



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Council	8
24 September 2015	
10.00am	
	Public

PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT FOR BUSINESS, IP&E, CULTURE AND COMMISSIONING (NORTH)

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1.

LEISURE SERVICES

The Leisure Services team had several areas to focus on during the past year. The monitoring of the management contracts with Shropshire Community Leisure Trust and Teme Leisure whilst working closely with them to improve services; the future of swimming provision in Shrewsbury; management transfer of joint-use facilities; directly managing facilities whilst discussing future management options; embedding the integration of Leisure Facilities and Leisure Development services, and continuing to support clubs, coaches, schools and individuals to maximise opportunities for increasing participation in a wide range of sports and physical activities.

1.1 Shropshire Community Leisure Trust

The Trust, with Serco Leisure as their managing agent, have operated 5 facilities on behalf of Shropshire Council since August 2012. 2014/15 was the second full year of contract operations and attendances across the 5 sites increased by 5.1% compared with the previous year (visits = 997,946). This increase contributed greatly to an overall attendance across all Shropshire leisure facilities of 2,113,238, the largest annual usage figure recorded.

Significant outlay has been necessary from Shropshire Council as landlord of the 5 facilities to enable the Trust to operate efficiently, examples of which include the rejuvenation of the all-weather turf pitch at Shrewsbury Sports Village and refurbishment of diving boards at The Quarry Swimming & Fitness Centre. Working in partnership with the Council, £245,000 of funding was acquired to refurbish the changing rooms at Market Drayton Swimming Centre, work was completed in March, and the Trust have introduced many improvements across the portfolio of facilities.

1.2 Teme Leisure

Teme continue to operate 4 leisure sites in the south of the county and have been able to maintain a high level of service and number of visits despite the need to reduce budgets.

Significant investment has been made by Teme at South Shropshire Leisure Centre (Ludlow) which has enabled them to maintain attendance levels across their portfolio.

1.3 Joint-Use Facilities

As a commissioning authority, the Council have continued a programme of facility management transfers of joint-use facilities. This has involved detailed negotiations with schools, colleges and academies on whose sites leisure facilities are managed directly by Leisure Services.

All current joint-use agreements are different and complex, creating difficulties in agreeing transfer terms and conditions. However, the following facilities have been successfully transferred in the past year:

Whitchurch Leisure Centre	September 2014
London Road Sports Centre (Shrewsbury)	September 2014
Rhyn Park Sports Hall (St Martins)	April 2015
Bridgnorth Leisure Centre	August 2015

Transferring management responsibilities reduces costs significantly over a period of time, although Shropshire Council maintain revenue support to transferred facilities to ensure the continuation of community use.

Leisure officers continue to offer support whilst the new operators maintain those opportunities. In March 2014, Shropshire Schools Forum made the decision to alter the way joint-use funding is distributed to schools across the county. Reductions in joint-use funding to schools where leisure facilities are located commenced in April 2015 and will have a significant impact on how joint-use centres operate in the future. The Council, schools and existing operators face a difficult challenge in establishing future operational and management options.

1.4 Swimming Provision in Shrewsbury

In May of this year the Council launched a four-month consultation to seek people's views on the future of swimming in Shrewsbury. The condition of the Quarry Swimming and Fitness Centre and the user experience it offers has declined in recent years and the increase in running costs are a growing challenge.

Independent experts were commissioned to explore viable options which are the refurbishment, upgrade or new build on the existing Quarry site, or a new build on a different site.

The consultation period has been extended by one month (to 30th October) to allow respondents to consider recently updated information. At the time of this report over 1300 responses had been received to date.

1.5 Sports & Play Development

By working closely with operating partners, funding agencies and other Council departments, development officers have been fully involved in planning and implementing projects and initiatives.

Neighbourhood Life commenced in September 2014 and is aimed at promoting physical activity to sedentary members of the public. Initially this has commenced in Shrewsbury, Ludlow and Oswestry and highlights partnership working between Public Health, Sports Development and both facility operators, Shropshire Community Leisure Trust and Teme Leisure. The project has attracted over 300 people returning to exercise from a sedentary lifestyle.

Specific Play Development schemes have continued to flourish including the Community Play Store, Out 2 Play Project and Play Week. More than 1,200 people attended the Play Week sessions over 4 days in August 2015.

The Development Team continue to administer and support the Shropshire Schools Sports and Athletics Association, enabling schools throughout Shropshire to play competitively in a number of sports.

1.6 Event Organisation & Management

The Leisure Services team continue to organise and manage major events within Shropshire, specifically the Severn Bridges Road Race, International Awards Evening and Sport Relief.

Unfortunately Ellesmere Triathlon did not take place in 2015 following the withdrawal of qualifying status for the event. The team placed a bid for status for the triathlon in 2016 and have been awarded qualifying status for the European championships in 2017.

2. WASTE MANAGEMENT

Shropshire Councils waste management services are provided through a 27 year PFI Integrated Contract with Veolia Environmental Services Shropshire which covers collection, transport, treatment and disposal of municipal waste. The contract began in 2007.

2.1 Collections

The collection service is in three parts, refuse, dry recycling (paper, glass, metals and plastics), and compostable waste (garden organics - with food in North and South Shropshire). With approximately 135,000 properties in the county and each waste stream being collected once per fortnight, this means over 10.5 million collections per year.

In terms of performance under the contract, results have generally been good. The number of missed collections has been consistently low at around 0.016% or one missed collection in every 6,200 completed. The most recent customer satisfaction survey, carried out in November and December 2014, showed that 92% of residents were satisfied with their black bin collections and 88% with their recycling collections. This is also reflected in the Customer Service Centre which on average receives 3600 calls per month on waste management, with 0.3% constituting a complaint about the service.

