

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**AGENDA ITEM 6**

**QUESTION 1**

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

It's good that the Government have capped the amount that pay and doorstep lenders may charge for their loans, although the new regulations do not go far enough. It's disappointing that the powers we have as a local authority in preventing pay day and door step lenders from doing business in Shropshire are limited or even non-existent.

Do we have records of pay day and door step lender activity in Shropshire and if so what is this activity?

I am, like many others a member of Just Credit Union but what is Shropshire Council doing in actively promoting Credit Unions in Shropshire as going some way in combatting the rip off pay day and doorstep lending industry?

**MR MIKE OWEN**, the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Finance and Support will reply:

Customer Services Command has been raising the profile of the Credit Unions via each of our Customer Service Points and Community Hubs in a number of ways. Whilst information in the form of leaflets is often available, we have found that a large "showcase" display made up of posters, leaflets, information and a "mission statement" draws more customer interest. Such displays have been travelling around our different sites each month for the last 18 months.

In addition we accommodate drop in sessions for both Just Credit Union and FairShare Credit Union at a number of our Customer Service Points, with the customer take up and interest in Just Credit Union at the Oswestry and Shrewsbury Guildhall being particularly busy.

Credit Unions are also represented at the Welfare Reform Operational Board where we are putting together Shropshire's local support framework for the introduction of Universal Credit in the County from early 2015. We value their involvement given the financial and budgeting issues that the introduction of this benefit is expected to raise, and responsible borrowing and banking are two of the key strands to this framework.

Children's Centre Advisers who work with disadvantaged families will discuss and promote take up of Credit Union Services.

Katherine Forrest (lead officer for credit at the Trading Standards Institute) has commented that the payday market reached its peak in 2009 and has been shrinking for sometime since. The new interest rate cap due to be

implemented in January 2015 is likely to make the cost of regulation unsustainable for most lenders - quite likely, all but three lenders will remain. The links to the FSA press release and a comment piece are below.

<http://www.fca.org.uk/news/fca-proposes-price-cap-for-payday-lenders>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/money/2014/jul/15/payday-loans-cap-questions-answered>

Concerns remain that the regulation does not go far enough and that it could lead to an increase in loan shark activity – so any activity which raises awareness of the whole credit market and payday lending issue is very valuable.

## **QUESTION 2**

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

It's good that Shropshire Pension Fund does not invest in payday lenders and doorstep lenders like Wonga, I hope that is more for ethical reasons than financial. Whilst it is understood that Shropshire Pension Fund trustees need to achieve the best returns for its members, it is interesting to note that many pension funds are divesting unethical investments such as tobacco and fossil fuel stocks, indeed as the council has a duty to help cut smoking across Shropshire it is counter-productive to invest in those very same companies that promote death. It is also counter-productive to be investing in fossil fuel companies when the Council is trying to cut carbon emissions across Shropshire. What proportion of the pension fund is invested in tobacco and fossil fuel stocks, in particular those companies involved in fracking?

**MR MIKE OWEN** the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Finance and Support will reply:

Shropshire County Pension Fund does not restrict its investment managers in the companies in which they can invest as this would be contrary to the overriding financial responsibility of the Pensions Committee. However, the Fund remains committed to the important issues of social responsibility and corporate governance. Through actively voting at shareholder meetings and sustained shareholder engagement it is felt the Fund is best able to change behaviour.

The Shropshire Fund employs F&C Asset Management to provide responsible engagement on the Fund's equity portfolios. F&C has done extensive engagement with companies regarding shale gas extraction by hydraulic fracturing, mainly focusing on how companies manage the environment and the social risks of fracking. In 2014, their engagement on shale gas has focussed on collaborating with other investors through a UN Principles for Responsible investment initiative and 36 leading fracking operators were targeted. F&C's engagement with the tobacco industry goes back many years and has focussed on environmental, social & governance issues e.g. responsible marketing – especially to minors.

Shropshire County Pension Fund is also a member of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF). LAPFF is the UK's leading collaborative shareholder engagement group and brings together 61 local authority pension funds from across the country with combined assets of £150 billion. The role of LAPFF is to protect the long-term investment interests of its member funds' beneficiaries by promoting the highest standards of corporate governance and corporate responsibility amongst the companies in which they invest. This is achieved by undertaking proactive, long-term engagement with the Companies held in their members' investment portfolios. In 2013, LAPFF had board-level meetings with Britain's two publicly-listed tobacco companies. Dialogue included pushing for improvements and advocating for ongoing harm reduction strategies, strict controls on marketing standards, stricter lobbying guidelines, and greater investment in improving supply chain practices. LAPFF has also had a long-term engagement programme around carbon management risk and more recently around fracking, with further engagement imminent.

