

Your council, your money

A closer look at Shropshire Council's budget and how it affects you

BACK in the autumn of last year, I invited you to give me your views on the council's budget for 2010-2011. I wanted to know what your priorities were, and how we should spend our money to best meet your needs.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in our extensive public consultation. I can assure you that we took into account everyone's views when we set about developing the budget. I know that we can't please all of the people all of the time, but I think that our plans for the next year - and beyond - are a good reflection both of needs and wishes of Shropshire people, and of the straitened times we are living in.

We have had to tighten our belts in some areas, and we will continue to have to do so, because of government cuts brought about by the recession.

I know that Shropshire has suffered as much as anywhere else through this economic downturn, and I also know that you want us to spend your money wisely.

As promised before the six Shropshire councils became one, we are working towards making council tax levels the same in all parts of the county.

This means that, for the coming financial year, some of you will see small increases in council tax, while others will see no increase at all. At the

same time, we have identified £10.4 million-worth of savings, which we have done by finding new and more efficient ways of working. We have reinvested £3.3 million in improving services for older people, transport and services for vulnerable people, young and old.

That is why we are delighted to have won a National bid for £136 million to provide care facilities for older people and people with dementia. These facilities will include more than 400 purpose-built homes to make life easier for service-users and their loved-ones.

Making sure that people have suitable housing is a top priority for this council, and the new scheme will help people to be independent for longer. There will be benefits for the wider community too, as the units will have communal facilities that everyone will be able to use.

We're also putting £2.6 million into affordable housing schemes, another top priority for Shropshire's people.

Through our Carbon Management Programme, we are aiming to cut our carbon emissions by 35 per cent over the next five years. We are making big investments in this, and the dividends

Fast speeds will support learning

SCHOOLS and libraries will be able to access the worldwide web faster than ever before after the council agreed a new way of providing internet services at its buildings.

Shropshire Council has a large network of buildings that it needs to provide broadband internet connections to, such as schools, libraries and leisure centres.

The council has recently been out to tender for its broadband and telephone services. As well as looking to make financial savings, the aim was also to find a solution which provided faster connections and improved the resilience of the network.

The great news is that the new network will provide primary schools and libraries with speeds up to five times faster than at present, and secondary schools will benefit from speeds over 12 times faster than they currently have.

This will give our school pupils faster and more reliable access to online learning materials and will also benefit members of the public who use the free internet computers in libraries. Perhaps more importantly, the new contracts will deliver savings of £744,000 each year with effect from 1 April 2011.

A major issue for people in some parts of Shropshire is the lack of broadband. Although the council's new network cannot be used to directly address this problem, officers and councillors are working closely with Advantage West Midlands and neighbouring councils on an exciting project in the south of the county which will pilot the use of wireless technology as a solution to the "not spots".

Should the external funding for this project be approved, it is hoped that the new service will be up and running in the test area early this summer.

