



Committee and Date
COUNCIL

10 December 2009

Item

3

Public

MINUTES

OF

MEETING OF SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2009
AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Mr P Adams	Mr D W Evans	Mr M J Owen JP
Mrs B J Baker	Mr R A Evans	Mr W M Parr
Mr T Barker	Mr E J Everall	Mrs E A Parsons
Mr J B Barrow	Mr J B Gillow OBE	Mr M G Pate
Mr K R Barrow	Mr N J Hartin	Mr M T Price
Mr M Bennett	Mrs T Huffer	Mr D L Roberts
Mr W Benyon	Mr R Hughes	Mr K Roberts
Mr T H Biggins	Mr V J Hunt	Mrs D M Shineton
Ms K Burgoyne	Mr J Hurst-Knight	Mr J Tandy
Mr V Bushell JP	Dr J E Jones	Mr R Tindall
Mr G Butler	Mr S P A Jones	Mr G F Tonkinson
Mrs A J Caesar-Homden	Mr J M W Kenny	Mr A E Walpole
Mrs K D Calder	Mrs H M Kidd	Mr S J West
Mr S Charnley	Mr C J Lea	Mr M Whiteman OBE
Mrs A M Chebsey	Mr D G Lloyd MBE	Mrs C Wild
Mr J E Clarke	Mr C J Mellings	Mr B B Williams RD
Mr G L Dakin	Mr D J Minnery	Mr M Williams
Mr A B Davies	Mr A N Mosley	Mr L Winwood
Mrs P A Dee	Mrs C M A Motley	Mr M L Wood
Mr A Durnell	Mrs E M Nicholls	M P A D Wynn

72. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chief Executive reported apologies for absence had been received from Mr T Bebb, Mr S Davenport, Mr T Davies, Mr J A Gibson, Mrs E A Hartley, Mrs M Mullock, Mr P A Nutting, Mr P F Phillips, Mr M Taylor-Smith, Mrs R Taylor-Smith, Dr M Winchester and Mrs T Woodward.

73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

- (a) Mr T H Biggins declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 14.3 - Motions - as the owner of a second property in Shropshire.
- (b) Mr G H L Butler declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 14.3 as the owner of a second property in Shropshire.
- (c) Mr M J Owen declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 12 - Delegation of Power to Appoint Freemen - as a hereditary freeman.

Each of the above members withdrew during consideration of the relevant item.

74. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2009 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

75. ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Chairman's Engagements

The Chairman referred members to the list of official engagements undertaken by himself and the Speaker since the last meeting on 5 November 2009.

(b) Death of Mrs Ann Whiteman

The Speaker reported with great sadness the recent death of Mrs Ann Whiteman, who as wife of Councillor Milner Whiteman had assisted him in his public duties for many years, particularly while he was Chairman of Bridgnorth District Council and as Mayoress of Much Wenlock in 1974, 1981 and 1996.

He also referred to the recent death of Mr Michael Gillow, the brother of the last Chairman of the former County Council, Mr J B Gillow.

Members expressed their sincere condolences and stood for a few moments as a tribute to their memory.

(c) **Carols and Lunch**

The Speaker reported that when the meeting adjourned for lunch the staff choir would sing carols outside the Council Chamber and invited all members to join him and the Chairman in a festive drink during the performance.

76. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Speaker reported that no questions had been received from the public in accordance with Procedural Rule 14.

77. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

The Speaker advised that six questions had been received from members in accordance with Procedural Rule 15.

(a) Mr A N Mosley asked the following question:

"The Shropshire Partnership has included "Responding to climate change....." as one of 3 priorities within the draft Community Strategy. It also declares an aspiration that: "Shropshire will be recognised as a leader in responding to climate change". In view of this, does the Portfolio holder think that the Council should reconsider its recent negative decision and join the nationwide '10/10' campaign regarding carbon emissions and in so doing respond to and lead the county in its endeavours? Does he now believe that the Shropshire Council should join the large number of councils, businesses, voluntary organisations, political parties, educational institutions, health authorities and other public and private groupings in pledging to exhibit real ambition in reducing its impact on climate change?"

Mr D W L Roberts the Portfolio Holder for Local Environment and Economy replied as follows:-

The 10:10 campaign is an initiative launched in September to encourage people, businesses and organisations to reduce their carbon footprint by 10% by the end of next year. The aim is to raise individual and collective awareness to the problem of global warming and secure commitments to take positive action, particularly in weeks leading to the Copenhagen summit.