Current holdings in the specific categories requested are as follows :-  
 Tobacco £ 3.9 million (0.3% of total fund value of £1.43 billion)  
 Fossil Fuels £41.0 million (2.9% of total fund value of £1.43 billion)  
 Fracking £ 2.9 million (0.2% of total fund value of £1.43 billion)

### **QUESTION 3**

**MR STEVE DAVENPORT** will ask the following question:

Could the Portfolio holder provide projected numbers of children and students in Shropshire schools over the period to 2018? What action is the Council taking to ensure the sustainability of high quality education in our schools over this period?

**MRS ANN HARTLEY** the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services will reply:

The table below summarises the projected pupil numbers in Shropshire schools and academies between 2014-15 and 2018-19. These are the projected pupil numbers in Reception through to Year 11 and are the numbers used in the local school funding formula to determine the annual school budget shares.

	2014-15*	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Variation 2014-15 to 2018-19	
<b>Primary</b>	20,038	19,978	19,795	19,662	19,296	<b>-742</b>	<b>-3.7%</b>
<b>Secondary</b>	14,734	14,472	14,379	14,319	14,354	<b>-380</b>	<b>-2.6%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,772</b>	<b>34,450</b>	<b>34,174</b>	<b>33,981</b>	<b>33,650</b>	<b>-1,122</b>	<b>-3.2%</b>
<b>Year on Year</b>		<b>-322</b>	<b>-276</b>	<b>-193</b>	<b>-331</b>		

Variation	-0.9%	-0.8%	-0.6%	-1.0%
	Variation 2014-15 to 2018-19			-1,122
				-3.2%

\* 2014-15 figures are Autumn 2014 school census NOR actuals, excluding any housing element

Shropshire Schools Forum established a Task & Finish Group on School Sustainability in autumn 2013 to consider the impact of Government school funding reforms on the existing network of schools in the context of projected falling pupil numbers in the short to medium term and the accepted underfunding of education in Shropshire. Members include primary, secondary and special school head teachers, school governors councillors and Shropshire Council officers.

For the first time, an 'informed dialogue' has developed between the Task and Finish groups and Shropshire Councils ruling administration based on the best available information and knowledge, and this will continue as we work towards a long term solution.

An administration group Task and Finish Group led by Councillor Nick Bardsley –Deputy Cabinet member for children’s services –has also been established to inform councillors and to provide advice and support to the sustainability task and finish group.

Key to addressing the challenge is ensuring that data is available and provides useful planning information. A school financial planning tool - covering a four year period - to assist governing bodies in their medium term budget planning using the most up-to-date data projections on pupil numbers and working them through the Council’s latest school funding formula has been developed. It is expected that, armed with this essential information, governing bodies with declining pupil numbers will be better placed and informed to address the challenges facing them in terms of sustaining high quality education provision. We will continue to encourage and support governing bodies to act on this information where appropriate.

Governing bodies are being encouraged to begin, if they aren’t already, collaborating with their neighbouring schools in finding local solutions to develop sustainable provision in their area and to ensure that the resources delegated to them are being used efficiently to achieve the best educational outcomes for their pupils. As well as the financial planning tool, the group has overseen the development of a local benchmarking tool which will enable schools to compare how they are apply their resources and whether there are more efficient ways of doing this that they can learn from other Shropshire schools.

The announcement of additional schools funding in 2015-16 has been welcomed. However, the demographic challenge remains and so the group will continue to meet in the new year with the focus on how to continue supporting governing bodies through, for example, the sharing of models of

best practice on collaborative working and the development of training on financial management.

A joint briefing note on schools sustainability was distributed in September - on behalf of the Schools Forum Task & Finish Group and the Council Administration - to all Shropshire schools, local councillors, parish/town councils and local MPs. This was part of a media campaign that resulted in coverage of the issue at the local, regional and national levels. A copy of the briefing paper is attached.

#### **QUESTION 4**

**MR ALAN MOSLEY** will ask the following question:

Given that there have been further recent and significant staff relocations, could the Portfolio holder please give us details of the current accommodation strategic plans indicating the short, medium and long term objectives and expected outcomes.

This should include The Tannery, The Guildhall, the old Reference Library, The Shirehall and Rowley's House along with other significant properties which the Council owns or is renting or leasing and including properties which are housing IP&E staff. Furthermore, what are the costs of any leasing/rental arrangements per year and what are the total costs of such arrangements over the last 5 years?"

