

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**AGENDA ITEM 6**

**QUESTION 1**

**MRS T HUFFER** will ask the following question:

Asian Parent Group, Bangladeshi Welfare Association, Craven Arms, Minority Group are members of the Equalities Forum.

Can you confirm that you consulted them on the budget proposals; outline their comments; and indicate how their views are reflected in each EINA?

**See reply to Question 3.**

**QUESTION 2**

**MRS A CHEBSEY** will ask the following question:

Shrewsbury Action Against Racism, Shropshire Wheelchair Users Group and South Shropshire Access Group are members of the Equalities Forum.

Can you tell me their views on the budget proposals and how they are reflected in the ENIAS?

**See reply to Question 3.**

**QUESTION 3**

**MR P PHILLIPS** will ask the following question:

Legislation demands that our policies have an Equalities Impact Needs Assessment for those with Protected Characteristics.

These classes include:

Race  
Sex (gender)  
Sexuality  
Age  
Disability  
Gender reassignment  
Religion and Belief  
Pregnancy and Maternity

Please can you tell us for each of these groups, which residents and reference groups have been consulted, i.e. have had the budget papers sent to them for comments on the impact on their own groups. Would you also inform Council as to where this evidence, i.e. their responses - can be viewed?

**THE LEADER** will reply as follows:-

“It may be helpful to outline what an Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA) is and also what our obligations are in undertaking EINAs.

The equality duties do not prevent public authorities from making difficult decisions such as reorganisations and relocations, redundancies, and service reductions nor do they stop public authorities from making decisions which may affect one group more than another.

What the equality duties do is enable public authorities to demonstrate that they are making financial decisions in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different members of their community. This is achieved through assessing the impact that changes to policies, procedures and practices could have on different equality groups, and by taking appropriate action to mitigate any such effects where these are significant.

The law requires that this duty to pay ‘due regard’ be demonstrated in the decision making process. Assessing the potential equality impact of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is one of the key ways in which public authorities can show ‘due regard’.

Although the law does not compel public authorities to carry out a formal Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), the Commission recommends for public authorities to use it as it helps ensure that the assessment process is robust .

Shropshire Council routinely assesses the impacts for all residents where service changes are required. Where budget savings have required changes to service delivery, the impact of these savings has been considered in terms of the effect on different groups.

An unprecedented and comprehensive programme of public consultation was carried out in Summer 2010, when Shropshire Council alongside other partner organisations, asked the public what its priorities were and how it would like to see Shropshire Council focussing spend. The outcome of this consultation exercise guided our Budget preparations and priorities.

The budget savings achieved through reductions with the VCS have all been achieved through face to face consultations and discussions with individual voluntary organisations. These include organisations supporting older people, people with physical disabilities, people with learning disabilities and the EINA records the impact against each of the ‘protected characteristics’.

The budget savings identified through the reconfiguration of services with a physical disability have been the subject of consultation with service users and family carers. Their responses have informed our action plan and we are also establishing a service user steering group.

Although we have not consulted with any of the specific groups mentioned in the Members’ questions, nor is there a requirement to do so where the impact of change on the members of such groups has been assessed as negligible, the Shropshire Disability Network are involved with supporting the change to

physical disability services and some members of the net work are also members of the Shropshire wheelchair user group and the access group.

The impacts of the budget savings have already been the subject of Member Scrutiny, with the EINAs being discussed, and these Assessments are publically available in the Members' library. Further consultation with service users is underway across many services to pick up specific client groups needs as services are reconfigured.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently published guidance- 'Using the equality duties to make fair financial decisions'. This is available in the Members' library, and I would urge members to familiarise themselves with it, as there appears to be some uncertainty and misunderstanding about such requirements, as is demonstrated by these questions."

#### **QUESTION 4**

**MR P F PHILLIPS** will ask the following question:

1. Can you confirm that 16 Social Inclusion and Recovery Services Officers are to lose their posts from 1 April?
2. Where were they based?
3. What conversations have you had with Partner Agencies about picking up their work or consequences of their disappearance?
4. What were their main areas of activity and how is this work to be continued in their absence.

**MR S JONES**, the Portfolio Holder for Adult Services, will reply:

Implicit in these questions is concern that the loss of these posts will have a detrimental effect on service delivery. Let me reassure you that this is not the case. Indeed, many of the planned service changes have positive outcomes. The need for particular jobs changes over time, otherwise the Council would still be employing barrel-makers and blacksmiths to shoe horses.