Nevertheless, Veolia and Shropshire Council are continuing to work together to improve the service, including the use of small prototype collection systems in 2014 which tested alternative methods in preparation for potential changes when the next set of vehicles are purchased in 2016. This work will be the main focus of the Waste Management Unit for the next 12 months.

2.2 Household Recycling Centres (HRC's)

Veolia operate 5 HRCs in the county where residents can bring their household waste for recycling or disposal. These can be found in Shrewsbury, Whitchurch, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, and Craven Arms and together they receive around 33,000 tonnes of waste each year. They also act as transfer stations for the waste brought in by the collection service as well as litter and road sweepings from the Councils Street Cleansing contractor Ringway. Over 30 different waste streams are segregated for recycling at each site with an average 52% recycling and composting rate for last financial year, excluding soil and rubble. The sites can also receive household hazardous materials such as chemicals and asbestos for safe disposal.

The Shrewsbury HRC, at Battlefield, is currently being extended as part of the Energy Recovery Facility development. This work will increase the overall size of the site by around 50% and will enable some material streams to be moved out of the existing area to a more appropriate position, including asbestos, plasterboard, soil and rubble. This in turn will free up more space in the existing site for other materials.

2.3 Battlefield Energy Recovery Facility

The most significant recent development for waste management services in Shropshire has been the successful commissioning of the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) at Battlefield, Shrewsbury. The construction of the ERF is a landmark project for Shropshire Council and will be key to the treatment of Shropshire's household waste throughout the life of the council's waste PFI contract and beyond. The plant, which will process 95,000 tonnes of waste per year, became a PFI contract facility on 10th September 2015.

The main outputs from the plant are electricity, sufficient to power 10,000 homes via the national grid, and ash, which is recycled via use as an aggregate in the construction industry. Preparation is being made by Veolia for the official opening of the ERF, the opening ceremony will be fitting to the significance of the facility and likely to be held in spring 2016.

3. LIBRARY SERVICES

There is a network of 22 community libraries, providing library access across the county.

- 4 mobile libraries cover the north, central, south east and south west of the county.
- The Library Services cover the following areas of work:
 - reading and learning;
 - digital and information;
 - health and well-being;
 - children and young people;

The library network reflects the needs and circumstances of communities, including the most isolated. Currently there are four levels of service for lending and reference provision via community libraries, complemented by the mobile library services and central support services. These are:

- Level 1- urban centres: Shrewsbury, Oswestry;
- Level 2 - larger market towns: Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Market Drayton and Whitchurch;
- Level 3 - smaller market towns and outlying rural areas: Albrighton, Bishop's Castle, Broseley, Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Ellesmere, Shifnal and Wem, Bayston Hill and The Library at the Lantern.
- Level 4 - rural areas: Cleobury Mortimer, Gobowen, Highley, Much Wenlock, Pontesbury and Shawbury.

3.1 Library Service Redesign

The Library redesign proposes to provide a library service that embraces different delivery models; through face to face, digital and virtually, through an outreach programme targeted to meet council outcomes for specific groups, and through a reconfigured network of libraries. We aim to deliver library services by working in partnership with communities so that tailored services can be developed to support the needs of people in their communities and also those who may have specific needs that may affect their access to library services.

We have piloted a redesigned library service in Highley which is managed by Halo Leisure alongside other leisure and community activities provided within the Severn Centre. In 2014 the library in Craven Arms moved to the Craven Arms Community Centre and is run by a local social enterprise organisation, the South Shropshire Furniture Scheme, with on- going support provided by Shropshire Council.

Progress is being made with developing proposals for new management arrangements for libraries across the county.

The approach is being undertaken by the library team who are aided by key community stakeholders, Local Joint Committees (LJCs) the Community Enablement Team (CET) and Locality Commissioners to facilitate the commissioning of library services and involves an assessment of potential providers and an evaluation of need. Communities are integral to these community conversations and will continue to be engaged and involved throughout the process.

Service level agreements and funding mechanisms for the redesign work to respond to specific areas of unmet need in LJC areas are being developed as each community conversation takes place.

This is part of a Shropshire wide strategy. Libraries will be strategically placed in towns in the different areas of the county. 6 strategic hubs in major libraries to improve accessibility and cater for larger populations in towns. A further 10 local hubs/libraries offering core community service provision and a varied range of opening hours but with participation from town or parish councils, voluntary and community groups the aim will be to increase these opening hours.

3.2 Digital Resources

E-books were introduced in March 2015 and continue to be a popular feature of the Library Service. E-magazines have also been introduced which complement the existing e-newspaper service. E-reference materials continue to be maintained, with new products added where possible e.g. Access to Research (Free access to over 1.5 million academic articles from over 8,000 journals).

3.3 Social Media

Social media accounts are used effectively to raise the profile of the library service and converse with the public. The press and radio pick up on campaigns, resulting in a much closer and immediate working relationship. 2014/5 we introduced the following accounts: Shropshire Libraries Flickr, Community Directory Twitter, Market Drayton Facebook and Twitter, Oswestry Library Facebook, Shropshire Children's Libraries Facebook.

From 2014/5 the number of followers to @shroplibraries Twitter account has increased from 400 to 2972.

3.4 Community Directory

The Community Directory, managed by the Library Service, continues to be a premier source of information for the people of Shropshire and beyond and attracts online visits on average of 7500 per month.

3.5 Future initiatives

E-audiobooks

In the next few months library customers will be able to download or stream audiobooks on their computer, smartphone or tablet. We've introduced technology that allows our members to listen in a whole new way.

