



Date: Thursday, 22 September 2022  
Time: 10.00 am  
Venue: Council Chamber, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND  
Contact: Tim Ward, Committee Officer  
Tel: 01743 257713  
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## COUNCIL

### TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

#### **8 Alternative Budget Process (Pages 1 - 22)**

Report of the Executive Director, Resources is **TO FOLLOW**

Contact: James Walton. Tel. 01743 258915

#### **14 Interim Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2022 (Pages 23 - 40)**

Report of Returning Officer is **TO FOLLOW**

Contact: Andy Begley, 01743 258675

#### **18 Questions from Members (Pages 41 - 46)**

To receive any questions from Members, notice of which has been given in accordance with Procedure Rule 15.2.

Report **TO FOLLOW**

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<u>Committee and Date</u>
Council 22nd September 2022

<u>Item</u>
<u>Public</u>

## **Budget Consultation and Alternative Budget**

**Responsible  
Officer**

James Walton

e-mail: james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 258915

### **1. Synopsis**

The Council wants to ensure that our financial plans reflect our communities' priorities as far as possible. This report proposes improvements to the current budget consultation and alternative budget arrangements that will allow broader input to how we determine our budget.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. This report has previously been considered at Performance Management Scrutiny Committee (4 May) and Cabinet on 7 September. It incorporates the feedback arising from those meetings.
- 2.2. The budget consultation is an essential part of the budget setting process, however feedback was received from some Members and the public on the process followed for the 2022/23 budget setting process that identified that further improvements are required to improve engagement with the process in the future. A proposal for future budget consultations is set out in Appendix 2 for further comment and consideration.
- 2.3. An alternative budget process for opposition parties was trialled in the 2022/23 budget setting process, and whilst this worked well, it is recognised that additional time and an improved process for review of these proposals is necessary in the annual budget setting process. A revised process is outlined in Appendix 3 for review and comment.
- 2.4.

### **3. Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- 3.1 Consider the information relating to the current budget processes and approve an approach for future budget consultations (Appendix 2) and an alternative budget process (Appendices 3a and 3b).
- 3.2 Authorise the Executive Director of Resources (s151 officer) to amend the Council's existing Financial Rules in accordance with Appendix 9 to this report

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

- 4.1 The development of the Council's Financial Strategy is a key process in managing many of the Council's strategic risks. The opportunities and risks arising are assessed each time the Financial Strategy is refreshed for Cabinet consideration.
- 4.2 The Financial Strategy and the detailed changes necessary to deliver the agreed budget for the next financial year will consider the requirements of the Human Rights Act, any necessary environmental appraisals and the need for Equality, social inclusion and health impact assessments (ESHIA) and any necessary service user consultation.
- 4.3 The public budget consultation is the opportunity for members of the public to express their views on the overall emphasis within the budget on proposed funding for pressures and efficiencies, and the overall impact on the Council Tax charge. Where significant changes to operational activities are proposed as part of the budget, there is then a second opportunity to comment, when those specific decisions are brought forward and a specific consultation is held.

### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Assuming that the revised budget consultation process will be an in-house developed process, rather than purchasing a separate toolkit to undertake the activity, then there will be no direct financial implication as a result of the new processes being agreed and implemented.
- 5.2 Whilst it will be vital to ensure that all alternative budget proposals brought forward include robust financial estimates and assessment of

their possible service delivery impacts, it will also need to be recognised that the resources available to support development of proposals are limited.

## **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

- 6.1 There are no direct implications for climate change as a result of this report and full implications and considerations of climate change as a result of budget proposals will be considered in future Financial Strategies to be considered by Cabinet.

## **7. Background**

### Budget Consultation

- 7.1 Details of the requirements of the budget setting process, including budget consultation, in the Council's Constitution is set out in Appendix 1 for information. Appendix 1 also details the requirements of the Gunning Principles for public consultation exercises as detailed by the Local Government Association.
- 7.2 Consultation on the Council's budget plans is carried out following Cabinet's approval of the Leader's draft budget proposals. To enable this to take place, a draft financial strategy is developed and agreed by Cabinet in December to enable consultation to take place for a period of 6 weeks, as detailed in the Constitution. This ensures that the budget consultation can be completed prior to the final approval of the Financial Strategy by Cabinet and Council in February. A timeline of the current budget setting process is set out in Appendix 4 and details of the budget consultation carried out for the 2022/23 budget is provided at Appendix 5.
- 7.3 Feedback was received on the budget consultation exercise for 2022/23 with comments from the public and some Members regarding the ability to fully consider the consultation results considering the consultation closing so late in the budget setting process. Also a number of comments were received that more detailed information was required to enable them to fully engage in the process. An outline of the feedback received is provided at Appendix 6.

### Alternative Budget Proposals

- 7.4 It was identified during the course of the 2022/23 budget setting process, that an approach for alternative budgets being put forward by opposition parties was not detailed in the Council's Constitution. Therefore a process was trialled ahead of Council on 24 February 2022 as shown in Appendix 8.

- 7.5 Feedback suggested that a revised and extended process was needed in future years, and that alternative budgets should not just be considered in terms of financial implications but also reviewed and agreed by service areas too.
- 7.6 A revised alternative budget process has been compiled in Appendix 3A for further consideration and comment. Key data to be collected for each proposal is summarised in Appendix 3B. The proposed process for this year is as follows:
- Begin on 31 October 2022, this allows four weeks for Councillors to prepare alternative proposals (with appropriate officer support), followed by 2 weeks to review these with service delivery officers.
  - Finalised proposals will be returned no later than 16 December 2022, allowing consideration at PMSC on 11 January 2023.
  - This will lead to consideration at Cabinet on 18 January 2023, for possible inclusion in the financial strategy to be agreed by Council on 2 March 2023.

### Summary

- 7.7 Revised arrangements for alternative budget preparation and the budget consultation process would allow all Councillors and residents to have a greater influence on the process by which the Council budget is set, in line with the Shropshire Plan, the Council constitution, and good practice.

## **8. Additional Information**

- 8.1 Whilst local authorities are required to follow guidance such as the Gunning Principles when conducting public consultations, there is no recommended prescribed format for undertaking the budget consultation. Research has been carried out to examine the timing that other local authorities have undertaken their consultation exercises and the format that these have taken. As shown in Appendix 7, the format used ranges significantly, and the data gleaned from each different type of exercise will be different in terms of how that helps to inform the budget setting process. There are however some good procedures that we could build into our consultation process to address the feedback received.
- 8.2 An outline of a proposed budget consultation process is set out in Appendix 2, for further consideration and comment, which has attempted to build on the Council's current approach. Appendix 2 details how this proposed approach would ensure that the future budget consultation is in line with the Gunning Principles.