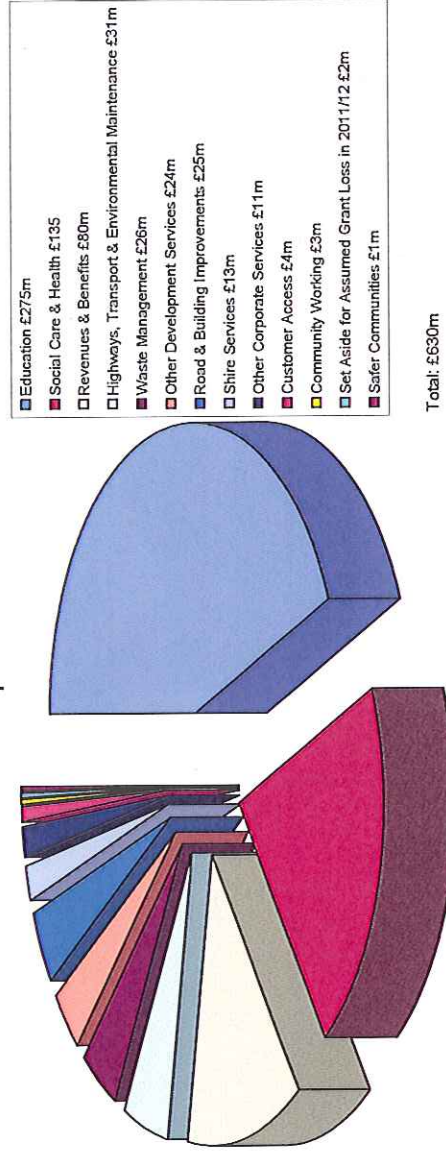


WELCOME FROM KEITH BARROW, LEADER OF SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

will be less expenditure on energy in the medium and long term and, of course, a much greener council.

All in all, the council will be investing £124 million in building projects and other improvements to frontline services, that is services provided direct to the public. I felt it was important to tell you how we aim to spend your hard-earned council tax, and I hope these pages will do just that. I believe the budget protects and improves the things that you have told us are most important to you, and it will build on the success of the council in its first year in providing high-quality, low-cost public services.

What we spend in each service area



SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL 2010/11 COUNCIL TAX CHARGES

Area	2010/11 Band D (£)	2010/11 Annual Increase
Bridgnorth	£1,164.72	3.50
North Shropshire	£1,164.72	0.71
Oswestry	£1,216.58	0.00
Shrewsbury & Atcham	£1,164.72	1.29
South Shropshire	£1,216.62	0.00

Stiff target but one we will achieve

AN ambitious campaign to cut carbon emissions by 35 per cent in five years, saving millions of pounds and potentially creating jobs, has been launched by Shropshire Council.

The Carbon Management Plan includes dozens of measures that the council will be implementing to cut its use of fossil fuels and thus its carbon emissions. These range from replacing inefficient heating systems at Shirehall to introducing energy-efficient lighting for buildings and streets.

Wood boilers, thermal panels and wind turbines will be introduced in some schools, and leisure centres and swimming pools will be upgraded where necessary to maximise their energy efficiency.

Councillor Ann Hartley, the councillor responsible for the Carbon Management Plan, said: "I am pleased that we have in place a series of plans that will make a tangible difference to our carbon emissions through saving energy. "The council takes the threats posed by climate change very seriously and we feel that by cutting the amount of carbon we produce, we are doing our bit to help minimise those threats.

"We are very well aware that a 35 per cent cut is extremely ambitious, but our Carbon

Management Plan is robust and we think we'll achieve it. We have already put in place some measures to help us achieve our target, and I look forward to the challenge."

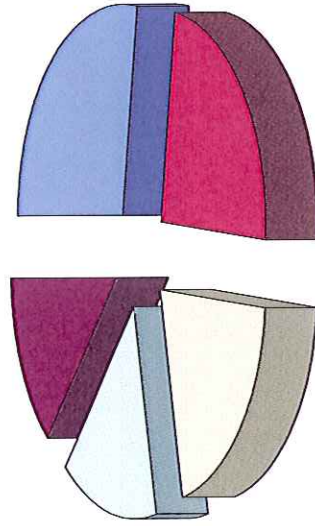
Laura Rowley, Director of Resources at Shropshire Council, is overseeing the implementation of the plan and said Shropshire had a strong track record in tackling climate change.

"The creation of the new Shropshire Council last year has given us increased impetus to take this good work forward. We have been working with the Carbon Trust to develop a programme for putting in place measures that will help us save a huge amount of energy.

"The Government, in its efforts to encourage cuts in carbon emissions, is planning to introduce 'carbon allowances' which councils will have to buy if they emit carbon over a certain threshold, and we have decided to avoid those extra costs by reducing our carbon output. So our programme makes sense both financially and from an environmental point of view."



Our sources of income in 2010/11



■ Specific Government Grants £172m
■ Dedicated Schools Grant £151m
■ Council Tax & Collection Fund Surplus £128m
■ Formula Grant £24m
■ Sales, Fees and Charges £55m
Total: £530m

Expert advice means you do not miss out

ARE you, or is someone you know, missing out on money that you or they are entitled to?