Code Clubs

September 2015 heralds the launch of Shropshire Libraries' first Code Club in Shrewsbury, a free volunteer-led after school coding club for children aged 9-11. A second Code Club in Oswestry Library will follow. The Clubs introduce children to computer programming and aim to teach children how to program by showing them how to make computer games, animations and websites. We want to inspire children to build and share their ideas, having fun and learning along the way. 3-D Digital

Wi-Fi networks

We are striving to extend W-Fi networks to all branch libraries. As part of Arts Council England £7.5 million funding central government aims to enable a universal offer for free, public access to Wi-Fi in libraries in England. The first priority is to enable Wi-Fi access in libraries currently without provision and a second priority to enable libraries with current Wi-Fi provision below the recommended technical specification to upgrade.

3.6 Health and Well-being

Over the last twelve months, Shropshire Libraries has been working harder than ever to highlight how library membership can contribute to the health, wellbeing and resilience of people of all ages across the county including:

- 6 large libraries Shrewsbury; Oswestry; Ludlow; Bridgnorth; Market Drayton; Whitchurch; now have Health Zones bringing all health and wellbeing information together in one convenient place
- 5 branches offer small health zones and even the 4 mobile libraries each have a Health Shelf
- 780 issues of titles from the Books on Prescription collections for mental health
- 30 advice drop-in sessions for the public hosted by libraries during Mental Health Awareness Week in May
- 454 issues from the Books on Prescription for Dementia collections since January 2015
- 5 Dementia Friendly Teatime events held in libraries and 3 carers' groups visited
- 4 Dementia Friends training sessions hosted by libraries for their communities

- 3 mobile libraries welcomed Alzheimer’s Society David Latcham aboard to take his message of support to all corners of Shropshire
- 6 customised cancer information leaflet stands supplied free by Macmillan to the largest libraries
- 60 special information displays in branches raising awareness of issues such as alcohol consumption, stroke, bowel cancer, oral health and stroke
- 14 support groups and businesses attended the Big Oswestry Baby Shower at Oswestry Library in May to offer prenatal and new parents advice and information and 47 information bags were handed out
- 46 GP practices and health centres targeted with Books on Prescription for Dementia information
- 1 “Live Well With Your Library” information stand staffed at Drayton Medical Practice in August
- 199 Shropshire residents received a Home Library Service delivered by volunteers
- 4 mobile libraries hosted Shropshire Fire Service staff during August to deliver summer fire safety messages to all corners of the county
- 70 Time To Listen sessions delivered for adults, offering relaxation, gentle mental stimulation and companionship
- 121 Knit & Natter sessions delivered for adults, offering companionship and learning

4. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

4.1 Marches Local Economic Partnership (LEP)

The national role of LEP’s is growing with an increased lead in driving economic growth including a remit to co-ordinate housing, economic infrastructure, business support and skills. The Marches LEP has successfully secured £83M for infrastructure projects which includes money towards Broadband extension in Shropshire, Oxon Link Road to open up the Shrewsbury West Urban Extension and the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package to facilitate the housing and employment growth in Shrewsbury. These are covered in more detail later in the report.

In July 2015 the Government announced the expansion of the Enterprise Zone (EZ) initiative to include market towns and rural areas. LEP’s were encouraged to work within Council’s to bid for EZ status for these areas. It has been agreed with the LEP that Oswestry Innovation Park be supported by the LEP as its bid for further EZ status. Shropshire Council is now the accountable body for the LEP and the LEP has

been hugely strengthened with the recruitment of a Director to run it day to day alongside a four person support team.

4.2 Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy (SEGS) 2012 – 2026

Shropshire Council in partnership with Shropshire Business Board has co-produced the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy 2012- 2026 which is aligned with the Shropshire Local Development Framework. It ensures that all parts of the Council are working in harmony to drive Economic Growth. The SEGS is then the Shropshire component of the Marches LEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). The delivery of this Strategy is private sector led; with Champions from the Business Board owning each action under the priorities below. The Portfolio Holder represents the Council on the Board. There are 4 priorities within the Growth Strategy and these are covered below.

Accelerating Business Growth

The procurement sub-group of the Business Board (COGS) has expanded to cover Telford and has simplified our procurement process to allow more local SMEs to benefit from contracts. Changes to contract rules approved by Council mean that all quotes must include a local company. Local economic leverage in contracts has been made a reality with scoring introduced on this basis. Even in a very difficult economic climate the Council has now achieved 65% of total spend is with local companies i.e. with a Shropshire post code. This is up from 62% last year. Nationally the Council was commended as the third best in the country for our percentage of spend with Small and Medium sized business. There is also a Local Procurement Charter with over 90 signatories ranging from the Council, Health Bodies and major private companies.

The outreach business support work provided to Shropshire Businesses has supported over 1700 businesses over the last 12 months. This free service provides hands on support to small and medium sized businesses across all our market towns and rural areas. This is accompanied by regular communications and information bulletins, signposting, grants, loans, training and growth opportunities delivered to businesses when and where they need it. For companies that have suffered large scale redundancies, there is a redundancy and recruitment action support scheme. One example is Depicton in Market Drayton where we have helped 49 staff find new employment locally.

One of the key actions in the SEGS was to pilot a new 'Business Hub' in Shrewsbury. This work has progressed at pace and working with Marches LEP and Shropshire Business Board; a new on line Marches wide Business Growth Hub will be launched in the autumn 2015. This will bring together all the national, regional and local business support offers into one place. It will be the one-stop web site for businesses. Further detailed research is underway to establish a Shrewsbury based physical growth hub which will complement the on line facility and enable outreach support and training to take place face to face. Businesses continue to receive a monthly e-newsletter and business support information is transmitted via social media channels and through Gov Delivery via our Shropshire Council website.