Last month plans were agreed for a clear and deliverable Carbon Reduction Programme based around known and costed projects over the next 12 months and 5 year project year timeframe. Through this agreement Shropshire Council is committing to reduce the carbon footprint of council activities by some 35%. This agreement has been confirmed by the Government Office for the West Midlands as being both reasonable and deliverable given the authority's formation in April. To seek to accelerate the planned delivery in the initial stages of our programme to meet the 10:10 pledge would have cost and logistical implications and in reality is unlikely to be achievable.

Mr Mosley said that he was encouraged by the Shadow Cabinet's enthusiastic support for the 10/10 campaign. He asked by way of a supplementary question whether, in view of the current proceedings in Copenhagen, the Portfolio Holder was personally committed to the fact that climate change was caused by human activity?

In reply, Mr Roberts said that he would have preferred notice of the question but undertook to provide a written reply within the week.

(b) Mr J Tandy asked the following question:-

"Shropshire council taxpayers are faced with additional costs of £100,000 for the Quantum Leap, Shrewsbury, in excess of the price agreed by developers during the tendering process. Would the Portfolio Holder please explain:

How this overspend has arisen?

Were there mistakes made in the site investigation, design, budgeting and/or construction on the part of the council or the construction company?

Why the final structure is significantly different from drawings and artists impressions, particularly the prominent solid concrete bases?

Is it a normal form of contract to allow such large variations in price following a competitive tendering process?"

Mr S F Charmley the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure replied as follows:-

The Quantum Leap Project was an initiative of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council to develop a piece of public art as a lasting memorial to Charles Darwin's Legacy. Shropshire Council has inherited the responsibility to see this work successfully completed.

The £100,000 allocated to the Quantum Leap project covers the costs of re-orientating the Quantum Leap structure to avoid the temporary works required for the construction damaging the root protection area of the surrounding trees as required by the Council's Tree Conservation Officer as described below.

Work necessary for this purpose included:

- recalculating the localised bending within the Quantum Leap Arch due to the 500mm level difference from original position.
- redesigning the foundations and piling.
- redesigning the central steel spine which had to take into account the increased length in the Quantum Leap Arch
- additional engineering/materials required

In respect of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council all proper site investigations were carried out in advance of a builder being appointed.

Subsequently, after the appointment of the builder, the builder undertook a site evaluation for the construction of the structure and identified that he needed a larger working area than originally had been anticipated and this would encroach on to the tree protection root area. At this stage the foundations had not been constructed so it was possible for the precise location of the Quantum Leap Structure to be moved to protect the tree roots. The change in position of the structure gave rise to some of the additional costs, see above for details.

During the construction the structure had to be deconstructed because it was incorrectly aligned at the centre of the arch. This has now been corrected. We are not in a position to comment in regard to the Construction Company.

We do not believe that the final structure is different from the original sketches and drawings. We believe that the drawings and artists impressions gave a reasonable interpretation of the finished structure. With regard to the prominent solid concrete base, a number of issues were raised during the consultation phase, including concerns raised by the Environment Agency as to the impact the presence of the structure would have in a flooding situation. With regard to your point in respect of the solid concrete bases, I assume you are making reference to the concrete infills to the bottom few ribs at each end. The detailed drawings approved by Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Development Control and Environment Protection Committee on the 9th September 2008, show, "infill between ribs to discourage climbing and gathering of debris". In addition, the bases ensure compressive strength in times of flood, which exerts horizontal pressure to the base and eliminates any sway in high winds, which exerts vertical pressure on the base.

The construction of the Quantum Leap has been let on a normal form of contract, in which there are provisions to allow for variations. The additional costs in this project are higher in percentage terms than might normally be expected, however, it should be recognised that the Quantum Leap structure is unique in its design and construction and has presented a number of complexities to be solved.

By way of supplementary question, Mr Tandy asked, given the scale of the overspend on consultants and contractors, why hadn't the Council budgeted for these problems?

Replying, Mr Charmley stated that he would delve deeper for the answers and provide Mr Tandy with a written response in due course.