**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)**

Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Resources  
Lezley Picton, Leader of the Council

**Local Member**

All

**Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Budget Setting Process in the Council’s Constitution and External Guidance
- Appendix 2 – Proposed Approach to Future Budget Consultation
- Appendix 3 – Future Process for Alternative Budgets
- Appendix 4 – Current Budget Setting Process
- Appendix 5 – Current Budget Consultation Process
- Appendix 6 – Feedback on Current Budget Consultation Process
- Appendix 7 – How Other Authorities carry out Budget Consultation
- Appendix 8 – Process Trialled for Alternative Budgets
- Appendix 9 – Amendment to Financial Rules

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Budget Setting Process in the Council's Constitution and External Guidance**

The Constitution sets out the process to be followed when setting the budget each year, and the key responsibilities:

#### ***Part 2 Articles of the Constitution***

*The full Council will decide the Council's budget and policy framework.*

*Budget - The budget includes the allocation of financial resources to different services and projects, proposed reserves, the Council tax base, setting the Council tax and decisions relating to the control of the Council's borrowing requirement, the control of its capital expenditure and the setting of virement limits.*

#### ***Part 4 Council Procedure Rules***

*At the Budget Meeting in February, each Group Leader may have one speech up to a maximum of ten minutes and presentations from outside bodies at Council shall normally be limited to a maximum of 15 minutes, subject to the Chairman's discretion, followed by a 15 minute question and answer session.*

### **BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES**

#### **1. THE FRAMEWORK FOR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

*The Council will be responsible for the adoption of its budget and policy framework as set out in Article 4. Once a budget or a policy framework is in place, it will be the responsibility of the Cabinet to implement it. NB – When the phrase 'budget and policy framework' is used here, it also refers to any constituent plan or strategy.*

#### **2. CABINET LEADS PROCESS; OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT WITHIN CABINET CONSULTATION PROCESS; DIFFERENTIAL VOTING ON DISPUTES REGARDING BUDGET AND POLICY PROPOSALS**

*(a) The Cabinet will publicise by including in the forward plan a timetable for making proposals to the Council for the adoption of any plan, strategy or budget that forms part of the budget and policy framework, and its arrangements for consultation after publication of those initial proposals. All Members of the Council, including the chairmen of scrutiny committees will also be notified. The consultation period shall in each instance be not less than 6 weeks.*

*(b) At the end of that period, the Leader will then draw up firm proposals having regard to the responses to that consultation. If a relevant scrutiny committee wishes to respond to the Cabinet in that consultation process then it may do so. It is open to the Scrutiny Committees to investigate, research or report in detail with policy recommendations before the end of the consultation period. The Leader will take any response from a Scrutiny Committee into account in drawing up firm proposals for submission to the Council, and its report to Council will reflect the comments made by consultees.*



*(c) Once the Leader has discussed his/her proposals with the Cabinet and Cabinet has approved the firm proposals, those proposals will be presented by the Leader to Council for decision.*

*(d) In reaching a decision, the Council may adopt the Leader's proposals, or may amend them, refer them back to the Cabinet for further consideration, or substitute its own proposals in their place.*

*(e) If it accepts the recommendation of the Leader without amendment, the Council may make a decision which has immediate effect. Otherwise, it may only make an in-principle decision. In either case, the decision will be made on the basis of a simple majority of votes cast at the meeting.*

*(f) The decision will be publicised in accordance with Article 4 and a copy shall be given to the Leader.*

*(g) An in-principle decision will automatically become effective at least 5 days from the date of the Council's decision, unless the Leader informs the proper officer in writing within 5 days that [he/she] objects to the decision becoming effective and provides reasons why.*

*(h) In that case, the proper officer will call a Council meeting within a further 2 days. The Council will be required to re-consider its decision and the Leader's written submission within 5 days. The Council may:*

*(i) approve the Leader's recommendation by a simple majority of votes cast at the meeting; or*

*(ii) approve a different decision which does not accord with the recommendation of the Cabinet by a simple majority.*

*(i) The decision shall then be made public in accordance with Article 4, and shall be implemented immediately.*

*(j) In approving the budget and policy framework, the Council will also specify the extent of virement within the budget and degree of in-year changes to the policy framework which may be undertaken by the Executive (Cabinet), in accordance with paragraphs 5 and 6 of these Rules (virement and in-year adjustments). Any other changes to the budget and policy framework are reserved to the Council.*

In addition to the Council's Constitution, public consultations are also subject to following the Gunning Principles as determined by case law. These specify that a consultation is only legitimate when these four principles are met:

**1. proposals are still at a formative stage**

A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers

**2. there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'**

The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response

**3. there is adequate time for consideration and response**

There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation,<sup>1</sup> despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation

**4. 'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made**

Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.

## APPENDIX 2

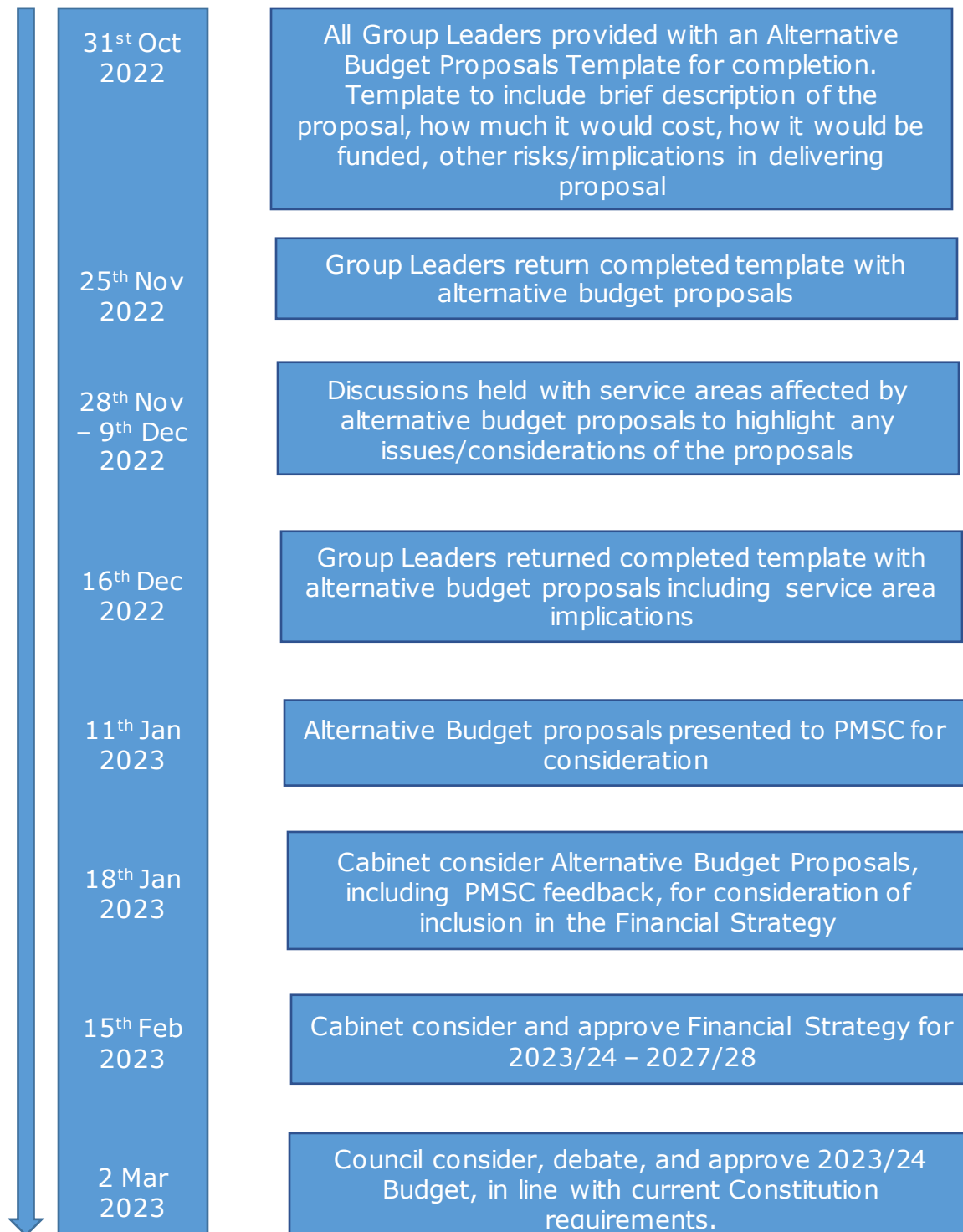
### Potential Budget Consultation Exercise for 2023/24