As the economic downturn continues, many people are finding it difficult to get by, but things can be far worse where age or illness means having to rely on benefits.

It needn't be so bad though, because extra benefits are often available to people who are simply not aware they qualify.

Help is available to people from the Shropshire Joint Benefits Team - a team of experienced advisers from

Shropshire Council, the Pension Service, Citizens Advice and A4U (A4U provides independent information and advice on all aspects of disability) - who last year helped the people of Shropshire claim over £3 million in extra income.

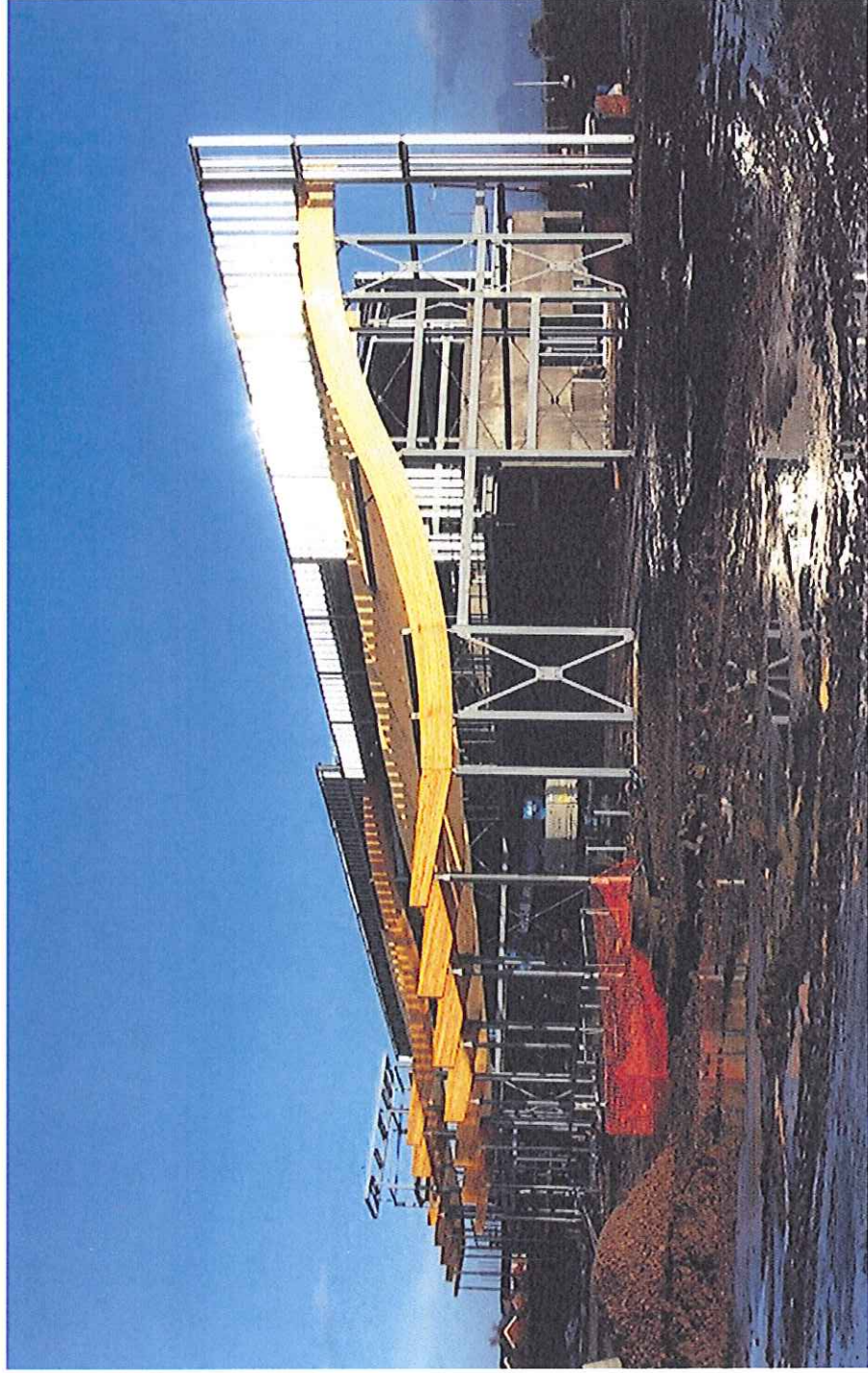
To find out if you are missing out on any entitlements, please contact the Shropshire Joint Benefits Team on 0345 678 9030 or visit www.shropshirepartnership.org.uk