1. **15** Social Inclusion and Recovery Services Officers (**not 16**) have been notified that they are at risk of potential redundancy, as a consequence of proposed service changes. The majority of these staff are part-time staff; four are full-time.
2. **8** of these staff are based within the Shrewsbury Community Mental Health Teams. **3** are based in Ludlow CMHT; **2** in Bridgnorth CMHT; and **2** work across both Bridgnorth and Ludlow CMHTs.
3. From the outset we have involved key partners such as the South Staffordshire and Shropshire NHS Foundation Trust SSSFT and the

voluntary sector in our proposals. We have also closely involved the SSSFT Service User and Carer Involvement Co-ordinator, in actively engaging with service users and carers explaining the reasons for this service change and the positive alternatives to the current arrangements. The service has ongoing meetings with Shropshire MIND, which is a key voluntary organisation providing social inclusion opportunities and activities in local communities throughout Shropshire. Shropshire MIND already provides a range of social and support groups across Shropshire and with them we have plans to further develop these. Service users are being encouraged and enabled to work as volunteers to facilitate these groups. In Shrewsbury at Observer House Shropshire MIND now runs a daily - including weekends - 10-4 "drop-in" service. Mental Health services - for example, the Shrewsbury-based Rehabilitation/Recovery Team - are supporting MIND in running and developing these activities.

We are also proposing the development of a new post of Voluntary Work Co-ordinator, which will work closely with partner agencies such as the Community Council to develop improved pathways to voluntary work opportunities, as well as working closely with Enable to support people in working towards paid employment.

The Community Mental Health Teams in Shrewsbury and South Shropshire, which are jointly provided by the SSSFT, are now actively reviewing people currently supported and care-coordinated by SIRS staff to ensure that ongoing needs are identified clearly in advance and ongoing support provided as necessary. We are also strongly promoting more imaginative use of personal budgets as a means of enhancing choice and accessing personally-determined social and inclusion opportunities and activities.

4. SIRS staff are based in the Community Mental Health Teams and work with people to help build confidence, identify opportunities for social interaction, leisure interests, voluntary work, and pathways to paid employment. SIRS staff generally work with people who have made some progress already towards recovery and are better able to engage in community-based activities, primarily to facilitate such activities and not to directly provide them. Since SIRS was established, social care has been transformed by personalisation, with personal budgets considered a much better means of enabling people to identify and achieve positive personal outcomes through support arrangements of their choice. Personal budgets are now very much a part of funded social care within Mental Health services, and there is mounting evidence that people with eligible needs benefit considerably from increased choice and a truly person-centred approach. While SIRS staff have been effective in enabling greater independence and social inclusion, the continuation of such a directly provided service runs the risk of producing dependence on individual workers rather than independence - and such dependence prolongs continued reliance on secondary services. This risk is minimised through the greater use of personal budgets, whereby the individual is empowered to choose support arrangements and activities without having to rely on a worker to do it for them. Furthermore, activities developed by the voluntary

and independent sector - notably by organisations such as Shropshire MIND - are less stigmatising than those provided by statutory "mental health" services, more easily accessed, and available in ordinary community settings. An important part of this proposal is therefore to promote and support such normalising and mainstream activity within the voluntary and independent sector.

It is noteworthy too, that the SIRS service in North Shropshire ended last year, with no evident negative consequences for service users. We have had discussions with SSSFT staff about this, and it is clear that this positive result was achieved through an effective communication strategy, individual reviews, and promoting groups run by service users themselves.

## **QUESTION 5**

**MR M KENNY** will ask the following question:

Following the downsizing of the Council the Council's own carbon footprint also must have reduced: do you have any indication what this reduction will be and what we can expect?

It is disappointing to see the reductions in public transport in particular removing the bus pass concessions and Shrewsbury evening bus services; how do these reductions help us tackle climate change?

**MRS ANN HARTLEY**, the Portfolio Holder on Energy and Carbon Reduction, will reply:

When the unitary Shropshire Council was created, we inherited a considerable number of buildings and vehicles from the former districts and boroughs and the table below shows our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the baseline year of 2008/09 which takes into account as many of the buildings and transport as we could account for at that time, but we know there were significant gaps with the transport.