**MR MIKE OWEN** Portfolio Holder for Resources, Finance and Support will reply

The Asset Management Strategy has been prepared and is in draft form to be submitted to Cabinet in February 2015, the strategic plans will be covered in this report.

As covered by other papers on the agenda the Guildhall, Reference Library and Rowley's are to be made available to the University. Options appraisals will be prepared for any surplus accommodation that is identified once the Asset Management Strategy is finalised.

Significant Buildings that the Council have lease arrangements on are:

The Chancery - Lease commenced 01/05/2006 expires 23/06/2016 - £121,312 per annum.

Prospect House - Lease commenced 24/11/2010 expires 23/11/2020 - £29,760 per annum.

Whitehall lease – Lease commenced 05/10/2009 expired 04/10/ 2014 - £138,000 per annum.

Castle View (First and third floor offices) – Lease commenced 28/08/2007 expires 27/08/2032 - £10,575 p.a. payable from 27/08/2017.

Oswestry Library (Second floor) – Lease commenced 28/08/2007 expires 27/08/2032 - £63,760 per annum.

Jupiter House – Lease commenced 01/09/2014 expires 31/08/2024 - £70,000 per annum.

## **QUESTION 5**

**MRS PAM MOSELEY** will ask the following question:

Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery in the former Music Hall has been justifiably recognised as a well curated collection offering a successful interpretation of the town's history, in a building which has been carefully and expertly restored.

However, whether the Museum has been as successful financially is of equal interest.

Could the Portfolio Holder please inform Members as to the total number of visits paid to the Museum since opening, and of these, how many were non-paying visits; and also, how many people attended on the free open day. Additionally, since opening, how many tickets in the three categories (adult, senior and child) have been purchased, how many season tickets sold (split into those purchased at both full and introductory discounted rate), and how many group rate and combined tickets have been bought.

Consequently, what has been the total ticket income to date from visitors to the Museum?"

**MR STEVE CHARMLEY** Portfolio Holder for Business Growth, ip&e, Culture and Commissioning (North) will reply:

Total number of visitors to Roman Gallery	62,295 (Estimate)
How Many People have visited the paid for Exhibitions	22,001
Museum FOC Entry Others (companions/Art Passes etc)	813
Number of Paying Education Visits	736
Museum Events	813
How Many People came to the free open day	1,060
How Many Adult Tickets have been sold	7,267
How Many OAP Tickets have been sold	7,852
How Many Children Tickets have been sold	2,241

How Many Season Tickets have been sold (discounted rate)	496
How Many Group Rate Tickets have been sold	388
Number of Combined Tickets sold	164
Museum Themed Events Tickets sold	171
How Many People have paid to visit the Museum in total	18,579
Total Income from Ticketed Visitors to Date	£77,191.50

In a survey 98% of visitors to the Roman Gallery said they would be happy to pay to visit the rest of the Museum but the majority did not have time on the day.

## **QUESTION 6**

**ROGER EVANS** will ask the following question

A written question concerning Serco and a recent press article was submitted some days before the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Wednesday 26 November 2014. The following written answer was circulated at the start of that meeting;

*Shropshire Council has a 10 year contract with Shropshire Community Leisure Trust who operate the 5 facilities on behalf of Shropshire Council. Serco Leisure are the managing agent and in effect provide 'back office support' to the Trust. Following the recent announcement from Serco that they intend to sell their leisure section of the business, officers have met to explore what this could mean. At this stage, it means very little - within the terms of the contract the Trust need to seek our consent to appoint an alternative agent, and to date we have not been notified of any potential alternative managing agent. Officers will be meeting with representatives from Serco in the coming week to receive more up to date information.*

*Until any sale is progressed, Serco Leisure will continue to undertake their duties supporting Shropshire Community Leisure Trust, which will have no bearing on day to day operations, finances to the council or affect the fees and charges and any recommendations made.*

The Cabinet member for this area did not attend any part of this Scrutiny meeting nor send any apology. Nor was any senior officer present when this previously tabled question was dealt with. Consequently no answer was given to the supplementary question and this is still the case one week later. Can the appropriate Cabinet member therefore now supply answer(s) to the question asked and also update Council on the meetings that have been held since November 26<sup>th</sup>.

Given the answer provided, what is the relationship between Shropshire Council, Serco and the Shropshire Community Leisure Trust, who is accountable to who. Is the future role of Shropshire Council in the running of these public facilities now going to be just as a spectator.