Promotion of Shropshire to inward investors and expanding companies via the 'Invest in Shropshire' branding continues. Examples of recent successes are: Bridgnorth Aluminium investment of £24M in 2014/15 with the creation of 20 jobs. SCR Engineering, who produce dairy monitoring equipment have created 20 jobs at their site in Ellesmere; Agilent in Church Stretton have expanded with the creation of 2 jobs.

Historic England is progressing the Flax Mill Maltings and following the successful novation of £1.2m ERDF funding from Shropshire Council to Historic England the first stage of works is underway for completion in the autumn. The total cost for this first stage is £2.4m with Historic England providing the additional match. The 2007-2013 EU programme closes in December 2015 and the ERDF projects funded through this programme (Business Enterprise Fund, Eureka, Marches Grads for Business, Metnet, Optimising Broadband, Technical Assistance) have or will finish. A significant amount of work has been undertaken to establish the priorities for the new 2014-2020 EU programme and to ensure Shropshire is in a position to respond to the various European funded calls. A Full application for Technical Assistance support is being developed for submission in September 2015.

The Annual Shropshire Business Summit was held on the 8th June 2015 with record business attendance of 140–companies with an evaluation showing that 96% of feedback forms rated the event as excellent or very good the highest ever rating.

Further financial assistance has been provided to companies unable to gain bank finance with Shropshire's Business Investment Fund with £3.1M of loans available from £5000 to £150,000. Already 47 loans have been given to local small and medium sized businesses generating 78 new jobs a total of £824,000 loaned.

Infrastructure for Growth

The Phase II Extension of Shrewsbury Business Park which links to Wenlock Road was completed in July 2014. The scheme I opened up over 6 acres with the capacity to accommodate 100,000 sq. ft. of office space together with a 10,000 sq. ft. local centre. Planning permission has been granted for 3,000 sq. ft. convenience store coffee shop and restaurant. It is estimated this next phase of development will create 600 jobs.

Work is also underway on the provision of small workshops as part of Phase II of Tern Valley Business Park at Market Drayton. 17 starter workshops have been completed by Redstart Construction as part of the first phase of a 42 unit scheme .In addition the developer has been granted permission for the construction of 7x1, 000 sq. ft. small office units.

Feasibility studies have been completed for the development of the Oswestry Innovation Park at Mile End. A master plan has been prepared based on a market assessment together with utilities appraisal and costings report together with consideration of the options for procurement and delivery of the business park. It is estimated that the site which is 22.7 ha (56 acres) has capacity to accommodate up to 47,000m² (over 0.5m sq. ft.) of development and generate between 1,300 -2000

jobs if funding is approved. The site recently benefitted from the Highways Agency 'Pinch Point' programme with improvements to the A5/A483 Roundabout at Mile End and the provision of an access into the site. A phased approach to the development of the site is proposed with provision of infrastructure for the Phase 1 which will open up 8ha (20acres)

West of the Innovation Park and the A5 is Oswestry Sustainable Urban Extension, a mixed use development comprising 900 dwellings and associated ancillary facilities. A Traffic Impact Assessment has been commissioned in conjunction with developers J Ross to consider the impact of the Innovation Park and the Oswestry SUE on the A5/A483 roundabout at Mile End. The Council is also considering early release of land in its ownership within the SUE following demand from local companies seeking to relocate following redevelopment schemes.

The Shrewsbury West Sustainable Urban Extension is a mixed use development comprising 750 dwellings and associated employment land including an extended Oxon Business Park, 'gateway' development at Churncote roundabout, health care business campus off Clayton Way and extended local centre at Bicton Heath. The Council is a major landowner and in conjunction with promoters Mosaic Estates, commissioned a master plan developers and David Wilson Homes have submitted a planning application for residential development.

A key element is the Oxon Link Rd (OLR) which will provide a new principal vehicular link between the A5 Shrewsbury Bypass and the B4380 Holyhead Rd facilitating the delivery of the SUE. Following the announcement of the LEP Growth Deals in July 2014, pump priming funding from the LEP was made available to work up the outline business case. In May 2015 the Cabinet agreed to submit the business case to the Marches LEP for part funding of the road from the Local Growth Fund. In addition, the Council has agreed in principle to forward fund the road construction costs with the proceeds of development. A detailed report outlining the financial proposals and recommendations for funding will be submitted on approval of Growth Fund monies.

The provision of additional electricity supply at Whitchurch has been an issue for number of years and Shropshire Council has been lobbying Scottish Power Energy Networks to invest in the network. This lobbying has proved to be successful as the company have agreed to make investment in additional capacity to cater for the proposed housing and employment development allocations. The company will also be upgrading the main 132kv network with a new overhead line and new substation to cater for Whitchurch

In Bridgnorth there has been concern at the loss of two companies due to lack of premises and serviced employment land. Work is ongoing to identify an economic 'health check' of the town in consultation with the local members on possible options for the future development of serviced employment land.

The Council provides a wide range of starter units and small offices and work-shops to address market failure in all our towns. The 209 units achieved the highest ever occupancy rate of 95% in April 2015; and support more than 150 companies and 400

jobs. The Shropshire Food Enterprise Centre is a good example of the provision of high quality incubator space for food and drink companies. Huge savings have been made by bringing the management of this facility back in house and in total well over 80 jobs have been created via this facility.