(c) Mrs E A Parsons asked the following question:

"Would the Portfolio Holder please outline what progress has been made towards the provision of suitable and easy access to Shropshire Council services at the Guildhall, Frankwell in Shrewsbury, especially for the disabled, wheelchair users, electric scooter users and those with pushchairs?"

The Leader, Mr K R Barrow, replied as follows:-

I am concerned that the Council should make reasonable adjustments to its property to facilitate access to our services and I thank Mrs Parsons for her

question. Whilst the Guildhall is accessible by people with disabilities, the footbridge from the car park is not, nor is it easily crossed by people with children in pushchairs. I am pleased to advise Mrs Parsons that following her earlier enquiry on this matter an appraisal was undertaken of the prospects for improving accessibility and we propose to bring forward a formal capital appraisal to be considered as part of the Council's future Capital Strategy.

By way of a supplementary question, Mrs Parsons asked that given it was such a longstanding issue which had been raised in the past could she be given a clearer idea of when the issues would be addressed.

Replying, Mr Barrow stated that he understood this would happen next year.

(d) Mrs E A Parsons asked the following question:

"What changes to the provision of services does the Administration foresee as a result of implementation of the Gender Equality Duty and how might any necessary changes impact on the forthcoming Budget?"

The Leader, Mr K R Barrow, of the Council, replied:-

The Gender Equality Duty is designed to address inequalities for men and women. It also requires public authorities to consider the need to prevent discrimination and harassment against transsexual people.

The duty was introduced in 2006 and we have worked with our staff and communities to ensure equal and fair access to services and employment. As part of the service planning process Equality Impact Needs Assessments (EINA's) are undertaken to ensure there are no negative or adverse impacts on either men or women. If a negative impact is identified then appropriate actions are taken to remedy this and these are built into the service planning process.

The duty also includes the requirement to consider the need to have objectives to address the causes of any gender pay gap. Shropshire County Council's Gender equality scheme was published in March 2007 and each year since then a statement has been published detailing the positive actions being taken to address equal pay and to implement the national single status agreement.

Shropshire Council does not foresee any impact to the forthcoming budget in fulfilling our duties against the Gender Equality duty.

Mrs Parsons thanked the Portfolio Holder for the answer, adding that she recognised that the Council was doing things correctly but, as a supplementary question, asked how members and the public could access the Action Plan on Gender Equality.

In reply Mr Barrow advised that he would confirm the relevant details in writing.

(e) Mr N J Hartin asked the following question on behalf of Mr P Phillips:

- (a) Can you acknowledge the contribution that Wheels to Work makes in terms of youth employment and training in remote rural areas?
- (b) Can you confirm the current level of budget for Wheels to Work and where the contributions come from?
- (c) Can you confirm that Wheels to Work's budget is safe in the current and next two financial years?

Mr D W L Roberts, the Portfolio Holder for Local Environment and Economy, replied as follows:-

The Council fully acknowledges the important contribution that Wheels to Work makes in supporting young people from remote rural areas in accessing employment and training opportunities.

The scheme, which is managed by the Community Council of Shropshire under contract to Shropshire Council, covers the whole of Shropshire and offers a number of interventions, including the moped hire service that is of particular benefit to young people living in areas not served by main bus and train routes.

The majority of Wheels to Work clients are referred from other support agencies including Jobcentre Plus, County Training and the Probation Service, and it has become a vital strategic tool in combating rural isolation and worklessness. There is an increasing demand for the service during the current period of economic uncertainty.

To provide an indication of the scale of the scheme, the following information shows the total number of people aged 21 and below that have been offered assistance through Shropshire Wheels to Work since April 2006 to the present day. The information has been broken down into the old district council areas and by 'transport solution' offered. The total number of under '21s' interviewed since 1st April 2006 to 25th Nov 09 was 630, of which 609 were offered assistance.

It will take more time to provide specific data on remote rural areas and the split between beneficiaries that used the service to access employment and/or training. To do this, each individual's case file would need to be checked manually by the Wheels to Work Co-ordinator, Mark Powell.