The Joint Benefits Team advisers are able to help with a range of benefit issues and can help people to

apply for any of the following:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Income Support
- Bereavement Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Carers Allowance
- Tax Credits
- Incapacity Benefit

Millions invested in filling the gap



MILLIONS of pounds is being invested into providing care facilities for older people and those with dementia across Shropshire.

The council has made two bids for funding under the Private Finance Initiative to build 400 two-bedroom units of Extra Care housing for rent, and 24 respite units, with facilities for dementia sufferers and their carers/families.

The units will be incorporated into eight separate developments spanning the county, and the overall project will amount to £136 million.

Housing is a top priority for Shropshire Council, and the project will go a long way to improving the

availability of good quality housing in the county, as well as helping those people who need support.

Councillor Keith Barrow, Leader of the council, said: "There are people looked after in their own homes, and there are those who are in residential care, but in the middle there is a void. This scheme fills that void and the really positive thing is that it will give people independence for longer."

As well as the housing units, each development will offer a number of communal facilities, many of which will be made available for use by the wider community.

The residents of the Extra Care

Developments will come from a broad range of background. There will be elderly people who may need occasional help and support, along with a number of people who need more regular support.

The community will also include, within purpose built accommodation, some people with dementia who will often be there alongside their partner and/or carer for a period of respite. There could also be a number of residents who may have learning or physical disabilities, but who are able to live within a community setting with minimal support.

COUNCIL TAX CHARGES IN OSWESTRY AREA

Property Band	2009/10 Charge (£)	2010/11 Charge (£)	Annual Increase (£)	Weekly Increase (£)
A	811.05	811.05	0.00	0.00
B	946.23	946.23	0.00	0.00
C	1,081.40	1,081.40	0.00	0.00
D	1,216.58	1,216.58	0.00	0.00
E	1,486.93	1,486.93	0.00	0.00
F	1,757.28	1,757.28	0.00	0.00
G	2,027.63	2,027.63	0.00	0.00
H	2,433.16	2,433.16	0.00	0.00

Tackling Council's first budget choices was historic moment

IT was important that the council listened to people's views when setting the budget, as some difficult decisions needed to be taken about where to spend money and where to make savings.

Council leader, Keith Barrow, and director of resources, Laura Rowley, visited dozens of public meetings across the county to talk to people about the budget process. Those meetings provoked a lot of healthy debate and resulted in real changes to next year's budget.

As well as public meetings, people could also play with an online "budget calculator" on the council's website. Nearly 1,000 people used this method to give some really useful feedback about their budget priorities.

Talking to members of the public, and council staff, raised a number of issues including:

- The need for more regular public transport was raised by young people and adults with learning disabilities as their biggest issue.
- Older people were concerned that service levels need to be increased to reflect the growing numbers of older people in the county.
- Increased charges for Meals on Wheels was not a popular savings proposal.

Support for council measures to bring empty properties back into use was expressed.

Staff opinion generally was that a pay award for 2010/11 would be unlikely in view of the current economic climate.

Most people thought that council tax increases should be kept to a minimum and most people thought that the planned increases were acceptable.

