire Council's schools?

- i) what has been the total cost to the authority per month (for each calendar month of the current financial year to date) for agency staff?
- ii) how many individual agency staff members have been employed by Shropshire Council to date in this financial year; what is the average length of contract; and what is the longest period that any agency staff member working during this year has worked for the authority?
- iii) what is the total forecast expenditure for the entirety of this financial year on the salaries of agency staff?
- iv) how many agency social workers have been employed during this year?

COUNCILLOR STEVE CHARMLEY the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support will reply:

Agency staff have an important role in providing flexible and knowledgeable staff to teams who need extra support. When teams are undergoing service redesign or peaks in workflow or staff absence, temporary agency staff gives managers another resource to help deliver the necessary service function. Some of our teams are also facing areas of recruitment shortages, where it is difficult to attract permanent staff.

With the introduction of the Agency Worker Regulations in October 2011, temporary workers have the same employment terms and conditions as our permanent employees after 12 weeks of continuous employment in the same role.

We currently use Matrix SCM as our managed service provider, which is a portal for managers to advertise to a wide supply chain and manage the appointment and timesheets in an efficient manner. Not all placements are on Matrix, so the management information we have on these placements is not as detailed.

- i) what has been the total cost to the authority per month (for each calendar month of the current financial year to date) for agency staff?

Temporary Agency Staff Spend 2017/18							
April - September 2017	1	2	3	4	5	6	Grand Total
Matrix - Contracted Provider	£208,979	£245,083	£248,821	£417,974	£251,769	£295,034	£1,667,660
Maverick - Off Contract Spend	£26,594	£62,858	£66,910	£64,154	£106,375	£75,827	£402,718
Grand Total	£235,573	£307,940	£315,731	£482,128	£358,145	£370,861	£2,070,378

- ii) how many individual agency staff members have been employed by Shropshire Council to date in this financial year;

There have been 202 total placements through Matrix, of which 63 have ended. We are unable to give a breakdown of roles employed outside of Matrix.

what is the average length of contract;

The median length of placements through Matrix is 34 weeks

what is the longest period that any agency staff member working during this year has worked for the authority?

The longest active placement is currently 111.

- iii) what is the total forecast expenditure for the entirety of this financial year on the salaries of agency staff?

Current straightline forecast is £4.1 million

- iv) how many agency social workers have been employed during this year?"

94 through Matrix

Job Title & Manager	No of Agency Workers Apr-Nov
Best Interests Assessor	19
Early Help Social Worker	1
Qualified Social Worker	42
Senior Social Worker	1
Service Manager	2
Social Worker	25
Team Manager	4
Grand Total	94

QUESTION 4

COUNCILLOR STUART WEST will ask the following question to the Leader

In recognising that, following the very welcome recent Ofsted report, Shropshire Councils Children's Services are now in the top 30% nationally and that all of those involved should be congratulated on this achievement. Does the Leader also recognise the fine work undertaken by staff and partners in many other areas? For instance, on delayed transfer of care, Shropshire Council's Adult Social Care is the 2nd best performing authority within the West Midlands.

In respect of the proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment, Shropshire Council are within the top performing authority for this measure. This measure is important for health and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities. Shropshire is at 13%, the West Midlands is 4.2% and all of England 57%. Shropshire is therefore ranked 12th out of 152 local authorities.

In respect of the proportion of the adults with a learning disability who live in their own home or with family, Shropshire Council are within the 2nd quartile performing authorities for this measure. This measure is important for health and wellbeing for people with learning disabilities. Shropshire is at 83.3%, the West Midlands 70.3% and all of England 76.2%. Shropshire is ranked 56th out of 152 local authorities.

As the Leader will know, the Care Quality Commission publish the latest rating for social care providers each year. These include residential homes, nursing homes and domiciliary care providers. The quality of care provision within Shropshire is generally rated good, and no fewer than 91% of providers good or outstanding. Shropshire is among the best for the proportion of Council Tax and Business Rates collected.

Finally, in England only Bath and North East Somerset have a lower teenage conception rate than Shropshire, and Shropshire is amongst the best for both male and female life expectancy.

Will the Leader join me in recognising the good outcomes achieved by staff in these, and the many other areas of the Council's activities and services, and offer the Council's thanks during this season of goodwill.