**MR STEVE CHARMLEY** Portfolio Holder for Business Growth, ip&e, Culture and Commissioning (North) will reply:

The relationship between Shropshire Council and the Shropshire Community Leisure Trust is that the council is the commissioner and has a legal contract with the trust to operate and manage the five centres on our behalf. Therefore the Trust is accountable to Shropshire Council who monitor all aspects of operations and managerial procedures across the 5 sites that form part of the contract on an on-going basis.

Shropshire Community Leisure Trust then have a contractual relationship with Serco Leisure who provide all of the back office support

Shropshire Council as a good commissioner, maintains a strong relationship with the Trust and Serco Leisure both formally (through regular contract meetings) and informally. All three parties recently met and Serco Leisure were able to provide a confidential update on the proposed sale which is progressing. Shropshire Council cannot divest the detail as this is commercially sensitive and not Shropshire Councils information to share. That said Shropshire Council is reassured that it will continue to be kept in the loop on the proposed sale in the coming weeks.

As has been previously mentioned, the change in ownership will have no impact on the service delivered on the ground; the same quality service would be delivered by the same centre staff and management team. Meanwhile, it is business as usual until the matter is resolved.

The Chair of the Trust has recently commented that any sale will make no difference to the management of the sites. All employees on the sites are employed by the Trust and the existing Serco Leisure management team remain in place which will allows them to continue to provide the high level of service that they have so far.

## **QUESTION 7**

**MR DAVE TREMELLEN** will ask the following question:

Why is Shropshire Council not openly supporting the Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group in their effort to rationalise health service provision in the county by building the "third site" acute unit on land already in NHS England's ownership, situated almost exactly between the two existing main hospitals and just a stone's throw from the A5, support that is wholly justified, given that the current situation at both existing sites falls far short of the basic requirement of ten A&E consultants recommended by the College of



Emergency Medicine, Shropshire having only 5.5 A&E consultants (a figure given by Dr Caron Morton at a recent briefing) across both sites and unable to recruit consultants at the required level when prospective applicants realize that their work load will consist of a duty rota of 1 in 3?

**MRS KAREN CALDER** Portfolio Holder for Health will reply

The Future Fit Review is a clinically led assessment of the provision of acute health treatment services for the County of Shropshire. The local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) that are leading the review are currently considering a long list of options that have been developed by their working groups. The CCGs are examining this long list of options with a view to creating a short list of options that will be considered in greater detail.

In view of the current stage of the Future Fit it would be more appropriate for Shropshire Council to reserve its opinion regarding the short listed options that will emerge. Shropshire Council will continue to contribute information about the needs of our local communities and to participate in the Future Fit Working Groups.

#### **QUESTION 8**

**MR DAVE TREMELLEN** will ask the following question:

Would the Portfolio Holder for Housing consider the recent decision by Brandon Lewis MP to exempt developments of under ten houses from liability to the affordable housing levy a triumph for the construction industry or a disaster for cash-strapped councils?

**MR MALCOLM PRICE** Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply

It is difficult to confirm at this stage the full impact of the proposals set out in the Ministerial Statement of 28<sup>th</sup> November, this is being assessed by officers. Shropshire Council's approach has been a transparent one, providing clarity for Affordable Housing Contributions and infrastructure requirements through the adopted Type and Affordability of Housing Supplementary Planning Document and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Both of these initiatives were introduced having regard to economic viability resulting in three rates across the county for affordable housing, and an approach to limit CIL to residential development only. In this respect the context in Shropshire has been transparent and I would argue that these regimes do not restrict housing growth, they simply provide clarity around land values.

#### **QUESTION 9**

**MRS CHARLOTTE BARNES** will ask the following question:

On 28 November 2014, the Secretary of State for Communities Eric Pickles published new planning guidance for affordable housing contributions from market housing. This removed the need for a S106 affordable housing contribution from housing developments of 10 units or less, and which have a maximum combined gross floorspace of no more than 1000sqm(NPPG 23b-012-20141128).

This measure will have a devastating effect on affordable housing provision across our county. We are already building less affordable houses than we need. In September 2014, 5,286 households were on the housing register for affordable housing in Shropshire.

In my rural division of Bishop's Castle, there have been 10 applications for 31 market houses in the last 12 months. All have been for ten units or less. Not all of the ten applications were or will be approved. But if they were all approved, they would fund six affordable houses. Under the new rules, this modest 20% contribution to affordable housing will be removed. Not just in Bishop's Castle, but across our rural county.

The new planning guidance allows for local councils to impose a lower contribution threshold of five units in designated rural parishes. For developments of 6 to 10 units, a financial contribution can be sought, but a council cannot insist on affordable housing on the site (NPPG 2a-017-20141128).

If this measure had been in place in Bishop's Castle division during the past twelve months, we would have funded four affordable homes if the larger applications had been approved.