Consultation Proposal	Gunning Principles			
	Proposals are still at a formative stage	There is sufficient information to give intelligent consideration	There is adequate time for consideration and response	Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made
<b>Timing: 15<sup>th</sup> December – 26<sup>th</sup> January</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budget Consultation to be held following approval of the Draft Financial Strategy by Cabinet in December.</li> <li>This will ensure that plans are sufficiently developed to allow informed consultation to take place.</li> <li>This will also allow the standard 6 week period of consultation as prescribed by the Constitution.</li> <li>Feedback will be received to allow for conscientious consideration in the final Financial Strategy approved by Cabinet and Council.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Content: Background information to be provided including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about Council priorities</li> <li>Summary of Council's financial position</li> <li>Linking draft budget plans to priorities</li> <li>Draft investment and savings plans across the 5 year strategy</li> </ul>	✓	✓		
<b>Survey: Feedback requested on draft investment and saving plans, including council tax plans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide description of proposal and the business impact of proposal</li> <li>Detail amount of each proposal</li> <li>Allow users to agree, disagree or have no opinion on each proposal</li> <li>Allow for specific comments on proposals</li> <li>Invite general comments on proposals for service Directorates/Cabinet Portfolios</li> </ul>		✓		

## APPENDIX 3A

### Future Process for Alternative Budget Proposals

The proposed process for the consideration of Alternative Budget Proposals is as follows:



**APPENDIX 3B****KEY DATA TO BE COLLECTED FOR ALTERNATIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS**

The proposed data to be collected for the consideration of Alternative Budget Proposals will include but not be limited to:

Name of Councillor making the proposal	
Political Group	
Political Group leader	
Financial year/s affected	
Summary of proposal	
What will need to change to deliver this proposal	
Financial implications of the proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation costs</li> <li>- Running costs</li> <li>- Funding source</li> </ul>	
Service delivery implications of the proposal	
Risk assessment of the proposal	
Proposal implications reviewed for accuracy by	
- Executive Director of Resources (s151 officer)	
- Service Executive Director	
Proposal endorsed by political group leader	

**APPENDIX 4**

**Current Budget Development Process**

Month	Budget Activity	Committee Dates	Committee Paper
Apr	New Financial Year Begins		
May	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;">                     Roll forward Financial Strategy (FS) to next 5 years and highlight any known service changes/issues or Government announcements                 </div> <div style="width: 45%;">                     Work up indicative savings plans to bridge funding gap                 </div> </div>		
Jun			
Jul	Discuss savings targets required over the term of the FS and produce detailed savings proposals	29th Jun – Cabinet	Indicative Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28
		7 <sup>th</sup> Jul – Council	Indicative Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28
		13 <sup>th</sup> Jul – PMSC	Indicative Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28
Aug	Identify demographic pressures for the Council and any service pressures		

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Month	Budget Activity	Committee Dates	Committee Paper
Sep	Detailed budget build up for next Financial Year completed		
Oct			
Nov		30 <sup>th</sup> Nov - PMSC	Draft Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2027/28
Dec		14 <sup>th</sup> Dec - Cabinet	Draft Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2027/28 Setting the Council Tax Taxbase 2023/24
Jan	Budget Consultation takes place for 6 week period	15 <sup>th</sup> Dec - Council	Setting the Council Tax Taxbase 2023/24
		11 <sup>th</sup> Jan - PMSC	Draft Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2027/28

Month	Budget Activity	Committee Dates	Committee Paper
Feb	Final Local Government Finance Settlement received	15 <sup>th</sup> Feb - Cabinet	Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2027/28 Estimated Collection Fund Outturn 2022/23
Mar		2 <sup>nd</sup> Mar - Council	Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2027/28



## APPENDIX 5

### Budget Consultation Process for 2022/23

#### Requirements of the Constitution

The Council's Constitution sets out the following arrangements for consultation of the budget:

#### ***Part 4, Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, para 2 (a):***

*The Cabinet will publicise by including in the forward plan a timetable for making proposals to the Council for the adoption of any plan, strategy or budget that forms part of the budget and policy framework, and its arrangements for consultation after publication of those initial proposals. All Members of the Council, including the chairmen of scrutiny committees will also be notified. The consultation period shall in each instance be not less than 6 weeks.*

#### Timeline and Distribution

The draft budget proposals were considered by Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022 following the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. Cabinet approved the detailed savings proposals as part of this draft budget to enable the Leader of the Council to consult on the budget plans.

The budget consultation took place for 6 weeks, in line with the Council's Constitution, from 5<sup>th</sup> January until 16<sup>th</sup> February.

The consultation was advertised on the website, through the newsroom and via Twitter. Respondents were given the option of completing the survey online, emailing a response or posting feedback to the Shirehall.

#### Details Provided in the Consultation

The budget consultation provides a detailed summary of the financial position of the Council, which provides explanation of standard finance terminology such as revenue and capital expenditure, and how these are treated differently. Also it outlined the Council's financial position and the draft plans for balancing the 2022/23 budget, including a proposed increase in council tax and the delivery of proposed savings.

The survey that respondents were asked to complete detailed questions asking for people's views on the plans to increase Council tax precept and the Adult Social Care Precept. It also specified each individual savings proposal (58 savings proposals) to allow comments and feedback on specific savings proposals rather than generic feedback on categories of savings.

## APPENDIX 6

### Feedback on 2022/23 Budget Consultation Process

The budget consultation had 155 responses which is the highest response rate of the last 3 years, but still low considering the number of stakeholders in Shropshire.

In the main respondents were able to vote on proposals and provide comments on the proposals, however feedback was also received from members of the public and Councillors that the survey was difficult to respond to due to the technical language used, and also was not detailed enough in terms of what the proposals related to.

Specific comments included:

*"I am sorry to say that I find the questions opaque in many instances. The descriptions seem to come from an internal document which does not convey meaning to those outside the Council."*

*"I have tried to fill in the budget consultation survey but find it almost impossible as I don't know what the questions mean. It seems to have been put together by a Council person for other Council people, who "speak the language". I was completely stuck on just the first question, as I don't know what TMBSS refers to! I think this is designed (perhaps accidentally) to put people off from having their say about the upcoming Budget"*

*"People simply do not feel they understand or have enough information to complete this."*

*"What do these proposals actually mean?"*

*"The consultation was not taken in line with the Gunning Principles, as the consultation closed when the budget was already set."*

## APPENDIX 7

### **Budget Consultation Carried out by Other Local Authorities**

Research has been done across a number of local authorities to determine the process that other authorities follow for their budget consultation activity. It has been identified that the process followed varies significantly across authorities. A selection of different methods adopted by other authorities is shown below:

#### **Local Authority A – 28 July – 19 September**

Document produced providing details of the Budget, outlining the following facts and figures:

- how money is currently spent
- how the Council is funded,
- financial outlook for the future
- plans for council tax
- plans for social care levy.

The survey requests narrative feedback on themed saving areas rather than individual saving proposals and questions around council tax proposals

#### **Local Authority B – 4 January – 14 February**

30 page document produced detailing the priorities of the Council, details of the indicative budget by priority, level of investment planned for each year of the 5 year Financial Strategy and detailed savings plans, and council tax plans.