Shrewsbury and Atcham District

Mopeds offered:	51	
CBT only offered:	1	(i.e. just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	40	
Bicycles offered	3	
Grants offered	3	
Travel plans only	25	
Total offered assistance	<u>123</u>	
Total interviewed	128	

North Shropshire District

Mopeds offered:	88	
CBT only offered:	2	(i.e. just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	59	
Bicycles offered	3	
Grants offered	5	
Travel plans only	31	
Total offered assistance	<u>188</u>	
Total interviewed	198	

Oswestry District

Mopeds offered:	29	
CBT only offered:	0	(ie just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	50	
Bicycles offered	1	
Grants offered	2	
Travel plans only	18	
Total offered assistance	<u>100</u>	
Total interviewed	102	

South Shropshire District

Mopeds offered:	55	
CBT only offered:	3	(ie just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	34	
Bicycles offered	1	
Grants offered	3	
Travel plans only	8	
Total offered assistance	<u>104</u>	
Total interviewed	107	

Bridgnorth District

Mopeds offered:	47	
CBT only offered:	1	(ie just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	21	
Bicycles offered	1	
Grants offered	5	
Travel plans only	19	
Total offered assistance	<u>94</u>	
Total interviewed	95	

Financial position

From 06/07 to 08/09, the total Wheels to Work capital and revenue costs were picked up by grant funding through the Shropshire Access Partnership (AWM funding). This amounted to circa £110,000 per annum.

This arrangement was set to continue in 09/10, but following budgetary cuts within AWM, no decision on continuation funding had been reached by the start of the year. Shropshire Council agreed to support the scheme on a short-term basis pending an eventual decision by AWM.

Following pressure from the Council and Shropshire Partnership, agreement was reached in August 09 that AWM would provide support to Wheels to Work for a further year, but at a reduced level of £67k. To fill the funding gap, Shropshire Council is providing £30k to the scheme through LAA reward monies.

Discussion is ongoing regarding funding from April 2010. An application is being prepared for Rural Development Plan England funding. This is a regional bid, led by Staffordshire's Wheels to Work scheme, but Shropshire will have an autonomous budget within this. The bid will be submitted soon and, if successful, will provide funding for at least three years. However, whilst there is confidence that the bid will be successful, RDPE cannot support certain aspects of the project like insurance for the moped fleet and discussion is ongoing on where additional funding for these elements – approximately £20,000 p.a.- can be found. Some of this funding will be sought from the Council's Worklessness Commissioning Group.

By way of a supplementary question Mr Hartin sought confirmation that the Council would continue to support the Wheels to Work scheme should the bid for funding not be successful.

Replying, Mr D Roberts stated that he couldn't make any commitment at this stage but would look at the position with the officers.

(f) Mr N J Hartin asked the following question on behalf of Mr P Phillips:

"Will you confirm the value and excitement being offered by the Building Schools for the Future Programme? This in due course will refurbish our secondary schools or indeed in some cases build new ones. Would you confirm by your pleasure that at Partnerships for Schools on the 5th November it was confirmed that the programme is still in place. Shropshire is one of the last tranches of the programme - exciting developments at Much Wenlock are our pilot - so will you undertake to press the Government to at least confirm and keep to the programme and if possible bring Shropshire into the nearer rather than the more distant future?"

Mrs C M A Motley the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People replied as follows:-

I very much welcome the funding made available through the One School Pathfinder Project to enable the building of a new secondary school at Much

Wenlock. With regard to the Building Schools for the Future fund, The Director of CYPs wrote to the DCSF on 4 November 2009 urgently requesting clarity on the timeline for determining when BSF funding would be available to Shropshire, in the light of the need for this Council to align capital investment such as BSF, PCP and 14-19 to enable us to place 21st century schools at the heart of our sustainable community strategy.

In a letter dated 19th November, Partnerships for Schools responded on behalf of DCSF and stated that they were unable to set out a timeline for the entry of Shropshire into the BSF programme, and that Shropshire, in common with other local authorities low down on the prioritisation list, would not be invited to join the programme this financial year. Partnership for Schools reiterated ministers' commitment to seeing all local authorities joining the programme 'as soon as is practicable', and stated that they were currently considering how to support local authorities' preparation for entry to the programme.'

By way of a supplementary question Mr Hartin asked the Portfolio Holder give an undertaking that she would do all she could to make the Government change their mind and bring Shropshire into the programme earlier.

Replying, Mrs Motley agreed to keep on pressing the issue.

78. REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL ON MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

It was proposed by the Leader, Mr K R Barrow and seconded by Mr S J West that the report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes and the recommendations contained therein be agreed.