COUNCILLOR PETER NUTTING the Leader, will reply:

I am delighted to join you in recognising the achievements of the Council across a range of services we provide. I was also very pleased that when I met the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Savid Javid MP, he congratulated Members and Officers of the Council for the high quality, low cost services we deliver. He said we are an example to others for doing so well with the funds we receive.

I am ambitious to inspire us to do even better and for us to become more self-sufficient so that services can be sustained. I am confident that the Conservative Group will deliver this.

I am very grateful to all of the Members and staff of the Council for the great work that we do. I hope everyone enjoys a well-deserved break over Christmas and recognise that many of our vital services work through regardless to keep our communities safe.

QUESTION 5

COUNCILLOR ANDY BODDINGTON will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services

- a) How much plastic that is collected for recycling is incinerated and how much of this is black plastic? (Tonnage and % of all plastics and of black plastics collected from households). What plans does the council have for reducing this?
- b) A significant contributor to litter on residential streets is plastic blowing out of recycling boxes on collection day. What plans does the Council have for introducing wheelie bins or other sealed containers to reduce this?
- c) Does the Council intend to introduce charges for collecting green waste? What impact will this have on recycling rates?

COUNCILLOR ROBERT MACEY the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services will reply:

- a) On average 3.5%, about 400 tonnes, of the material collected in the kerbside boxes is rejected by the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) and sent to an adjacent plant where it is burned to generate electricity. This includes material that cannot be recycled, material that could be recycled but has become contaminated, and material which cannot be sorted effectively (mainly black plastic). The composition of the rejects is not broken down so we cannot provide an exact tonnage or percentage of plastic or black plastic.

Black plastic is a nationwide issue and the solutions are in the hands of manufacturers and MRF operators. Both groups are working on this. It is already possible to produce black plastic which the existing MRF technology can sort, but the two groups have yet to agree on how this material should be used and the exact specification.

In Shropshire our approach to black plastic is driven by the fact that it does not contaminate other material and evidence that concern over how to deal with it has put people off separating any plastics out for recycling. Our crews are instructed not to reject boxes with black plastic as overall this will lead to a

higher quantity of recyclable plastic being collected. However, we do not list it as being recycled on our leaflets as we do not want to mislead people.

- b) Plastic has been collected from boxes for the last five years and while some material is blown out of the boxes, litter tonnages before and after the service launch do not suggest that there is a significant impact. Generally, residents do act responsibly and stack boxes or use other methods to prevent this, particularly in windy conditions.

The introduction of wheeled bins for recycling was discussed with Veolia before the rollout of the new recycling service in 2016. However, the cost of around £600,000 p.a. could not be justified due to other budget pressures. The vehicles that Veolia have purchased for the new service can operate efficiently with bins, so if the opportunity arises in the future we can make that change. We will continue to look for a cost effective approach to resolving this issue.

- c) It is true that green waste collection is not a statutory duty and many other councils have introduced a charge to cover this. As with any other service we monitor and discuss the approach of others to decide if it is something which Shropshire should consider. At this time no decisions have been made on whether to introduce such a scheme.

The impact on the recycling rate would be determined by the proportion of total garden waste presented by the residents who take part in the scheme and the choices made by those who don't. The experience of other Councils that have introduced a charge suggest that there are three routes for the garden waste to no longer be collected

- Delivered to Household Recycling Centres – no impact on recycling rate, different delivery point
- Residual waste bins – negative impact on recycling rate as this is removed from the composting tonnage and added to the disposal side
- Home composting – positive impact as it reduces the total amount of waste against which the recycling rate is calculated.

Modelling indicates a likely reduction of between 1 and 3.5 percentage points in the recycling and composting rate if charges were made for collecting garden waste i.e. the current Shropshire rate of around 54% would fall to somewhere between 50.5% and 53%. However, evaluation of this initiative would also include ways of increasing dry recycling and food waste composting to mitigate this.

QUESTION 6

COUNCILLOR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services

Can Council be informed how much in each of the years since it was introduced has Shropshire Council collected in CIL payments and how much has been spent in each of these years on various projects.

What is the balance held by Shropshire Council as at 1st December please?