Each saving proposal then has its own business case produced detailing the level of saving, a detailed description of the saving, key milestones in delivering the saving, options and alternatives considered and the business impact of the saving. People are asked to complete an online form with comments on the proposals or contact through standard social media channels.

#### **Local Authority C – 14 December – 25 January**

An interactive webpage which allows people to prioritise where the Council spends its funds. The webpage contains a series of sliders which enable visitors to adjust the amount spent on key services provided by the council or alter the income generated via chargeable services or Council Tax. The toolkit needs to balance off before submission, therefore if they spend more on one service, they need to offset by reductions in other areas.

#### **Local Authority D – 2 December - 4 January**

Background document produced providing context of financial position of the authority, including council priorities, how council is funded, what is spent on council services, details of the budget proposals including savings and council tax plans.

Survey requests people to say whether they agree or disagree with proposed approaches to savings (themed savings headings rather than specific savings proposals). People were also asked to rank their top three preferred savings approaches. Opinions on the council tax increase was also requested. Finally,

people were asked to consider which of the council's priority they consider to be most important.

**Local Authority E – 2 December - 4 January**

Budget engagement document produced outlining:

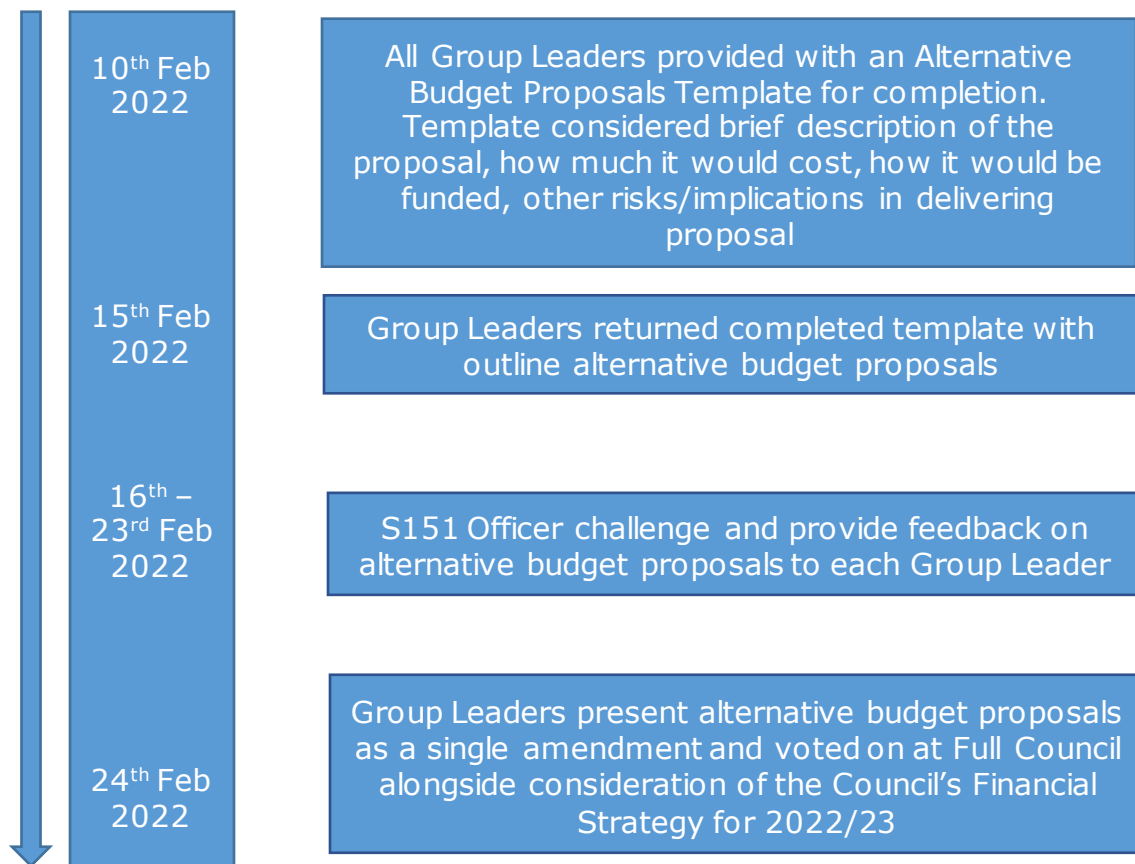
- the Council's corporate priorities,
- plans for spend against Council's priorities for the next year,
- the Council's summary financial position
- details of investment and individual savings proposals (providing brief description of how savings will be achieved) – requesting people select that they support, oppose, or have no opinion against each proposal and provide any additional comments
- details of any central budgetary/funding activity planned such as use of reserves or council tax increases - requesting people select that they support, oppose, or have no opinion against each proposal and provide any additional comments

## APPENDIX 8

### Process Trialed for Alternative Budget Process

It was identified during the course of the 2022/23 budget setting process, that the Council's Constitution does not set out a procedure for consideration of alternative budget proposals.

Therefore the following process was applied for 2022/23 budget with agreement with Group Leaders, in order that a formal procedure can be adopted within the Council's Constitution for 2023/24 budget and beyond.



## APPENDIX 9

### Amendment to Financial Rules

Current text:

#### *Budget Guidelines*

4.6. *Guidelines on budget preparation are issued to members, directors, managers and budget holders by Cabinet following advice from the Section 151 Officer. The guidelines will take account of:*

- a) Legal requirements;*
- b) Medium term planning prospects;*
- c) Forecasts of available resources externally;*
- d) Forecasts of internal resources available;*
- e) Spending pressures;*
- f) Best value and other relevant Government guidelines;*
- g) Cross cutting issues (where relevant);*
- h) Impact assessments;*
- i) Risk factors;*
- j) Consultation with residents and businesses.*

Proposed Revised text:

#### *Budget Guidelines*

4.6. *Guidelines on budget preparation are issued to members, directors, managers and budget holders by Cabinet following advice from the Section 151 Officer. The guidelines will take account of:*

- a) Legal requirements;*
- b) Medium term planning prospects;*
- c) Forecasts of available resources externally;*
- d) Forecasts of internal resources available;*
- e) Spending pressures;*
- f) Best value and other relevant Government guidelines;*
- g) Cross cutting issues (where relevant);*
- h) Impact assessments;*
- i) Risk factors;*
- j) **Alternative budget proposals from Council Opposition Groups;** Consultation with residents and businesses.*

### **[To be inserted before paragraph 4.7]**

#### *Alternative budgets*

4.7 *Alternative budgets will be invited from the political Opposition Group(s) within the Council from 31 October each year (NB - actual dates to be confirmed annually). Officers will support the development of alternative proposals in terms of financial estimates and operational consequences. Alternative budget proposals must be returned to the Section 151 Officer by 16 December (tbc annually). January PMSC will*

*consider the alternative budget proposals before they are presented to Cabinet later in January. In February, Cabinet will receive the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy and associated detailed budget proposals for the coming year before these are considered by Full Council. Cabinet will have the opportunity to adopt the alternative budget proposals and incorporate them in to the February reports for Cabinet and Council.*

#### *Consultation with residents and businesses*

- 4.8 *Consultation with residents and business will be undertaken for 4-6 weeks from mid-December to the end of January each year (dates to be confirmed annually). Residents will be invited to comment on key budget proposals including proposed pressures funding and proposed efficiencies and the proposed council tax charge arising. The outcome of this consultation will be reported to Cabinet and Council in February, enabling the consideration of budget proposals alongside the outcomes of the consultation. (Consultation with members is undertaken via the alternative budget proposals, above, and the debate with Cabinet and in Full Council.*

**[Appendices 3a and 3b to this current report to be added to appendix B of the financial rules as below:]**

*B.4. Alternative budget preparation – indicative timetable and template for proposals*

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<u>Committee and Date</u>
Council 22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2022

<u>Item</u>
Public

## Interim Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2022

**Responsible Officer**

Andy Begley

e-mail: Andy.begley@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 258675

### 1. Synopsis

This report details the findings of the Interim Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) for the polling places mentioned.