In presenting the report, Mr Barrow advised that Mr R J Thomas, one of the Panel members, was present to answer questions in the absence of the Panel Chairman.

Referring to the Panel's recommendations Mr N J Hartin stated that, first, the multiplier used to determine the Special Responsibility Allowances for the Chairs of the Strategic Planning Committee and the three Area Planning Committees should be reduced from 0.75 to 0.5 equating to a Special Responsibility Allowance of £6,060 per annum. Secondly, the members of the Area Planning Committees should receive an SRA which is equivalent to 10% of the Chairman's Basic Allowance, equating to £606.00 per annum.

He explained that, currently, there were 20 members of the Area Planning Committees not in receipt of another Special Responsibility Allowance who would be entitled to receive this payment. By reducing the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Committee Chairs, this equated to the £12,120 saving, and so there would be no change to the overall Allowances budget.

Mr A N Mosley also suggested the deletion of the words "other than that resulting from its indexing to the annual NJC staff pay award" from the final sentence of paragraph 5.5 and their replacement with the words "and the indexing provision be withdrawn from 1 January 2010" and also the deletion of paragraph 6.44 of the Panel's report.

After consulting Mr Thomas on the point, the Leader stated that he would refer these proposals to the Panel for further comment. However, in the interim, members should accept the report as drafted.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the foregoing, the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations on the proposed level of allowances for the 2010/11 financial year be approved.

79. SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2010/11

It was proposed by the Leader, Mr K R Barrow, and seconded by Mr M Bennett that the report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes and recommendations contained therein, be received and agreed.

The Speaker explained that the assumptions used in the report were those based on the Council's current policy relating to empty properties which was the substance of a motion to be considered by the Council later in the meeting. Should the Council decide to amend its existing policy there was still sufficient time to review and revise these assumptions and to consider them afresh at the meeting on 21 January 2010.

Mr N J Hartin and other members thanked the Leader for the helpful clarification.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, in accordance with the Local Authority's (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, the amount calculated by Shropshire Council as its council tax base for the 2010/11, and detailed in the appendix to the report, totalling £107,939.04, be approved.
- (b) That the inclusion of £430.54 Band D equivalents in the tax base for continuation of the second homes discount at 10%, in accordance with present Council policy, be noted.
- (c) That the exclusion of £842.83 Band D equivalents from the tax base for continuation the long term empty properties discount at 50%, in accordance with present Council policy, be noted.
- (d) That the reduction in the council tax income raised of £997,690 as a result of the continuation of the long term empty properties discount at 50%, be noted.
- (e) That a collection rate for 2010/11 of 98.50% be approved.

80. REVISED MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION STATEMENT – 2009/2010

It was proposed by the Leader, Mr K R Barrow, and seconded by Mr T Barker that the report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes and the recommendations contained therein, be received and agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the setting aside of £26,814,600 in usable capital receipts, as at 1 April 2009, be approved.
- (b) That the revised Minimum Revenue Provision statement for 2009/2010 be approved.

81. APPOINTMENT OF ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER AND RETURNING OFFICER

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Chief Executive be appointed as Electoral Registration Officer in accordance with Section 8(2)(a) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- (b) That the Chief Executive be appointed as Returning Officer in accordance with the Section 35(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- (c) That the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) be appointed Deputy Electoral Registration Officer in accordance with Section 52(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

82. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEE CONSTITUTION

It was proposed by Mr G H L Butler and seconded by Mrs C M A Motley that the amended report, a copy of which was tabled at the meeting and attached to the signed minutes and the recommendation contained therein, be received and agreed.

Presenting the report, Mr Butler advised that the proposed amendments dealt with the circumstances when members were unable to take part in a particular decision resulting in the quorum not being achieved. He also clarified the situation in the Shrewsbury area, where several elected members represented both the unitary electoral division and the ward of the Shrewsbury Town Council, and advised that the final sentence had been deleted from paragraph 3(i).

A number of members commented on the value of this relatively straightforward change.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed amendments to the Local Joint Committee's Constitution, as set out in Appendix 1 to the amended report, be approved.

83. DELEGATION OF POWER TO APPOINT FREEMEN

It was proposed by the Leader, Mr K R Barrow and seconded by Mr K Roberts that the report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes and the recommendations contained therein be received and agreed.