The £3.5M Market Towns Revitalisation Programme (MTRP) was due to complete on 31st March 2014 but has now been extended to allow £430,000 of critical economic projects to be completed including the refurbishment of Ludlow Buttercross and a range of projects in Bridgnorth.

Stimulating our Growth Sectors

Business growth and the increase in the number of high value jobs will occur in our opportunity sectors. The sectors that we focus on are Food and Drink, Agri-technology, Environmental and Low Carbon, Creative and Digital and the Visitor Economy. All of which have private sector champions on the Shropshire Business Board.

Food and Drink successes include the new facility for ABP at Hordley, the new cheese packing plant at Arla in Oswestry and many new food festivals across the County e.g. in Shrewsbury. We provide support for Environmental Technology businesses through the Marches Environmental Technologies Network which has now been extended to December 2015. A recent evaluation found that it had generated £1.4M of GVA in the last phase.

Key successes for Agri-technology include the funding and opening of the Agricultural Innovation Centre at Harper Adams using £750,000 of Marches LEP funding and the recent development and large overseas sales of the Merlin Robotic Milking Parlour by Fullwood in Ellesmere.

The Visitor Economy continues to be recognised as an important economic driver for Shropshire. Both the private and public sectors continue to invest at an impressive rate with over £40 million worth of projects identified within the last two years.

Our Skilled and Loyal Workforce

Employment and Skills has a champion on the Business Board and key achievements over the year have been a 'Real Apprenticeship' event held in February 2015 and targeted campaigns to boost apprentice numbers in small and medium sized businesses in our key growth sectors. In conjunction with training providers in Shropshire, Telford and Herefordshire, there is an ESF skills in the workforce project with a value of £400K. This is really up-skilling employees in the workforce and is a good example of collaborative working across all training providers. As regards the number of apprentice starts we still only have 13/14 numbers which were 770 apprentice starts compared to a target of 738 in 12/13. We are awaiting data on this for 14/15 from the National Apprenticeship Service.

Work on the new University Centre Shrewsbury is moving on a pace. The first undergraduates are due to arrive on the 27th September 2015; the first post graduate course has been completed; the refurbishment of the Guildhall as the main

University teaching centre is well under-way; the refurbishment of Mardol providing 86 bedrooms for the new students is almost finished.

5. Outdoor Partnerships

As part of Shropshire Council's Transformation and savings agenda the Outdoor Recreation Service was restructured as of 1st April 2014 to become Outdoor Partnerships. In addition since April 2014 the hosting arrangements for the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership team has been transferred to Outdoor Partnerships.

Whilst statutory work remains unchanged the redesigned service provides an even stronger focus to meeting wider Public Health outcome's by encouraging more communities, groups and individuals to become more physically active by better utilising their outdoor recreational assets. This includes supporting people who have physical and mental health problems to become more active outdoors - Shropshire Wild Teams has been launched. Strategic partnership working (for example with Warwickshire & West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company) has been at the heart of service delivery, alongside working with local communities in the management of local assets.

There has been a focus on increased income generation, with both Country Parks working towards a cost neutral position for the Council and the Rights of Way Team taking on more paid work.

In addition work is further focussed on proposals to transfer greenspace assets to town and parish councils, a review of grounds maintenance costs, and reviewing budgets of our two main Country parks at The Mere and Severn Valley.

The key achievements in 2014/15 include:

- The 'Ease of Use' of Public Rights of Way maintained at 73% of the network
- 62 active Parish Paths Partnership groups, including seven new groups
- 738 physical improvements were made to the ROW network, including the replacement of 111 stiles with gates to make routes accessible to more people
- 817 people volunteered with the service, dedicating 48,500 hours, with a value of £275,000
- There are 49 active Walking for Health groups throughout Shropshire with over 550 people per week walking with the scheme.
- 142 people have been trained as Walks Leaders this year.
- 40 volunteer groups working on parks and greenspaces with approximate 420 members - 244 recorded volunteers, putting in 16,297 of volunteer hours
- Green Flag Award status gained by The Mere and Severn Valley Country Park

- Probationers provided 9,364 hours of work, equivalent to £72,571, based on the volunteer rate of £7.75 p/h
- £130,000 of LSTF funding in 2014/15
- 49 children's events were held at Severn Valley Country Park with 2824 people attending - represents a 45% increase in the number of children taking part in events.

6. Development of Business Support and Regulatory Services

The process to develop and refine the new delivery model for Business Support and Regulatory Services (formerly known as FULCRUM) continued throughout 2014/15 with the transfer of the services into ip&e Ltd achieved on 1 June 2015. In April 2015, the responsibility for the specific services delivered through Business Support and Regulatory Services was assigned to the Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services, Housing and Commissioning (Central). As a result, further particulars concerning the development and transfer of Business Support and Regulatory Services are covered in the Portfolio Holder Report for Regulatory Services, Housing and Commissioning (Central) that was presented to Council in July 2015.

7. Visitor Economy, Arts Development and Theatre Services

The Visitor Economy Team over the last 12 months have achieved many things, not least the launch of the new **Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery**, a £10.7M re-development of the former Music Hall and Vaughan's Mansion which has created a vibrant tourist hub in the town centre. Our valuable museum collections are displayed in a suitable environment and we are enticing visitors and local residents to get and explore the many cultural delights that Shropshire has to offer. The service was delighted to enter into an agreement with solicitors Lanyon Bowdler to become the first corporate sponsor of the Museum & Art Gallery.