### 2. Executive Summary

2.1. The main purpose of the review is to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting within the following polling places:

- Baschurch (Baschurch Ward)
- Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward)
- Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of)
- Shrewsbury (Cophorne Ward) (part of)
- Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of)
- Shrewsbury (Porthill Ward) (part of)

2.2. Local Authorities must comply with legislative requirements regarding the designation of the polling districts and polling places, ensuring that each parish is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply, and must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless size or other circumstances are such that the situation of the polling station does not materially affect the convenience of the electors.

- 2.3. The polling place must be in an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district.
- 2.4. Local Authorities must also seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.

### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That members of Council approve the following arrangements, in order for them to be implemented on or by 1 December 2022.

<b>DIVISION</b>	<b>PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS</b>
Polling District Reference: NKA Baschurch (Baschurch Ward)	Baschurch Village Hall replace Millington Close Community Rooms as the polling place for NKA Baschurch (Baschurch Ward).
Polling District Reference: SBB Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of)	Emmanuel Church replace Riversway Elim Church as the polling place for SBB Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of).
Polling District Reference: SJA Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of)	Riversway Elim Church replace Emmanuel Church as the polling place for SJA Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of).
Polling District Reference: SIA Shrewsbury (Cophorne Ward) (part of)	Army Reserve Centre replace Woodfield Infants School as the polling place for SIA Shrewsbury (Cophorne Ward) (part of).
Polling District Reference: SPB Shrewsbury (Porthill Ward) (part of)	Army Reserve Centre replace Woodfield Infants School as the polling place for SPB Shrewsbury (Porthill Ward) (part of).
Polling District Reference LHA Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward)	All Stretton Village Hall replace Silvester Home Institute as the polling place for LHA Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward).

- 3.2. That delegated authority be given to the Returning Officer to find a suitable alternative, in conjunction with local members, should any polling station not be available for a particular election.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

- 4.1. The Council is obliged to conduct a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations on a regular basis.
- 4.2. There is no anticipated environmental impact associated with the recommendations of the report.
- 4.3. The recommendations are not at variance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and is unlikely to result in any adverse Human Rights Act implications. The recommendations are in line with relevant legal procedures prescribed by the Act and with guidance issued by the Home Office.
- 4.4. Any amendments to the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations will take into account the provisions of the Equalities Act, Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006), and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- 4.5. The council must seek to ensure all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 4.6. The council must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.

### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1. Appendix 1 provides either decreased or increased costs where they have occurred based on the hire charges and staffing levels applied for the Local Elections in May 2021 and Parliamentary By-Elections in December 2021.
- 5.2. There will be a total increase of £1295.50 for future elections if all recommendations are accepted, however, it should be noted that charges are likely to increase year on year.

### **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

- 6.1. There are no anticipated effects on climate change matters from the changes proposed to polling places identified within the report.

## **7. Background**

- 7.1. A review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations should be carried out on a regular basis, to ensure all locations remain appropriate, and suitable for electors. On this occasion, it was considered best to commence an interim review during a fallow election year.
- 7.2. The proposed polling places have been identified following consultation with council officers, local members and partner organisations, and a full review on their suitability has been conducted prior to the consultation taking place.
- 7.3. A public consultation was held from 1 July to 12 August 2022. Details were published on the Council's website, at the Council Offices and in the affected Town and Parish Council areas, and circulated to the relevant stakeholders and community groups. The consultation invited comments and proposals from the Shropshire Council Returning Officer, MPs for Ludlow, North Shropshire and Shrewsbury and Atcham Constituencies, Unitary Councillors in the affected divisions, Town and Parish Councils in the affected areas, local political groups, the public and known local groups/ organisations connected with disability groups.
- 7.4. A number of responses were received during the consultation and were published on the Council's website and outlined in Appendix 1.
- 7.5. The Returning Officer's proposals were published on the Council's website, and considerations invited from 24 August to 14 September 2022.
- 7.6. Submissions were received from Church Stretton Town Council, and Councillor Munro, Mayor of Church Stretton Town Council, in response to the Returning Officer's proposals. These are outlined in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of the report.
- 7.7. The Returning Officer's proposals originally supported no change to the polling provision for Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward).
- 7.8. Further consideration was given to the additional submissions received in response to the Returning Officer's proposals, and it was concluded that greater weight should be given to the 'protected characteristics' of the age demographic in the area and formal

support of the proposals from Church Stretton Town Council. On balance it is considered that the proposals to replace Silvester Home Institute with All Stretton Village Hall as the polling place for Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward) should now be considered for approval.

- 7.9. Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission provides a staged approach to conducting a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations according to the relevant legislative requirements. This guidance has been considered and referred to during the review process.

## 8. Conclusions

- 8.1. The arrangements proposed in the review enable the Council to designate the most appropriate polling places and polling stations to enable electors, including disabled users, to access suitable facilities for voting which are practicable in the circumstances.
- 8.2. It is planned that any changes resulting from the review would be incorporated into the annual register when published on 1 December 2022.

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

Representation of the People Act 1983: Section 18

Electoral Administration Act 2006: Part 4 Section 16

Electoral Commission Guidance on Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Gwilym Butler

**Local Member**

Local members within the affected electoral divisions.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Schedule of Proposals

Appendix 2 – Full Submission from Councillor Munro, Mayor of Church Stretton Town Council

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**NORTH SHROPSHIRE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

**RYTON AND BASCHURCH DIVISION**

<b>Polling District</b>		<b>Existing Polling Place</b>	<b>Proposed Polling Place</b>	<b>Electors</b>	<b>No. of Stations in Venue</b>
NKA	Baschurch (Baschurch Ward)	Millington Close Community Room	Baschurch Village Hall	1774	1

**Submissions:**

**Baschurch Parish Council:** In support of the change of venue.

**Councillor Bardsley (Unitary Member for Ruyton and Baschurch):** In support of the change of venue.

**Sight Loss Shropshire:** No issues reported about specific polling district or polling place.

**Financial Impact:**

There would be no additional staff costs incurred and a reduction in venue hire charges of £70.50 based on 2021 charges.

**Returning Officer's Proposal:**

The existing polling place is considered to be unsuitable for future elections due to concerns over the health and wellbeing of vulnerable residents on site following the Covid-19 pandemic. It is considered necessary to identify and relocate to a more appropriate venue within the locality going forward.

The proposed venue is deemed suitable for all electors to access and considered appropriate for use as a polling place/polling station going forward.

The Returning Officer is in support of the proposals to designate Baschurch Village Hall as the polling place for NKA Baschurch (Baschurch Ward).

**Recommendation:**

Baschurch Village Hall replace Millington Close Community Rooms as the polling place for NKA Baschurch (Baschurch Ward).