As a result of that feedback, the following changes were made to the budget which was approved by councillors at the end of February:

- The pay award provision was reduced to nil, this released additional resources of £1.3 million to fund a number of other priority areas.
- The council agreed to revise the present rate of relief on council tax on empty properties. This generated an additional £500,000 in council tax.
- Additional resources of £500,000 were invested into public transport to sustain and support existing bus routes, including ShropshireLink.
- Provision of £80,000 was built into the budget to fund two posts in community services that would focus on bringing empty properties back into use.

The proposed increases in charges for Meals on Wheels were removed from the savings proposals.

- The financial saving arising from

the review of Meals on Wheels procurement and provision was reinvested within Older People's Services to provide more services to support people at home.

SHROPSHIRE Councillors have voted on the first budget for the new Shropshire Council - securing the double benefits of council tax levels below the rate of inflation and investment in better services for local people.

Councillors debated the 2010/11 revenue budget at a meeting of the full council in February, following months of consultation and discussions with local residents, community groups, and local businesses. They also agreed the capital programme for 2010/11 to 2014/15, which will deliver £124 million of building projects and other improvements over the next 12 months, and a similar level of investment, in total, over the following two years.

Council tax will be frozen for many local people, with rates varying a little across the county, as the council moves to equalise council tax levels for all Shropshire residents during the first three years of the unitary council.

Laura Rowley, Director of Resources said "The revenue budget proposals will reduce spending by £10.4 million, through a wide range of savings initiatives, to improve efficiency and deliver services in innovative, cost-effective ways. The savings are needed to prepare for reduced Government funding in the future, and to respond to the current tough economic conditions which have reduced the council's income."

Since the start of the budget process in July 2009, £3.3 million pounds of savings has been reinvested so as to improve services for local people. These investments include improvements in services for older people. More funding - around £500,000 - will be put into public transport, particularly the growingly popular ShropshireLink demand-responsive bus service. And £335,000 will provide additional resources for young people with disabilities who reach the age of 18 and need social care as adults. There will also be a further £150,000 to support people with physical disabilities.

Councillors felt it was important for people to have their say on the proposals, and the Leader of the Council, Keith Barrow, visited dozens of meetings across the county to discuss the budget. As a result of hearing what residents had to say, some changes were made to the original proposals, including freezing charges for Meals on Wheels for the

second year running.

Shropshire Council Leader, Councillor Keith Barrow said: "We will be saving money by increasing our energy efficiency and becoming a more effective organisation. We need to do all we can to prepare for reduced national funding in the future, by becoming ever more careful with our finances."

Considering the growing demands on our services in the recession, this is a fantastic budget. It protects and improves the things local people value most, and which will stand us in good stead in the future as the funding the council receives from the Government is cut."

The capital programme includes £6.4 million for new energy-saving schemes, such as replacing old boilers and improving insulation in council buildings. This will reduce the council's carbon footprint and its energy costs in the future. Councillors also agreed to boost facilities for local people and visitors to the area, by putting £9 million, over the next two years, into the redevelopment of Shrewsbury Music Hall, and £8.2 million into the continuing development of the new William Brookes School in Much Wenlock.

Councillor Keith Barrow added: "This is an incredibly exciting capital programme, which will invest millions of pounds into the local economy and provide a welcome boost to local firms. The energy-saving schemes will save us money year on year, which will be important when the level of Government funding starts to fall in the future."

The capital schemes outlined in the report include:

- £1 million more invested into Disabled Facilities Grants to help people with disabilities live at home for longer, without the need of going into residential care. This will help people be comfortable at home and reduce the financial cost of residential care.
- £9 million over the next two financial years for the Shrewsbury Music Hall refurbishment.
- £8.2 million in 2010/11 on the continuing development of the new William Brookes School in Much Wenlock.
- £4.5 million in 2010/11 on the continuing construction of the Oswald Park Lifestyle Centre in Oswestry.
- £2.6 million to fund affordable housing schemes in 2010/11, with a further £2 million in 2011/12.
- Provision of a new children's home, allowing children to be cared for within the county and saving money on out of county placements.

Meet your local representative