The Team has devised an exceptional special exhibitions programme in the main gallery. 'Exposed-The Body in Art' brought top names from 500 years of painting and engraving. 'Secret Egypt' with its incredible artefacts from that ancient civilisation including a real mummy was a blockbuster event attracting more than 12,000 visitors in its three month run. This summer we have been invaded by dinosaurs as the National Museum of Wales brought its 'Archaeopteryx-The Missing Link between Dinosaurs and Birds' exhibition to Shrewsbury.

The autumn and winter period looks very promising with 'Brick City-The World's Most Iconic Buildings and Landmarks in LEGO®', 'The Magical World of Masks and Puppets' and 'Valhalla' a Viking exhibition from York to look forward to. We are working on plans with the Defence Photographic School for an exhibition of 100 years of defence photography and also marking the 50th anniversary of the School's move to RAF Cosford. We are very pleased to celebrate the close links between Shrewsbury and Zutphen with an exhibition by Dutch artist Jet Rotmans.

The contemporary art programme continues to attract new audiences and investment from the Arts Council England. Exhibitions such as the World War I artist in residence have had a particular resonance with visitors.

The Stop. Cafe has firmly established itself as a popular meeting place for Shrewsbury residents and visitors and also promotes its own events. Working with solicitors Lanyon Bowdler the Museum is launching its own business networking club with a breakfast for 40 members to hear from the new owner of the Dana prison. The regular Shrewsbury Tweet Up group brought over 100 members for a social evening in the café and courtyard earlier this year.

Shrewsbury Castle & Regimental Museum has been marking the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo with a series of events including a lecture and an outdoor concert. The venue remains very popular.

It's been a busy time at **Acton Scott Historic Working Farm** as it celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2015. TV crews have been to the farm on many occasions in the recent past helping to raise its profile.

Much Wenlock Museum continues to perform above pre-Olympic Games levels demonstrating that the tremendous amount of work done to celebrate the town's heritage in 2011-12 has paid dividends.

Work has continued on creating a new **Ludlow Museum** in the Buttercross, which is expected to open during autumn 2015. This will be managed by Ludlow Town Council with curatorial support from the Visitor Economy Team. **Ludlow Museum Resource Centre** has been re-structured as part of the wider service redesign work and continues to offer opportunities to volunteers in addition to housing a significant part of the Museum's significant collection. Also in Ludlow the **Visitor Information Centre** is now run by the Assembly Rooms in a temporary location awaiting the refurbishment of the ground floor. When this is complete the VIC will return to its former site and be run in conjunction with the Assembly Rooms Box Office.

In July 2015 **Shropshire Archives** celebrated 20 years at the Castle Gates building. The new Shropshire Records and Research Centre, as it was then called, was formally opened on 24 July 1995. During that time the service has been transformed. Computers were just being introduced to the workplace in 1995 and the centre was one of the first new Shropshire County Council buildings to have an integrated IT network, though customers only had access to one dumb terminal. Things are very different now with almost 400,000 records online, including 30,000 photographs, as well as images of Shropshire parish registers available through the subscription website Findmypast.

Throughout the 20 years, the service has relied on the support of volunteers and members of the Friends of Shropshire Archives. Following the completion of the successful 'Volunteering for Shropshire's Heritage' project, funded by the Heritage Lottery fund, volunteering has continued at Shropshire Archives with volunteers involved in all aspects of the service including helping customers, supporting events, and working on the cataloguing, digitisation and conservation of collections.

Volunteers can also contribute from home by using the Heritage Heroes website www.heritageheroes.org.uk.

As part of county wide activity to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War, £190,000 of funding was secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England to support nineteen arts and heritage projects across Shropshire from 2014-2016. These projects have included a dramatic presentation 'My Dearest Girls' developed with Pentabus and inspired by a book of women's letters held at Shropshire Archives which is now on tour across the county, a recreation of a First World War trench system at Park Hall, and a digital installation 'Fracture: World War One to 21st Century Healing', developed by the Qube, in Oswestry. Fracture celebrates the remarkable story of Sir Robert Jones and Dame Agnes Hunt, pioneers who revolutionised modern orthopaedics and nursing rehabilitation, and will on show at Qube from 10th September to 7th November 2015.

7.1 Tourism

During the past year we took the opportunity to review the level of support that the Council gives to the Tourism Sector. There have been a number of changes to working practices and, as a result, we have taken some key decisions.

The Council continues to recognise the importance of the tourism sector to the Shropshire economy, with 14,500 people employed in the industry and highlighted in the Shropshire LEP and ESIF strategies as an investment priority. While deciding the way forward we took account of the resilience of the tourism sector and the way in which the work already undertaken by the Council's tourism team to develop robust strategies and build strong partnerships would be able to continue without direct involvement from the Council.

The new Visitor Economy Development Officer post will concentrate on strategic aims rather than hands on involvement in the tourism sector, but will still have the capacity to deal with certain issues such as PR trips, requests for information and advice and more as it arises. In future the role be concentrating on developing the Council's own tourism assets, such as the museums. This would include marketing and sponsorship, providing strategic support to the sector, leading on commissioning for the visitor information service, acting as conduit for large organisations such as Visit England and Visit Britain, working with the LEP Tourism Group to shape tourism priorities around European funds and some day to day support with businesses.

7.2 Arts Service

WW1 Commemorative Activities: To mark one hundred years since the First World War, the Arts Service and Shropshire Archives have been working in partnership with communities from across Shropshire, to deliver an ambitious programme of arts and heritage events - 'The Pity of War'. Funded by Heritage Lottery and Arts Council England (£190,300), over 15,000 people have so far engaged with the programme.

