



Committee and Date

Item

1

Public

SOUTH WEST SHROPSHIRE LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEE

NOTE OF DECISIONS AND ACTIONS STEMMING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH

APRIL 2016

AT

THE SpArC CENTRE BISHOPS CASTLE 7PM

Responsible Officer

Mathew Mead

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Committee Members Present:

Shropshire Council

Charlotte Barnes

Heather Kidd

Nigel Hartin

Bishop's Castle (Chair)

Chirbury and Worthen

Clun

Town/Parish Councils

John Croxton

Jane Carroll

Valerie Whately

Sandra Davies

Jonathan Kemp

Trevor Jones

Godfrey May

Brian Ince

Clunbury Parish Council

Bishops Castle Town Council

Bettws-y-Crwyn Parish Council

Newcastle on Clun Parish Council

Bedstone and Bucknell Parish Council

Myndtown Parish Council

Lydbury North Parish Council

Worthen with Shelve Parish Council

Officers Present:

Mathew Mead, Community Enablement Officer, Shropshire Council

Clive Wright, Chief Executive, Shropshire Council

Chris Edwards, Area Commissioner, Shropshire Council

150 members of the public were in attendance

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Charlotte Barnes welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Gordon Lewis (Mainstone) Mrs Lewis representing the Parish; Andrew Craig (Chirbury); Jonathan Roberts (Clungunford); Valerie Whately (Bettws-y-Crwyn)

2. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

No members of the Committee disclosed any pecuniary interests on the agenda items

3. Notes of Previous Meeting (Item 1)

The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the previous LJC on which was held on 25th November 2015

4. Presentation – The Future of Shropshire Council services in South West Shropshire. Councillor Malcolm Pate, Leader of Shropshire Council and Clive Wright, Chief Executive of Shropshire Council

Councillor Barnes welcomed Malcolm and Clive to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

Malcom Pate gave an outline as to why Shropshire Council was facing significant financial challenges. Broadly there were three main reasons, which were:

- A freezing of Council Tax by Central Government and the administration at Shropshire Council over the last 4 years. Council tax can't be increased by more than 2% (plus 1.99% for adult social care) without a public referendum
- A reduction in revenue funding from Central Government from 2017. While Shropshire Council will be able to keep business rates raised locally, this income will be a lot less than the money received from Central Government
- A significant increase in the cost of providing adult social care in Shropshire. On average Shropshire has an older than average population, which is spread over a large rural area. Shropshire also received less per head than metropolitan areas for adult social care, with Shropshire getting around 35p per person per day, compared to 60p on large urban areas. The cost of adult social care is predicted to rise annually over the next three years.

All of these factors mean that the costs of running services are increasing, but the income Shropshire Council gets is reducing, and comes on the back of a number of years of cuts. The Council has to legally run a balanced budget, and has to deliver a range of statutory services, such as schools, highways and adult social care. This year (2016/17) has £80 million to spend on none statutory services but this will be reduced to £25 million over the next three years. There is therefore a need to look at the Council stopping running some none statutory services. It is not what the Council wants to do but tough choices need to be made.

Clive Wright then talked about how Shropshire Council was looking to manage its budget and priorities which services to focus on. The Big Conversation had taken place over recent months and involved members of the public from a cross section of Shropshire residents. The survey had helped the Council priorities which services people wanted the Council to focus on. Education, social care and support for vulnerable adults where the main priorities identified. This meant that savings from other budgets such as sports, culture and leisure and the environment had to be

looked at. The Council has published a financial plan for 2017 based on the current financial outlook, and this did show cuts to some service areas, such as libraries, leisure centres and other non-statutory services.

Malcolm and Clive explained that this budget setting exercise was being used to focus attention on how to maintain as many services as possible in Shropshire. Work was being undertaken with central government to get extra financial support for Shropshire. Around £8 million was secured earlier in the year, and in May the Local Government Officer Greg Clarke had been invited to Shropshire to see the potential impacts the cuts would make.

Work has also started with Town and Parish Councils, and the volunteer sector in Shropshire to see if they might consider taking on and funding services in Shropshire. Town and Parish Councils were exempt from rules on raising the precept, so can choose to precept locally to pay for services. Malcolm Pate gave the example of Albrighton where he is a Councillor, where the Town Council now runs the swimming pool and library in the town. While there are legal issues and responsibilities around running services which need to be considered it is an approach Shropshire Council are keen to work with communities in Shropshire to look at developing similar partnerships.

Questions from the LJC Committee and public were then made.

A question was raised why the Shropshire Council Chief Executive was being given a pay rise when these cuts were taking place.

Malcolm responded that when Clive Wright took the role of Chief Executive it was at a lower than average rate than other Chief Executives, and should he leave it would be hard to replace him at this lower wage. The role of Chief Executive is vital to the Council and maintaining services and making this investment in the Chief Executive role was important for the Council.

Members of the public pointed out that the reductions to leisure budgets from 2017 placed the future of the SpArC Centre in Bishop's Castle in doubt. As it is a shared use site with the school and also hosts the SpArC Arts project too, this was a very major concern for the town. Disappointment was expressed that as late as December 2015 there was no suggestion that SpArC was under threat, but suddenly it now had a zero budget from 2017 onwards. Why was this the case?

Clive explained that it was only in December this year that Government settlement for local authorities was released, and proved to be much lower than expected. This resulted in Shropshire Council having to review its budgets and publish a new financial strategy early in 2016. While people recognised the importance of leisure services the Big Conversation had shown it to be less of a priority than other services, hence the reductions in the budget.