## **SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

### **BAGLEY DIVISION**

<b>Polling District</b>		<b>Existing Polling Place</b>	<b>Proposed Polling Place</b>	<b>Electors</b>	<b>No. of Stations in Venue</b>
SBB	Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of)	Riversway Elim Church	Emmanuel Church	1272	1

#### **Submissions:**

**Councillor Burchett (Unitary Member for Bagley):** Fully support the proposed changes for the Bagley and Harlescott divisions.

**Shrewsbury Town Council:** In support of the change of venue.

**Sight Loss Shropshire:** No issues reported about specific polling district or polling place.

#### **Financial Impact:**

No additional financial impact.

#### **Returning Officer's Proposal:**

The existing polling place is suitable for all electors to access, however, due to the location within the polling district it is considered more appropriate to allocate the existing polling place to Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of).

The proposed polling place is suitable for all electors to access, however, due to the location within the polling district it is considered more appropriate to allocate the proposed polling place to Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of).

The Returning Officer is in support of the proposals to designate Emmanuel Church as the polling place for SBB - Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of).

#### **Recommendation:**

Emmanuel Church replace Riversway Elim Church as the polling place for SBB Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of).

### **HARLESCOTT DIVISION**

<b>Polling District</b>		<b>Existing Polling Place</b>	<b>Proposed Polling Place</b>	<b>Electors</b>	<b>No. of Stations in Venue</b>
SJA	Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of)	Emmanuel Church	Riversway Elim Church	2406	2



**Submissions:**

**Councillor Burchett (Unitary Member for Bagley):** Fully support the proposed changes for the Bagley and Harlescott divisions.

**Shrewsbury Town Council:** In support of change of venue.

**Sight Loss Shropshire:** No issues reported about specific polling district or polling place.

**Financial Impact:**

No additional financial impact.

**Returning Officer's Proposal:**

The existing polling place is suitable for all electors to access, however, due to the location within the polling district, it is considered more appropriate to allocate the existing polling place to Shrewsbury (Bagley Ward) (part of).

The proposed polling place is suitable for all electors to access, however, due to the location within the polling district it is considered more appropriate to allocate the proposed polling place to Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of).

The Returning Officer is in support of the proposals to designate Riversway Elim Church as the polling place for SJA - Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of).

**Recommendation:**

Riversway Elim Church replace Emmanuel Church as the polling place for SJA Shrewsbury (Harlescott Ward) (part of).

**COPTHORNE DIVISION**

Polling District		Existing Polling Place	Proposed Polling Place	Electors	No. of Stations in Venue
SIA	Shrewsbury (Cophorne Ward) (part of)	Woodfield Infants School	Army Reserve Centre	968	2

**Submissions:**

**Shrewsbury Town Council:** In support of change of venue.

**Councillor Wilson (Unitary Member for Cophorne):** In support of change of venue as this would remove any negative impact on the children and parents who attend Woodfield School.

**Councillor Dean (Unitary Member for Porthill):** Welcome the change of venue as this would be less disruptive to the school and provides a more suitable venue for people who have to use a vehicle to attend a polling station.

**Sight Loss Shropshire:** No issues reported about specific polling district or polling place.

**Financial Impact:**

There would be an increase of £807 for venue hire and additional staffing to monitor the car parking area due to site security requirements. This cost would be split between Copthorne and Porthill Wards.

**Returning Officer's Proposal:**

The existing polling place is considered suitable as a venue, however, as the school is required to close when being used as a polling place, this causing significant issues for the school, parents and children, and a review of alternative venues was considered necessary.

The proposed polling place is accessible to all electors and considered an appropriate venue for future elections.

The Returning Officer is in support of the proposals to designate the Army Reserve Centre as the polling place for SIA - Shrewsbury (Copthorne Ward) (part of).

**Recommendation:**

Army Reserve Centre replace Woodfield Infants School as the polling place for SIA Shrewsbury (Copthorne Ward) (part of).

**PORTHILL DIVISION**

Polling District		Existing Polling Place	Proposed Polling Place	Electors	No. of Stations in Venue
SPB	Shrewsbury (Porthill Ward) (part of)	Woodfield Infants School	Army Reserve Centre	1725	2

**Submissions:**

**Shrewsbury Town Council:** In support of change of venue.

**Councillor Wilson (Unitary Member for Copthorne):** In support of change of venue as this would remove any negative impact on the children and parents who attend Woodfield School.

**Councillor Dean (Unitary Member for Porthill):** Welcome the change of venue as this would be less disruptive to the school and provides a more suitable venue for people who have to use a vehicle to attend a polling station.

**Sight Loss Shropshire:** No issues reported about specific polling district or polling place.

**Financial Impact:**

There would be increase costs of £807 for venue hire and additional staffing to monitor the car parking area due to site security requirements. This cost would be split between Copthorne and Porthill Wards.

**Returning Officer's Proposal:**

The existing polling place is considered suitable as a venue, however, as the school is required to close when being used as a polling place, this causing significant issues for the school, parents and children, and a review of alternative venues was considered necessary.

The proposed polling place is accessible to all electors and considered an appropriate venue for future elections.

The Returning Officer is in support of the proposals to designate the Army Reserve Centre as the polling place for SPB - Shrewsbury (Porthill Ward) (part of).

**Recommendation:**

Army Reserve Centre replace Woodfield Infants School as the polling place for SPB Shrewsbury (Porthill Ward) (part of).

## LUDLOW PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

### CHURCH STRETTON AND CRAVEN ARMS DIVISION

Polling District		Existing Polling Place	Proposed Polling Place	Electors	No. of Stations in Venue
LHA	Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward)	Silvester Home Institute	All Stretton Village Hall	399	2

#### **Submissions:**

**Councillor Luff and Councillor Evans (Unitary Members for Church Stretton & Craven Arms):** We don't feel a polling station in All Stretton is needed. All Stretton Village Society do not have a budget for elections, and we should not be creating extra expense to the Councils when money is tight. There are also issues with identifying experienced staff at polling stations across Shropshire, and in particular in more rural areas. The present system works well as it is and therefore, we are not in support of the proposed change.

**Local Resident (Caroline Crump):** I am writing in support of All Stretton Village Society's application to have its own polling station. This would be of huge benefit to the elderly and less mobile residents of the village.

**Sight Loss Shropshire:** No issues reported about specific polling district or polling place.

**Church Stretton Town Council:** In response to the Returning Officers proposals, the Town Council have resolved to support All Stretton Village Hall being used as a polling place for Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward) electors.

**Councillor Munro, Mayor, Church Stretton Town Council:** In response to the Returning Officers proposals, the Mayor supports the option to move polling district LHA - Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward) to All Stretton Village Hall.

#### **Financial Impact:**

There would be a minimum increase in costs of £559 for venue hire and additional staffing.

#### **Returning Officer's Proposal:**

The existing polling place is considered suitable and will continue to be used as a venue for remaining polling districts within the Church Stretton Area. Although the venue is outside the polling district boundary, the affected area is a relatively short distance from the existing polling place and has a regular bus service.

The proposed venue is considered suitable to use as a polling place for future elections. The addition of this provision would see increased election costs to the Unitary and Town Council, and it may impact on limited staff availability within rural areas.

The Returning Officer's proposal originally supported no change to the polling provision for Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward).

Following further submissions received in response to the Returning Officer's proposals, it is considered that greater weight should be given to the 'protected characteristics' of the age demographic in the area and formal support of the proposals from Church Stretton Town Council, and Councillor Munro, Mayor of Church Stretton Town Council.

On balance the Returning Officer is in support of the proposals to designate All Stretton Village Hall as the polling place for LHA – Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward).