The Leader declared that he was delighted to propose this change which would in future enable the Shrewsbury Town Council to exercise the powers under Section 248 and 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the installation and creation of Freemen and Honorary Freemen of the town.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council delegates to the Shrewsbury Town Council those powers under Section 248 and 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the installation of Freemen and the creation of Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Shrewsbury.
- (b) That the Council pursues with the Department of Communities and Local Government the possible amendment of the law in this area.
- (c) That the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to approve any similar request received from other town councils in Shropshire.

84. JOINT MEMBER BOARD – TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was proposed by Mr S P A Jones and seconded by Mr M Bennett that the report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes and the recommendation contained therein, be received and agreed.

Mr Jones, in presenting the report, explained that the terms of reference for the Joint Member Board had been recently reviewed. This was to ensure that the Board was effectively discharging the responsibilities of the Council and the Primary Care Trust in line with other partnerships and the newly emerging performance regimes across local government and the National Health Service.

The new terms of reference would expand scrutiny over the functions of the Directorate of Public Health to ensure that health needs assessment and health surveillance, as well as the joint commissioning of services, were pursued appropriately.

RESOLVED:

That the terms of reference for the Joint Member Board of the Council and the Shropshire County Primary Care Trust, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

85. MOTIONS

- (a) It was proposed by Dr J E Jones and seconded by Mrs E A Parsons:

That this authority, in line with the leadership of all the major political parties, totally repudiates the politics of hate and discrimination and will work to ensure that Shropshire is a welcoming place where all our communities and residents can live together in harmony.

We will continue to work with partner organisations to address hate crime and, as community leaders, to promote traditional values of fairness and open-mindedness.

Dr Jones advised that in proposing the motion she had been accused of stating the obvious, but held the view that unless members stood up and said what they believed, it would not be obvious to those outside the Council Chamber. She stated that it was easy for those whose motive was to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of others and this motion provided members with a chance to speak up against intolerance. It was not a party political wheeze; neither was it intended to deny right to express legitimate concerns or even national policy differences between members. Shropshire had recently been voted one of the top five areas of Britain in which to live. This was something to celebrate and the Council should do all that it could to protect the wellbeing of local communities.

A large number of members, including Mr J M W Kenny, Mr G H L Butler, Mrs P A Dee and Mr N J Hartin welcomed the opportunity presented by the motion and, in doing so drew attention to such matters as disability hate crime and the need to be wary of those people promoting intolerance and the ideas of the far right wing groups.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Conservative Group would support the motion. He then thanked Mr M J Owen for the work that he had undertaken in this area when he had championed the cause as Portfolio Holder in the former Shropshire County Council Cabinet.

Responding, Dr Jones stated that it was wonderful to receive such support for the motion. Right wing elements were very active in the Shrewsbury area and the current economic recession presented them with the opportunity to scapegoat vulnerable groups. There was now more reason than ever to be vigilant and to combat unhelpful and inaccurate messages as well as challenging comments that led to intolerance.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

- (b) It was proposed by Mr N J Hartin on behalf of Mr P F Phillips and seconded Mr C J Mellings:

Economic recession is a great threat to Shropshire residents. Unemployment, reduced incomes, growing indebtedness cloud many lives. Shropshire Council can play a leading role and **RESOLVES:**

- Urgently to establish a Recession Task Group;
 - Small in number and including key partners
 - To meet urgently and
- (a) Publicise actions being taken to counter effects of the recession; and
- (b) Particularly: to identify quick and effective strategies.
- These could draw on the experience of other counties, e.g.
- (i) Employment Bond/using 'Tomorrow's People, especially to combat youth joblessness/establishing a Recession Fund ... increasing aid to CAB's, the Credit Union, etc. (E. Sussex).
- (ii) Learning Access Points/Rural Economy Scheme (Suffolk)
- (iii) In house apprenticeships/external apprenticeships/business loans Bank (Essex/Devon)

Or

Bidding into programmes of DWP like Future Jobs Fund/Backing Young Britain Campaign

and

proactively marketing Shropshire, not least our own business/workshop units/actively intervening with tenants who may be facing difficulties/making Economic Development a high profile and pro-active service; reconsidering capital project time lines.

These are only examples: they may be inappropriate or impractical, or already being done.