Alan Doust, the Head of Bishop's Castle Community College, stated that as a shared facility the loss of £67,000 of shared use funding from the education budget was a double cut to SpArC, and asked if that decision could be looked at again. Malcolm

agreed that leisure sites which had pools were subject to a double hit, from both leisure and education budgets, but that this decision was a Schools Forum decision and would need to be reviewed by them. Clive also stated that changes to the way school budgets were administered had been made by Central Government and meant Shropshire Council had less control over them

Various members of the public pointed out that SpArC was used by a wide range of people in the area as a means of treating or mitigating medical conditions. It was also well used by more elderly residents. So if the centre was to close there would be impacts on their health and long term costs to the Council adult social care budget. The Future Fit programme also made great play of more preventative measures being delivered at a local level, so didn't this contradict the closure of sites?

Malcolm said he did recognise this problem, and there was a conflict between needing to make short term financial savings without building up long term costs. However the budget had to be balanced and as leisure wasn't a statutory service it was one area that had to be looked at. Potentially working more closely with Public Health was a way forward too.

Councillor Heather Kidd spoke about the need for the wider area to get behind maintaining the SpArC Centre. While it was based in Bishop's Castle it was used by residents from across the area and discussing how other Town and Parish Councils could support the centre needed to be made. Karen Baverstock and Jane Carroll, speaking on behalf of the Town Council said they were willing to look at supporting the centre but needed detailed, information on running costs to help them judge what level of funding was required. Chris Edwards and Mathew Mead said they would be happy to support community meetings to support this work.

Members of the public expressed the view that more should be done to secure additional funds from Central government. While there was support for local precept rises to support local services, it should also be remembered that the area had a relatively low average wage and this needed to be taken into account too.

Questions were asked about who owned the SpArC Centre and whether a Community Asset Transfer of the site might be a way of securing the sites future were made. Clive responded by saying the site was owned by Shropshire Council and they would certainly consider an asset transfer if that was felt as a way for the site to be sustainable in the future. However a number of people also made the comment that ongoing maintenance of the buildings is significant and having details of these costs would be required before a transfer was seen to be viable.

Questions were also asked over the IP&E company set up by Shropshire Council, why was it wound up? Malcolm replied that the basis of the company was good, in that it gave Council workers the chance to look at ways in which their skills and services could be sold outside the Council. However the external markets they were selling too – mainly other Councils had also suffered cuts in recent years which made the companies markets much smaller. The staff of IP&E have been brought back in house and will still offer skills to the Council but lessons from establishing the company have been made by the Council.

Other questions were directed at the management and staffing structures of the Council, and whether savings can be made there. Clive felt that Shropshire had already streamlined its management team, and savings had been made, however they were exploring if some generic services the Council has could be provided with other services or Councils in the midlands area.

Alan Doust also raised the recently published proposals to allow all Primary Schools to become academies by 2020, and questioned whether this might affect Council education budgets in the coming years. Malcom responded by saying that giving schools more ability to control their future was good, the academy announcement was something that needed to be considered in more detail in Shropshire and will be discussed by the Conservative Group on Shropshire Council.

Jane Carroll also raised the issue of potential change to the way the Shropshire Hills AONB is funded and managed. Tourism and countryside based businesses are supported by the AONB and are very important to the local economy. Malcolm explained he couldn't comment on the consultation too much as it involved staff contracts. However Shropshire Council did definitely recognise the important role the natural environment played in the economy.

Charlotte Barnes thanked both Malcolm and Clive for their attendance at the meeting. She commented that this meeting was the biggest turn out for an LJC meeting which showed the very strong public support for SpArC and maintaining local services.

5. South West Shropshire Grants Scheme (Item 2)

The Community Enablement Officer reported that the South West Shropshire Grant scheme had received two new applications since the last meeting. These were

Bentlawnt War Memorial – This project aimed to install a small memorial stone and plaque in the village of Bentlawnt listing service men from the village who were killed in the two world wars. The site is where the annual remembrance service takes place. The project has requested a grant of £150.

Committee Decision: Grant of £150 approved

Haselhurst Close Residents – New equipment for lunch club

The residents group at Haselhurst Close in Clun would like to set up a regular lunch club, but need to buy some new equipment and make improvements to their kitchen to help prepare the food and meet food hygiene requirements. The group are requesting a grant of £150

Committee Decision: Grant of £150 approved

The Community Enablement Officer reported that Town and Parish Councils were starting to send in contributions to the 2016/17 fund and an updated balance for the year would be circulated to LJC members soon.

6. Youth Commissioning in South West Shropshire

A report on the progress of Youth Commissioning was presented to the Committee.

The LJC had now spent the £3,000 it was allocated in 2015/16. £1000 had been allocated to Irene Stelfox to carryout outreach work in the area. Smaller grants have also been awarded to St Johns Church Youth Group in Bishop's Castle; Worthen Youth club; Bishop's Castle Duke of Edinburgh Group; and a youth dance project run by the SpArC Arts project.

The Committee discussed how to allocate its £3000 available in 2016/17 and decided that a similar grants based scheme would be used. The Community Enablement Officer was asked to send details of the grant scheme to prospective applicants.

7. Public Question Time

No questions were received from the public

8. Future Agenda Items

It was felt that revisiting some of the issues of this LJC meeting would be needed later in the year. The Committee would also need to think more closely about how it worked collectively and also with neighbouring LJC's and other authorities.

Future Fit and the location of A&E Departments in Shropshire was an ongoing issue, but at this stage there were no formal proposals to be discussed. However the decision on where A&E Services might be located was likely later in the year.

9. Date of next meetings

Proposals were made to hold the next meetings on the following dates.

Planning Meeting - Thursday 16th June, 7pm

Full Public Meeting - Thursday 21st July, 7pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____