In the year 2009/10 with considerably better data we have made a reduction on emissions of 5.96% on the buildings and street lighting but an increase of 26.60% on the transport.

The reduction on buildings and street lighting is mainly due to energy cost reduction actions taken by West Mercia Supplies. However, energy costs are expected to rise between 8-12% from March 2011. The transport figures now reflect more accurately the vehicles the council owns and those run on behalf of the council by our contractors.

**Table 1 Energy Costs and Carbon Emissions 2008/09 (Baseline) and 2009/10**

	Total CO <sub>2</sub> Emission (tonnes)	Buildings and street lights	Transport	Shropshire Council Housing
Baseline CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (tonnes)	90,608	44,991	11,889	33,728
Baseline Cost (Million £)	11.6	9.0	2.6	~
2009/10 CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (tonnes)	91,087	42,308	15,051	33,728
2009/10 Cost (Million £)	10.7	8.5	2.2	~
% Change CO <sub>2</sub>	0.53	-5.96	+26.60	0.00

There is a review of property currently taking place, but it is imperative that the overall picture is considered and energy assessments are undertaken as part of this. The Council should not put itself in the position of disposing of buildings that either have better energy efficiency per sqm or per head, or have the ability, with modest refurbishment, to become more efficient and with the addition of renewable energy to earn income from the Feed-in-Tariff and Renewable Heat Incentive at the same time.

The latter point about income generation needs to be considered for land sales too, as there are a number of organisations approaching the council for medium/large scale solar pv generation options from which the council could benefit from longer term income than a one off sale price.

The Carbon Management Programme is and will continue to play a significant part in reducing the Council's carbon footprint. The work undertaken in the area offices and the Shirehall during last summer/autumn will provide 6 months comparison data by April/May this year when we draw together the 2010/11 emissions data. Some savings are already being shown for some IT projects and Leisure Centre projects, which can be seen on the Carbon Management pages on the Intranet. Early data for the upgraded lighting in Shirehall is also looking positive.

As we work through the programme of energy efficiency measures for the buildings (including schools) the information will be put on the web pages in the form of case studies.

*It is disappointing to see the reductions in public transport in particular removing the bus pass concessions and Shrewsbury evening bus services; how do these reductions help us tackle climate change?"*

#### Draft Bus Strategy

There are, of course, much greater environmental gains from energy efficiency in buildings than from use of vehicles. Nevertheless, we are very aware of the importance of public transport in tackling climate change and while addressing budget pressures, the draft Bus Strategy does take account

of this. The strategy proposes a number of service reductions but in many cases it has been possible to identify proposals which will have limited impact on CO2 emissions / modal shift.

For example the strategy proposes the removal of subsidy for services where the vast majority of passengers are non entitled school children travelling away from their local schools by parental preference. Where this is happening in a number of schools in Shropshire the school/parents are funding their own coach transport and we provide advice and support when required. There is potential for this to be the case where we propose to withdraw the subsidy for existing public services.

In a number of cases the Council is subsidising buses to operate with relatively few passengers during off peak periods and the strategy proposes some reductions in this instance. During these times of the day a reduction in frequency is more likely to be accommodated by the traveller and the change should lead to higher occupancy levels on the remaining journeys. In taking this approach we are conscious of the fact that buses use several times more fuel than cars over the same mileage, and very low patronage can result in higher relative carbon emissions. Other services being considered include those with very high passenger subsidy and consequently have the highest CO2 emission rates per passenger journey.

As part of the overall consultation process the Council's Enterprise & Growth Scrutiny Committee has set up a Task and Finish group to review the proposals and the consultation feedback. As part of this process we have agreed to undertake an evaluation of the impact that the removal of services will have on journeys - will people choose to use a car instead etc. - and this will be fed into the final decision making process.

### Concessionary Fares

Shropshire Council receives funding from Central Government to provide the statutory concessionary travel scheme. This includes all local bus services between 9.30 am and 11 pm Monday to Friday and all day at weekends and bank holidays, but excludes services where the fare includes consideration of an amenity such parking at a park & ride site. In previous years Shropshire Council has been able to enhance the statutory scheme using local funding to include pre 9.30am travel and travel on the Park & Ride (P&R). Due to the current financial pressures, Shropshire Council is no longer in a position to continue funding these enhancements, and must offer local people better value-for-money.