COUNCILLOR ROBERT MACEY the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services will reply:

The current way that CIL revenue is allocated geographically means that, although the global amount of unspent CIL seems significant (c. £10 million), it is spread across a very large number of parishes, with two-thirds of parishes accruing less than £50,000 to date;

Given the above, it has taken some time to accumulate sufficient CIL revenue to fund appropriate infrastructure (which often requires significant sums) **which explains why there has been a lower level of spend to date.**

CIL Revenue has currently been raised from development in 61% of Shropshire's Parish and Town Councils. (To date 9 Town and Parish Councils have spent some of their Neighbourhood Fund on locally important projects, mostly on carparks, street lighting and recreation facilities. In addition Shropshire Council have agreed to spend some of the remaining CIL money within 2 other Parish Council areas.)

In addition to the CIL which has been spent, a further £4.6m is already allocated to specific projects, mainly to transport improvements in Shrewsbury.

In terms of figures being reported, an annual summary of CIL revenue is regularly published here: <http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/community-infrastructure-levy-cil/distribution-of-cil-payments/> and we understand that the last update was in Jan / Feb 2017, but we are about to upload the very latest version.

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) SUMMARY 2012/13 ONWARDS				
	Balance Brought Forward As At 1 st April £	Payments Received £	Funds Applied £	Balance Carried Forward As At 31 st March £
2012/13	-	131,987.89	(6,599.40)	125,388.49
2013/14	125,388.49	580,854.00	(29,042.73)	677,199.76
2014/15	677,199.76	1,711,480.59	(103,644.24)	2,285,036.11
2015/16	2,285,036.11	3,902,563.30	(405,998.61)	5,781,600.80
2016/17	5,781,600.80	5,099,082.52	(666,887.43)	10,213,795.89
2017/18	10,213,795.89			

QUESTION 7

COUNCILLOR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support

How many contracts have been commissioned by Shropshire Council in each of the last three financial years where present staff have been transferred and so subject to the TUPE regulations?

How many (former) staff were subject to TUPE in each of the last three financial years.

Were any known vacancies included in these transfers and if so how many were there in each of the last three financial years.

What action was included in these contracts to ensure any recruitment of staff to fill these known vacancies were employed on terms similar to those who were subject to the TUPE transfer terms and conditions.

COUNCILLOR STEPHEN CHARMLEY the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support will reply:

How many contracts have been commissioned by Shropshire Council in each of the last three financial years where present staff have been transferred and so subject to the TUPE regulations?

How many (former) staff were subject to TUPE in each of the last three financial years.

Financial Year	Corporate		Schools	
	Total TUPE Post count	Teams TUPE transferred	Total TUPE post count	School count transferred
2014/15	70	11	549	13
2015/16	151	26	249	14
2016/17	189	26	740	25

Notes:

- Multiple teams may form one TUPE transfer
- TUPE in Schools may occur in 3 incidents in Schools on academisation, transfer of cleaning and catering staff to Shire Services or an external provider - we do not hold information centrally relating to the TUPE transfer destination
- All posts counts may contain multiple post holders.
- The above information may be a mix of 'commissioned' and 'other' TUPE transfers (other including where contracts are lost i.e. Shire Services)

Were any known vacancies included in these transfers and if so how many were there in each of the last three financial years.

Unknown.

What action was included in these contracts to ensure any recruitment of staff to fill these known vacancies were employed on terms similar to those who were subject to the TUPE transfer terms and conditions.

External contractors would be need to engage new staff of its own terms and conditions and in this context the Council could not require the new provider to fill vacancies on terms similar to existing Council terms.

QUESTION 8

COUNCILLOR ANDY BODDINGTON will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Finance

- a) How much of the £1,308,000 Shropshire Council was allocated for 2017/18 under the discretionary business rate relief scheme had been distributed as of 1 December 2017.
- b) What criteria were used to allocate this money and when did distribution commence?
- c) What is the council's estimate of how many businesses eligible for all forms of business rate relief have not applied for relief at 1 December 2017 (number and percentage by category of relief)?