A Recession Task Group should be small, practical and positive. It should meet urgently and produce some Quick-Win actions. It should not indulge in copious report writing. It should raise awareness of strategies already in place.

Mr D W L Roberts proposed by way of amendment that consideration of the motion be deferred and that it be referred to the next meeting of the Economic Recession Committee to which Mr Phillips should be invited to attend.

He thanked the mover of the motion for the opportunity this presented to inform the Council of the considerable volume of work already undertaken in this area, including the production of a 17 page document which would be circulated to all members in due course.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried unanimously.

(c) It was proposed by Mr R A Evans:

That Shropshire Council resolves to remove all council tax discounts from homes that have been empty for over 6 months commencing from April 2010.

The Local Government Act 2003 has given councils discretionary powers to reduce or remove the 50% discount awarded in respect of long-term empty properties with effect from 1st April 2004. Previously three of the old District/Borough Councils removed the discount and two retained the full 50% discount. Shropshire Council at present across its whole area gives a 50% discount to long term empty homes. This motion seeks to remove this discount and so encourage owners to either sell or rent out homes that have been empty for more than 6 months.

We need to reduce the number of empty properties. In general, Local Authorities who removed the discretionary council tax discount on Long Term Empty properties have a lower proportion of empty property stock than Local Authorities who have not removed the discount. Here in Shropshire we need to encourage empty homeowners to be good neighbours. Who wants to live next door to a house that has stood empty for a long time with its garden overgrown and a mess.

Note Shropshire Council already makes a grant available to those with homes that need work to bring them up to a suitable standard provided the owner agrees to make them available to rent and not sell them for the period agreed at the grant giving stage.

Mr Evans stated that it was widely accepted that there were not enough affordable homes available in Shropshire for those presently in need. And the Council's current policy in relation to council tax on empty homes meant that it was foregoing almost £1 million each year at a time when resources were already tight. By withdrawing the empty homes discount the Council would be able to assist those who were suffering homelessness by imposing on providing those with a second and subsequent properties the incentive to either sell or rent the properties to those in housing need. Where properties were in need of repair or refurbishment, grants were available where properties were subsequently made available for rental. Nationally, more than half of all the councils in England and Wales had now removed the empty homes discount, and while the 50% discount had been retained by 38% of the authorities, this number was reducing.

Mr Evans stated that before drafting the text of the motion he had received broad cross party support for the initiative and, given that the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing accepted the benefit of the Cabinet re-examining the current policy, he would not call for a seconder at this time. The matter would be left on the table to enable the Cabinet to consider a report in advance of the next meeting on 21 January 2010.

In reply, the Housing Portfolio Holder, Mr M T Price, thanked Mr Evans for enabling the matter to be considered by the Cabinet after which he would present a report to the next meeting of the Council.

He advised members that, currently there were 4,400 empty homes in Shropshire which had an impact on the housing waiting list across the County. However, this was not simply a council tax matter, so it was

essential that the Council had the opportunity to explain what other options existed to the owners of empty homes. These included maintaining the status quo with no change to the policy of granting 50% discount after six months, to charging full council tax after the property had been vacant for more than six months, or something in between.

However, members should not presume that all properties were empty for the same reason. These were varied and complex and could include disrepair, probate, previous difficulties with tenants, speculative purchase as well as for rental. By referring the matter to the Cabinet for further discussion, a comprehensive report could then be brought to the next Council meeting for all members to consider.

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the motion be deferred.

86. REPORT OF THE WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY

It was proposed by the Speaker and seconded by the Chairman that the report of the West Mercia Police Authority, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes, be received and noted.

Referring to paragraph 4 of the report, Mrs D K Calder asked if the Spokesperson, Mr Kenny, could clarify the purpose of the 21 year lease of Edinburgh House, Wem.

Replying, Mr Kenny advised that he would ensure Mrs Calder received a written response to her question.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the foregoing, the report be noted.

87. REPORT OF THE SHROPSHIRE AND WREKIN COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

It was proposed by Mr S J West and duly seconded by the Speaker that the report, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes, be received and noted.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

88. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 and paragraph 10.4(3) of the Council's Access to Information Procedural Rules, the public and press be excluded during consideration of the following item.

89. EXEMPT MINUTES

It was proposed by the Speaker and seconded by the Chairman that the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2009 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

SPEAKER

DATE

(The meeting closed at 11.00 a.m.)