Shropshire Boys Dancing: 2014 was the fourth year of Boys Dancing, a successful project between Shropshire Council and the West Midlands Boys Dance Alliance and funded by Arts Council England (£10,000). 90 boys from primary schools across

Shropshire, worked with professional male dance artist to create a unique performance, 'No Man's Land', responding to WW1. Performed at Theatre Severn to a sell-out audience.

Flax Mill Maltings Arts Strategy: Funded by Arts Council England (£10,500), Shropshire Council and Friends of Flax Mill Maltings appointed a consultant to develop an Arts Strategy. The resulting strategy and action plan, provides a strategic framework and overarching artistic vision for the Flax Mill, supporting the future sustainability of the site. It will be used by both the Friends and Shropshire Council to; develop an arts programme, inform a wider arts and interpretation programme and identify opportunities for commissioning local, national and international artists.

Arts Connect West Midlands: Arts Service have been working in partnership with Arts Connect on a number of projects and initiatives, to enhance and develop the arts and cultural offer, for children and young people within Shropshire. Arts Connect have so far invested over (£20,000) into the county and are supporting the Shropshire Children and Young People's Cultural Consortium (SCYPCC), a recently formed network of arts and cultural organisations.

Arts Revenue Clients: 32 Arts Organisations and Festivals have been commissioned for 2014/15, through the Revenue Client Grant Scheme. The organisations and venues, deliver a regular high quality arts programme, are county wide and represent a number of art forms. It's expected in 2014/15, that the investment from Shropshire Council, will support these organisations in leveraging in £100,000, from grants and earned income.

7.3 Theatre Services

The Old Market Hall

There were 1,123 film screenings this year and overall attendance was 61,666 (£221,602) 13.6% up on attendances for 2013/14. New digital projection equipment was installed during the course of the financial year without interruption to the film programme. Participating in the National live season of screenings has seen a continued increase in attendance and added a new dimension to the film programme. So much so, that this offering has been expanded and these screenings now also take place at Theatre Severn

Theatre Severn

There were almost 450 performances that took place in either the Walker Theatre or Auditorium during 2014/15. This resulted in an increase in average attendances to 159,936, up 10.4% on 2013/14. 31% of these tickets were sold to households outside of Shropshire.

The Pantomime contributed to this by having its most successful season ever, with almost 40,000 people attending a performance. The production sold out to 98% of capacity. At this stage of the year, sales for the forthcoming Pantomime season are currently 1% ahead of sales for the previous year.

Income from private hires, again showed an increase on last year. Outright purchase and installation of digital projection equipment for the Walker Theatre was possible, allowing expansion of the rapidly growing 'live screenings' market. Outsourcing of The Foundry Restaurant took place in January 2015 and early indications are that it looks to be a positive move.

8. Connecting Shropshire Broadband Programme

Phase 1

The Connecting Shropshire programme is now two thirds through its Phase 1 delivery and remains on schedule to complete to its contract commitments by winter 2016. Connecting Shropshire is projecting to connect up to 93% of premises to the fibre network by the end of Phase 1 with 87% of premises projected to get access to superfast broadband (sfb) speeds of at least 24Mbps. The projected figure remains dependent upon existing commercial providers delivering to their original pre-procurement engagement commitments.

As of August 2015 the programme has connected nearly 40,000 premises to the new fibre network.

A key element and focus for the Connecting Shropshire programme is generating demand for the new network from businesses and communities. The upgrade work does not increase speeds automatically and it is up to individuals and businesses to 'opt in' and 'take up' the new service with their chosen Internet Supplier Provider once new structures are enabled.

As part of our Phase 1, Connecting Shropshire committed to improve broadband to all programme premises that had a speed of less than 2Mbps, regardless of our plans to provide fibre broadband. BDUK have recently advised that the solutions to provide better broadband to those premises that cannot be connected to fibre broadband will be through Satellite technology. Connecting Shropshire are anticipating undertaking a trial of the technology later this year in a number of communities.

Phase 2

As part of the Government's continued commitment to improve sfb nationally, Shropshire Council received a notional sum of £11.38m as part of the Phase 2 national BDUK programme. This sum was based on delivering sfb to 90% of premises locally, and 95% nationally by 2017.

Full match funding (£ :£) was required as part of the initial BDUK £11.38m offer to Shropshire Council in March 2014. Following discussions with BDUK, Shropshire Council received approval to undertake a procurement process using £11.38m BDUK, and £5.02m match funding from the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Local Growth Fund (LGF). An invitation to tender was issued as part of the BDUK framework on 12 January 2015.

A formal bid was received from BT, the only framework supplier, on 24 April 2015. A contract was signed in June 2015 which commits to serve a further 3,735 premises with access to superfast broadband.

Phase 2 will see Shropshire Council meet the Government sfb local target by providing coverage to 91.7% of premises, against 87% in Phase 1. This projection is based upon existing providers meeting their commercial commitments as defined during the pre-procurement process.

Since contracting with BT for Phase 2 Shropshire has received written assurances from BDUK that the residual unused funds (£6.68m) are available to be used with the LEP LGF (£5.02m) to procure further coverage. The monies will be used to address the balance of premises unserved with sfb, which is projected as approximately 12k premises.

Connecting Shropshire has now commenced 'soft market' testing in order to assess further procurement opportunities within the 'open market' at the same time as assessing further partnership opportunities that will demonstrate value.

8.1 Business Connection Vouchers

BDUK extended the city voucher scheme from 22 cities to 50 in the spring 2015 budget.

As part of scheme's extension, a number of rural authorities were given an opportunity to apply for inclusion, provided they were able to partner with an existing city authority administrator. The scheme's extension was seen as a real opportunity to seek some further support to address superfast broadband gaps projected as part of the main Connecting Shropshire programme. Shropshire Council applied to Digital Birmingham as part of the process and was successfully accepted by BDUK into the scheme from April.