COUNCILLOR DAVID MINNERY the Portfolio Holder for Finance will reply:

- a) We initially awarded £1,324,278 relief to 1,000 businesses identified as qualifying in line with the Council's criteria below. As at 28 November 2017 we had awarded £1,295,666 to 987 businesses. This has reduced due to RV changes, businesses vacating, and nine businesses sending the relief back because they did not want it.
- b) The main points of relief scheme devised by Shropshire Council are as follows:-
 - For the financial year 2017-2018 the relief has been set at 87% of any rates increase compared to the 2016-2017 financial year;
 - Aimed at occupied hereditaments with a Rateable Value of between £15,000 and £199,999 inclusive;
 - Charities and national businesses are excluded from receiving the relief;
 - Relief will end when a hereditament becomes unoccupied;
 - Relief is not transferred to subsequent new occupiers;
 - This new relief will only be awarded after any other relief entitlements have been applied;
 - Any business that qualifies for the relief that has a reduction in RV with effect from 1 April 2017 will have the new discretionary rate relief reduced accordingly, potentially to zero.

We started distributing the relief in October 2017.

- c) As these reliefs are awarded under discretionary powers, businesses should make an application for relief. Applications were sent to those businesses identified as potentially qualifying for supporting small business rate relief, and support for pub relief. Applications were sent in July 2017 but responses were initially quite low. Reminders were sent in respect of these reliefs and staff continue to chase the remaining businesses to draw their attention to the relief.

As take up of these reliefs had been low, we took a different approach to awarding the discretionary business rate relief. For this, we awarded the relief to businesses identified as qualifying for the relief, and sent an amended bill showing the reduction, with a covering letter that explained our scheme and stated that if the business did not want to apply for the relief then they should advise us within two weeks. So far, nine businesses have come back to us to say that they do not wish to have the relief.

Total value of relief awarded for **Supporting Small Business**

Relief awarded as at 28 November 2017	= £202,855.51
Number of qualifying businesses	= 166
Number of applications sent	= 199
Percentage	= 83.4%

Estimate total value of relief awarded for **Support for Pubs**

Relief awarded as at 28 November 2017	£174,592.05
Number of qualifying businesses	= 212
Number of applications sent	= 249
Percentage	= 85.1%

Estimate total value of relief awarded for **Discretionary Business Rate Relief**

Relief awarded as at 28 November 2017	= £1,295,666
Number of qualifying businesses	= 987
Number of applications sent	= 1,000
Percentage	= 98.7%

QUESTION 9

COUNCILLOR DAVE TREMELLEN will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services

As the Planning Task & Finish Group chaired by Councillor Steve Davenport appears to have been abandoned, would the portfolio holder with responsibility for Planning confirm what the situation is regarding its current status?

And if it is the case that Council Leader Peter Nutting's declaration to Full Council of his intention to retain three planning committees has, indeed, led to

that Task & Finish Group being abandoned, given that we have been led to believe by earlier Planning Task & Finish Groups that the cost of a decision by committee is eight times that of an officer-delegated decision, could either the portfolio holder responsible for planning or Councillor Nutting himself justify that decision by providing Council with the calculations on which that decision was based?

COUNCILLOR ROBERT MACEY the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services will reply:

The delivery of an effective and efficient Planning Service across Shropshire is central to the delivery of economic growth, one of the Council's key objectives.

Planning will always be a service that generates a lot of interest - from the development sector, from communities as well as key stakeholders and the role of planning is to mediate interests that sometimes conflict with one another to facilitate sustainable outcomes. Most applications for planning permission in Shropshire are ultimately granted, whether by Planning Committee or those delegated to officers for consideration.

Given the importance of and interest in the planning process Members have convened through recent task and finish groups, to look at planning processes, performance and committees. Our key challenge has been in delivering processes efficiently and consistently across the large rural geography of Shropshire. The cost of service delivery is of course a relevant factor and an application reported to Committee will inevitably cost more to process than an item delegated to officers for consideration. In terms of costs it is perhaps more important to recognise that planning performance is dependent not only on the planning team, but also on the resource and capacity of internal and external consultees to the process. Failure at any point in the process can contribute to delays and uncertainty which does not benefit the applicant or those with an interest in a planning application. This was a key point endorsed by the last Task & Finish group in a report presented to Enterprise & Growth Scrutiny on 23rd March this year.

Planning is a service area where there may be perceptions about performance, quality or process arising of the different and potentially conflicting sector interests highlighted earlier. It is for this reason I have previously reported to Council some headline and generally very positive performance figures to provide the facts of the matter.

In terms of the number and delivery of planning committees this remains an option for the Council to revisit in the future and this was also endorsed by the task and finish group in March. Again I suggest that if changes are made to the number of planning committees or how these function in practice, that this assessment should be informed by evidence and what works best for Shropshire rather than by perception or speculation.