**Recommendation:**

All Stretton Village Hall replace Silvester Horne Institute as the polling place for LHA Church Stretton (All Stretton Ward).

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# Church Stretton

Town Council

28<sup>th</sup> August 2022

Miranda Garrard  
Solicitor  
Democratic Services Manager  
Shropshire Council

By email

Dear Ms. Garrard,

## **Polling station review – All Stretton**

Thank you for your email dated 26<sup>th</sup> August inviting representations regarding the establishment of a polling station for the community of All Stretton. I am replying to you but have copied in your colleague, Fiona Howe, as you suggest.

## **Background**

All Stretton is a village of around 600 souls of which slightly more than 400 are on the electoral register. It is probably the community with the highest proportion of residents of retirement age in the county (71% aged 55 or over) and in a recent poll 96% of All Stretton residents responding cited maintaining its independence from the nearby town of Church Stretton as their highest priority.

The village lies between 1.5 miles (at the south) and 2 miles (at the north) from the centre of Church Stretton requiring the use of cars to attend the polling station in the town. There is no suitable public transport which would facilitate voting. During the pandemic providing lifts to polling stations was not allowed, and this resulted in many All Stretton residents becoming disenfranchised. Any suggested use of more postal votes is not compatible with many older residents and deprives people of important social contact: isolation remains a key issue in rural communities.

As such, the conclusion of residents was that the current arrangements were not working and that All Stretton merited its own polling station.

## History

Approximately three years ago the All Stretton Village Society (ASVS) started a conversation with Claire Porter who had responsibility for these matters at that time. The provisions of the 1983 Act were rehearsed, and in particular “section 18 (2)(b) “F5...,each parish or community shall in the absence of special circumstances be a separate polling district...[and] (c) the polling station for any polling district shall be an area in that district...”

No special circumstances were identified and it was agreed that All Stretton should have its own polling station. However, by that time the covid-19 pandemic was rearing its head, and in a spirit of cooperation residents and Claire’s team agreed that work on a new polling station should be suspended until after the pandemic had abated. Since that time the All Stretton village hall has been inspected and found to be suitable for use as a polling station.

In May 2021 the majority of Councillors on Church Stretton Town Council were replaced, with ironically a substantive election held for the ward of All Stretton which required residents to travel to Church Stretton to vote in person for their local ward councillors.

The Town Council works very closely with the ASVS and is fully supportive of the village’s wish to have its own polling station. To that end, the Town Council holds a budget for local elections, as parish and town councils should, and Shropshire Council is responsible for the cost of unitary elections. Based on Shropshire Council estimates, the annualised cost of elections based on a four year cycle would be around £100. It was surprising, therefore, to see cost cited by Unitary Councillors as a reason for blocking this amenity.

A final issue raised by Unitary Councillors relates to “issues with identifying experienced staff at polling stations...and in particular in more rural areas.” Shropshire is a rural county and it is difficult to reconcile this position with the support given to changes proposed to urban locations. Rural communities frequently feel abandoned and the optics of this argument will further undermine confidence in governance.

As a suggestion, the Town Council employs a number of staff who could operate a polling station, some of which are frequently asked to do so and are very experienced. The Town Council would strongly support its staff in undertaking this public service, and this may help to meet the demand. Further, there are many local residents who could be trained for such a role and the Town Council would offer facilities to support such training. As an example, there are two retired County Chief Executives in All Stretton, and many more retired local authority staff. Do you know what steps have been taken to recruit such people?

## Summary and conclusions

The village of All Stretton is a discreet and separate community from Church Stretton and under the Representation of the People Act 1983 constitutes a separate polling district, and in the absence of special circumstances should be afforded its own polling station. This position has the support of local residents, the All Stretton Village Society, local ward councillors and the Church Stretton Town Council.

Given that Shropshire Council’s own estimates put the cost at around £100 a year, and that the Town Council has properly reserved the necessary funds (and has done for many years), it is difficult to understand what motives exist to deny All Stretton a polling station, particularly as this has been a matter which has been progressed in partnership with Shropshire Council for three years and which was considered a settled matter only delayed by covid -19.

The argument that rural communities should be denied access to local polling stations because of the difficulties in finding staff is shocking in a county as rural as Shropshire, and I have made a number of suggestions for the Town Council to work with Shropshire to help train people to assist with elections across the south of the county. If you identify any other ‘hot spots’ I would happily work with other mayors to find volunteers to train.



In short, the 1983 Act creates the duty to provide a polling station, costs have been shown not to be an issue, there are no special circumstances identified, and the optics of not providing a polling station on the basis that it is too difficult to do so in a rural area denies the realities of what is Shropshire, particularly given the age demographic of the village.

I should be grateful if the proposal can be reviewed and a recommendation made to Councillors to support the establishment of a polling station in All Stretton.

If there are any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Andy Munro  
Mayor  
Church Stretton Town Council

Cc

Fiona Howe, Shropshire Council

Cllr Helen Stowell, All Stretton Ward, CSTC

Gillian Bailey, Clerk, CSTC

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## COUNCIL 22 SEPTEMBER 2022

### MEMBER QUESTIONS

#### **Question from Councillor Ruth Houghton**

The disposal of housing stock by local Housing Association, Connexus in southwest Shropshire is of serious concern given the dire shortage of affordable accommodation in the area. This is further compounded by the fact that no new building is taking place, which isn't due to a lack of planning, but the total stop on new developments, including any that Cornovii may wish to develop, due the challenges posed by the Clun River phosphate problem.

Will the Portfolio Holder please confirm how many people are currently on HomePoint waiting for housing in Southwest Shropshire and what is this Council doing to mitigate the environmental factors affecting the Clun River in order to open up new developments in the area? As Cornovii are currently unable to develop in the Southwest of the County will the company instead consider the acquisition of these disposals from Connexus in order to refurbish and develop affordable housing in the area?

#### **Response from Councillor Rob Gittins, Portfolio Holder for Digital, Data & Insight and Built Housing**

Current registrations on the Council's HomePoint system, broken down by Place Plan area, show the following numbers of households awaiting housing in Southwest Shropshire:

- Bishops Castle 132
- Church Stretton 122
- Craven Arms 72
- Ludlow 284

In respect of Shropshire Council's actions to address the environmental issues affecting the Clun Valley and its development implications, I can provide the following information. Shropshire Council has led the establishment of a Strategic Clun Liaison Group to bring together senior leaders from across the Environment Agency, Natural England and Severn Trent Water with the aim of establishing a multi-agency response to address issues in the Clun as soon as practicably possible.

At present, there is no up-to-date Nutrient Management Plan or Special Area of Conservation Restoration Plan for the Clun catchment. It is Natural England's responsibility to lead this work.

It is Natural England's position that mitigation measures to ensure that development is nutrient neutral cannot be defined or implemented until the measures required for restoration are known. This is because Natural England want certainty that any such mitigation measures will not compromise the ability to restore the Special Area of Conservation. As a result, residential development cannot currently be permitted within the catchment area.

Natural England and the Environment Agency, as the two responsible bodies, have now commenced work to scope the Special Area of Conservation Restoration Plan. The Council is committed to supporting both organisations in this work to bring it forward as soon as is possible. The Council is seeking clarification on the timeframe for its preparation through the monthly Liaison Group.

Despite the need firstly to understand the restoration requirements for the Clun, the Council does not want to wait to develop an evidence base and understanding around mitigation. The Council has therefore reached agreement with Natural England to undertake this work alongside work on the Restoration Plan.