The purpose of the statutory concessionary travel scheme is to address the social exclusion of older and eligible disabled people by providing improved access to essential local services by using local bus services. Travel pre 9.30am and on P&R is not covered by the national concessionary travel scheme.

We will be monitoring the impact of the removal of pre 9.30am concessionary travel and are expecting a significant number of users to choose to travel post 9.30am and the anticipated savings reflect this. In addition it is understood

that a number of those that travel pre 9.30am are pass holders commuting to work and are in a position to afford the bus fare.

### Alternative Fuel Vehicles

The recent Shrewsbury Park and Ride tender process invited submissions based upon the use of alternatively powered or hybrid vehicles. Only one company submitted a tender using alternative fuelled vehicles (diesel electric hybrids in this case) but the costs to Shropshire Council were substantially greater than Euro V diesel option chosen.

In terms of environmental performance the new Mercedes Euro V diesel engine buses on Shrewsbury P&R are a significant improvement on the previous fleet as demonstrated in the table below.

EU Emission Standards for Diesel Engines, g/kWh (smoke in m-1)

	<b>Previous Fleet</b>	<b>New Fleet</b>
<b>Tier</b>	Euro II	Euro V
<b>Carbon Monoxide</b>	4.0	1.5
<b>Hydrocarbon</b>	1.1	0.46
<b>Nitrogen oxide</b>	7.0	2.0
<b>Particulate Matter</b>	0.15	0.02
<b>Smoke</b>	0.15	0.5

### QUESTION 6

**MR T CLARKE** will ask the following question:-

Given the highly valued essential service provided to Shropshire and Borders by Shrewsbury Crematorium will the Leader now agree to commission the long delayed refurbishment of the London Road facility using £1.5 of the £2m new monies earmarked for Council reserves?

The report to Cabinet of 10 November shows the Crematorium providing a sadly very reliable net income of £300,000 plus per annum into the public purse; sufficient to fully repay the required capital investment in its facilities within 5 years.

Surely it is in the public interest to avoid the transfer of this publicly owned and accountable monopoly into the hands of a profit driven private operator, and thereby also hand them the leverage to perhaps take control of the market supplying all related local bereavement services.

If unable to accept any proposal will the Leader at least agree to table this very questionable privatisation of an essential public service for open debate and final decision of full Council?

**CLLR CECILIA MOTLEY**, Portfolio Holder for Public Protection will respond.



Timely investment in the Shrewsbury Crematorium is required to ensure the long term viability of the facility and to meet future legislative requirements. It is clear that there are much greater benefits in seeking to contract for bereavement services with a third party provided. There is no logical reason to do this ourselves.

In contracting the operation of bereavement services, the council is seeking to secure long term investment in the facilities and services by experienced and qualified organisations, and to secure an income stream to Shropshire Council. This may be a private company or a not for profit organisation.

Experience in other areas has shown that private sector providers provide excellent services at competitive prices and the relative freedoms and flexibilities they have over the procurement of new plant and equipment when compared to a local authority means that the required works can be undertaken in a cost effective and timely way. There is no evidence in other areas of monopolies occurring in what is a developed and competitive market.

Cabinet was clear when considering this matter, that procurement should be open to all suitably experienced organisations and that the tender for the running of the service should only be let if it is in the overall advantage of Shropshire Council to do so in both financial and service delivery terms. If letting the tender does not achieve this then the matter will be referred back to Cabinet and if necessary to Council for funding as an amendment to the capital programme to undertake the upgrading works directly. At this time, we remain confident that a successful contract can be let.

The procurement process is moving at pace and we plan to be in a position to determine the matter this summer.

## **QUESTION 7**

**MRS H KIDD** will ask the following question:-

Would the Leader of Council consider asking the Coalition to look at raising the tax level on the fuel allowance for volunteer drivers? The 40p allowance does not now cover their expenses as both insurance and fuel prices have risen significantly. Voluntary car drivers are now voting with their feet and hospital cars and other voluntary car schemes are difficult to run. In the spirit of the Big Society we should be encouraging people to help in the community and not be penalising them when all expenditure is rising.

**THE LEADER** will reply:

“I raised this very issue in a meeting with our local MP's in January. The MP's acknowledged and understood the significance of this situation and how it might act as a barrier to encouraging voluntary car schemes. I have since written to Rt Honourable Owen Paterson MP who has promised to raise this important issue with the relevant Government Minister.”