The voucher scheme provides Connecting Shropshire with a complimentary project that supports businesses that have an immediate requirement for a superfast connection, or are excluded from our main programme due to cost or engineering restrictions. It is therefore an invaluable option for Connecting Shropshire to be able to offer businesses.

As of August 2015 Shropshire businesses had successfully applied for over 50 vouchers for new connections. As a result these businesses will be able to exploit the commercial opportunities through digital connectivity that would not otherwise have been available.

In addition to supporting local businesses to get connected it has also opened up commercial opportunities for the local wireless suppliers who have been able to exploit the gaps in the market that we are currently unable to service as part of existing commercial relations.

It is understood that the current £40m allocation for vouchers, released in April 2015 by BDUK may be fully committed by as early as October 2015. In addition there

appears to be a strong indication that any extension of the scheme will be the subject of the autumn Spending Review being undertaken by HM Treasury.

8.2 Business Optimisation

The Optimising Business Broadband (OBB) Project finished delivery to qualifying SMEs across Shropshire Council and Staffordshire County Council areas in June 2015. The project had been supported by Connecting Shropshire and Superfast Staffordshire programmes and enabled SMEs to discover how fibre broadband technology could support digital economic growth. The project value was £216,467 and was supported by a grant sum of £108,233 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

The Project was commissioned by the two authorities through an ‘open tendering’ process. Winning Moves (WM) were contracted to deliver the activities with project co-ordination by Connecting Shropshire.

WM exceeded all ERDF contracted outputs which included engagement with 440 businesses. In total 75 SMEs received business assists which exceeded the original ERDF contracted output of 34.

In 2014 Shropshire Council was awarded a grant sum of £75k from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Government Equalities Office (GEO) to encourage women to take on the new digital technologies which are possible with superfast broadband, and is linked to Shropshire Council’s broadband delivery programme. Shropshire Council contracted with Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) to deliver the project, following a granted procurement exemption based on their ability to deliver a niche service delivery. The 2014 WAB (Woman and Broadband) project completed successful to time, cost and output and was subsequently held up as an exemplar by the GEO across the national programme of activity.

In 2015 the GEO made £1.1m available nationally for Broadband Projects to bid for a phase 2 project. Shropshire Council, together with Staffordshire, who also previously had contracted with WiRE, and Telford & Wrekin Council submitted a joint application for funding. The call was open to all 44 national broadband programmes. Shropshire’s joint bid was one of only 16 that were successful in being awarded funding. The original bid was £150k with an offer received of £146k.

The Phase 2 WAB project will commence delivery of activities across the Shropshire region from September 2015.

9. BEREAVEMENT SERVICE

The council's bereavement service is provided via Co-Operative Funeral Care Ltd with whom in 2011 the council entered into a 30 year concession agreement. This agreement provides for a suite of bereavement services across the bereavement estate comprising of Emstrey crematorium and cemetery, Longden Road cemetery, 5 other rural cemeteries in villages in central Shropshire and in time will include a new cemetery being developed off Mytton Oak Road, Shrewsbury.

Funeral booking administration, arrangements for cremation and grave preparation, memorialisation, collection of fees and charges and some aspects of grounds maintenance are undertaken or arranged by Co Op. Around 1,500 cremations and 150 burials are provided for annually via the council owned crematorium and cemeteries.

The last 12 months has seen the bereavement service subjected to significant local and national media coverage and public scrutiny.

Following on from the BBC's 2014 enquiry into infant cremation practices at Emstrey the council commissioned an independent inquiry. The inquiry concluded in May 2015 with the publication of a report of findings and recommendations. Twelve recommendations were made, the first seven of these aimed towards national government calling for amongst other items; the establishment of a single authoritative code of practice, a national inspector of crematoria and, the establishment of minimum standards of training for crematorium staff.

Three recommendations were directed at the council, these focussed on:

- 1 - ensuring that its contractor arranges adequate maintenance provision of the cremation equipment and its timely updating/replacement.
- 2 - that the council participates in regular liaison with its contractor, funeral directors, officiants and hospitals so as to remain connected with the service to ensure its quality.
- 3 - that the council ensure its service management arrangement includes expertise and competencies normally associated with personal social care.

The remaining two recommendations were directed jointly at the council and its contractor and focussed on ensuring that there is a programme of continuing professional development for related staff. Also that a revised, plainly written ashes policy statement is jointly issued making it clear that whilst no absolute guarantee can be given, it is probable, given the use of new equipment and techniques that ashes from infant cremations are likely to be recovered.

The inquiry made clear that the matter of non-recovery of ashes from infant cremations was an historic rather than a current issue. New cremators were installed in 2013, since this time ashes from infant cremations have been recovered in each case. Following publication of the inquiry report a working group comprising of both council and contractor representatives has been formed. The working group met weekly initially and has made swift and proper progress on all recommendations

and particularly those recommendations with which the council has greater influence or is accountable for.

Shared communal infant graves also received media and public attention. A related charity group cleared such graves of personal tributes and the manner in which the clearance took place caused upset with bereaved families. The council was subsequently petitioned to install a definitive tribute policy. Consultation has taken place. In excess of 50 responses are received and evaluation of responses is in process with the aim to create, communicate and install a tribute policy for shared graves.

The major project over the next 12 months is the commissioning of the new cemetery off Mytton Oak Road. This is due for spring 2016 and dialogue is ongoing with the various stakeholders and contractors.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Steve Charmley

Local Member

All Members

Appendices