A Mitigation Measures Study has been completed by the Council which provides a phosphate budget to enable understanding of the phosphate contributions made by development proposals. This also allows the Council to understand the measures needed to enable new development to achieve nutrient neutrality. This work was assisted the recent Local Plan examination.

The Council is now taking this work forward to provide a more detailed delivery plan for mitigation and is keen to ensure this is put in place as soon as possible. This includes exploring whether development which can clearly demonstrate nutrient neutrality can proceed in the absence of a restoration plan. The scope for this work is currently being agreed with DEFRA and DLUHC.

In respect of planned disposals of certain affordable housing stock by the local Registered Provider Connexus, CDL and STAR are exploring any potential to purchase the units on either an affordable or private rented sector basis. However, it should be noted that the key driver for Connexus to dispose of the homes is their poor thermal performance and the associated high costs of refurbishment. The issues associated with these homes arises from their rural locations, heating systems, build type and associated high construction costs. These same issues will also affect the viability of the homes should CDL and STAR purchase the units

### **Question from Councillor Kevin Pardy**

On the 30th of June 2021, the Shropshire Unitary Council Cabinet agreed to a recommendation to accept a contract between Shropshire Council and the SCLG (SERCO). The recommendation mentioned a contract of "up to five years". The Council Leader stated that the recommendation was for important reasons.

On the 15th of July 2021, the recommendation was presented to the Full Members Meeting with a significant change of wording, from 'up to five years' to 'for five years.'

On the 17th of July 2021, I emailed the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Motley, asking why there had been a change. I did not receive a reply.

On the 4th of August, I sent another email to Councillor Motley requesting a reply, again I did not receive a reply.

On the 7th of July 2022, at Full Council, I again asked why the wording of the 2021 Contract with SCLG (SERCO) had been changed. The Portfolio Holder replied saying, 'she didn't know why Councillor Pardy, "had it in for SERCO". This reply, once again avoided answering the question.

I will ask again, and with the public in mind I hope the question will be answered directly and accurately. My question is:

Why was the wording of a recommendation by Cabinet on the 30th of June 2021 with reference to a contract between Shropshire Unitary Council and SCLG (SERCO) changed, from "up to five years" to "for five years" when presented to Full Council and who made the decision to change the wording?

### **Response from Councillor Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture, Leisure & Tourism and Transport**

The extension to the contract with Shropshire Community Leisure Trust is for 5 years, with a break clause in year 2.

The extension negotiations came at a time of considerable uncertainty in the leisure market. Issues include:

- The speed of income recovery following the Covid pandemic
- Rapidly increasing inflation
- Increases in utility costs
- Increases in staff salaries

This meant that there was a significant increase in subsidy required.

Given that the impact of the issues mentioned above are yet to be fully understood, it was felt prudent to add a break clause at the end of year 2,

so that the delivery of the contract could be monitored and potentially reviewed, by both sides, depending on how market conditions change over the next 12-18 months.

As a result, whilst the contract is for 5 years, there is an opportunity to renegotiate the contract for years 3-5, or to retender if market conditions are favourable.

The wording change from 'up to five years' to 'for five years' simply more accurately represents the full term of the contract. The drafting of Council reports benefit from the input of many colleagues providing their professional advice.

### **Question from Councillor Heather Kidd**

#### Border issues with Concessionary bus passes

Concessionary bus pass holders have had a real issue along the border with Wales since introduction around 15 years ago. People can travel into Wales to use vital services and return free. They cannot change buses. If they need to walk or drive to Churchstoke (in Wales ) to catch a bus to Newtown for an appointment at Newtown or Welshpool hospital or the dentist then their pass is not valid. The Oswestry area has similar problems when travelling to Chester

In the light of the cost of living crisis will the Leader of Council and Transport portfolio holder, please:

- Raise the issue with our border MP's (Philip Dunne MP and Helen Morgan MP ) and ask them for urgent talks with the Welsh Government and the Transport Minister in Westminster to make this free both sides of the border?
- Consider working with Powys to put a local agreement in place? This could be cost neutral for both authorities.

This would both be good for the environment keeping people out of cars, save money for those facing huge hikes in costs and reduce the expensive problem of using taxis in some cases.

### **Response from Councillor Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture, Leisure & Tourism and Transport**

Thank you for your question, regarding the use of English Concessionary Bus passes in Wales and the impact that is having on passengers. The English National Concessionary Travel scheme when introduced was not intended for use in Wales for which separate legislation exists, however there are agreements in place that as you mentioned in your question,

allow Shropshire concessionary passengers to commence their journey in England and travel onwards to Wales.

The issue you highlighted is where passengers then want to change to a more local service in Wales for onwards travel to access essential services, for which their concessionary pass is not valid and a charge would be made. I don't believe we can provide a blanket approval for Shropshire passes to be used on any bus service in Wales, but I am happy for us to explore which individual services in Wales passengers are looking to use to gain access to essential services and I have asked our Transport Team to explore this option with their colleagues in Wales.

Officers will report back once they have had those conversations

### **Question from Councillor Dan Morris**

In December 2017 Shropshire Council submitted a scheme outline business case under the Department of Transport's Large Local Majors funding programme for the North West Relief Road (NWRR). In March 2019 the Department for Transport awarded £54m towards the construction of the NWRR. On the Shropshire Council Website page for the NWRR it currently states the following on timings:

- February 2022 – full business case endorsement by DfT
- Spring 2022 - appointment of contractor
- Spring/Summer 2022 - start of construction
- Spring 2024 – road open and project fully complete

I would suggest that now these timings are out of date.

The desire and need to build the NWRR was a democratically taken majority decision by Shropshire Council members. The building of the road had been mooted for decades, and through the hard work of many Shropshire Council officers, some Members and the MP for Shrewsbury and Atcham a large sum of funding was awarded by the DfT to help build the road. Many people I speak to are increasingly frustrated by the delays of getting this road built.

Please could Shropshire Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Assets & Built Housing update council on what is currently holding the planning process up, when he expects the NWRR to go before Planning Committee, the plans to mitigate current inflationary pressures as a result of the delays and could he update council when he expects contracts to be awarded and when he thinks the road will now be in use?

### **Response from Councillor Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure (highways and assets)**

The project team are currently undertaking more detailed design work to seek to remove objections raised by the Environment Agency and Natural England during the Planning Consultation. The project team remain confident that outcomes of the work will result in objections being removed. The detailed work currently being undertaken is work that was planned for post planning consent and so the delay will not have a significant detriment to timescales. It is hoped that a resolution will be reached in the coming weeks and that a planning application can be considered before Christmas. The web site will be updated to reflect the new timescales once the date of the Planning Committee has been confirmed.

### **Question from Councillor Rosemary Dartnall**

Please provide updated information about the proposed North West (Relief) Road in respect of the following areas;

- Has Balfour Beatty now completed the audit of Shropshire Council's project costing and confirmed, or otherwise, the most recently quoted total project price of £81 m (down from £87 m), provided to council some months ago?
- £20 m has been spent on preliminary investigations, we are told. How much of this spend is directly related to investigations for the elevated section of the proposed road? How suitable is the underlying geology for construction of the sub- and super-structure supporting the road at the west end? Is it possible to mediate for the nature of the subsurface sedimentary rocks?
- Does the administration remain convinced that this is a viable and worthy project, despite sound arguments that show it to be outdated, unlikely to relieve congestion, counter to net zero targets and poor value for taxpayers' money?

**RESPONSE TO FOLLOW**