In Shropshire, all parishes are designated as rural with the exception of Albrighton, Bayston Hill, Bridgnorth, Broseley, Ellesmere Urban, Highley, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Oswestry, Shifnal, Shrewsbury, Wem and Whitchurch parishes.

Will the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing take urgent action to apply the lower threshold to all designated rural parishes in Shropshire?

**MR MALCOLM PRICE** Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply

I have asked officers to assess the potential impact of the Ministerial Statement having regard to our adopted policy for the provision of affordable housing. In the meantime, we recognise that there is currently a significant increase in major planning applications for housing across the county, these are the schemes that provide 10 houses or more and would not therefore be affected by the minister's statement. It is important therefore that the Council continues to support these schemes *where* they are sustainable and acceptable in planning terms, particularly in established urban areas such as our market towns, to ensure that on site provision and affordable housing contributions continue to be delivered across Shropshire.

## **QUESTION 10**

**MRS VIVIENNE PARRY** will ask the following question:

A recent report by Leonard Cheshire Disability found that many disabled people cannot find housing that suits their accessibility needs (<http://bit.ly/lcheshome>).

- a) Does Shropshire Council have an accessible housing register or similar system?
- b) Does Shropshire Council have any data on the number of homes in the county built to Lifetime Home Standards?
- c) What plans does Shropshire Council have in place to encourage housing to be built to Lifetime Home Standards?

**MR MALCOLM PRICE** Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply as follows;

- a) The Housing Register includes data in relation to the individual's specific housing need. Such documented needs include:- requirement for level access together with specific adaptations for the registered household.
- b) Currently the Council does not monitor or retain a database of dwellings built to Lifetime Home Standards but is considering this as part of the Local Plan Monitoring Framework being developed alongside the SAMDev Plan. However, the HCA (Homes Communities Agency) require grant funded affordable housing to be built to Lifetime Home Standards. The following figures relate to dwellings funded by the HCA:-

2010/2011 – 151 units

2011/2012 – 127 units

2012/2013 – 126 units

2013/2014 – 90 units.

- c) Core Strategy Policy CS11 seeks to ensure that all housing developments are designed to achieve the lifetime homes standard whilst the Council are currently responding to the Government's Housing Standards Review Consultation. This document outlines optional standards that can be adopted by the Council. The Council is keen to implement standards in the future if feasible in recognition of the ageing population within the County.

## **QUESTION 11**

**MR ANDY BODDINGTON** will ask the following question:

Shropshire Council's Homelessness Strategy is due for review in 2015.

- a) What is the timetable for that review and what will be its scope / terms of reference?
- b) How many people were rough sleepers in Shropshire in the years 2010 to 2014?
- c) How is the number of rough sleepers calculated (counted, estimated)?
- d) What arrangements are currently in place for providing shelter in severe weather emergencies for rough sleepers?
- e) How many people were classified as statutory homeless in Shropshire in the years 2010 to 2014?
- f) How many cases of homelessness prevention or relief did Shropshire Council action, outside the statutory homelessness framework, in the years 2010 to 2014?

**MR MALCOLM PRICE** Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply

- a) The timetable for the Review has still to be confirmed, however the draft structure is as follows:
  1. January – February 2015: Stakeholder consultation to evaluate existing Homelessness Strategy and scope review / agree terms of reference
  2. March – June 2015: Formal discussions with stakeholders to inform Homelessness Strategy
  3. June – September 2015: Draft Homelessness Strategy
  4. September 2015: Draft Homelessness Strategy to Cabinet for approval to consult
  5. September – December 2015: Consultation period
  6. December 2015 – January 2016: incorporation of feedback from consultation. Final draft prepared.
  7. February/March 2016: Homelessness Strategy to Council for adoption

Timetable for review is yet to be confirmed. The review will need to have regard to the latest Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and the wider Shropshire Housing Strategy.

- b) Rough sleepers in Shropshire in the years 2010 to 2014;
  - 2010 – 10
  - 2011 – 13

2012 – 10

2013 – 12

2014 – 10

- c) How is the number of rough sleepers calculated (counted, estimated)?
- Estimate night once each year involving partner agencies (both statutory and non-statutory), e.g. Police, Brighter Futures

- d) Current arrangements in place for providing shelter in severe weather emergencies for rough sleepers;

Emergency accommodation is to be provided in the event of outside temperature is forecast by UK Met Office to drop below zero degrees celsius in Shropshire over three consecutive nights. Additional to this Shropshire Council provide temporary accommodation to anyone whom is known to be rough sleeping within Shropshire from 15<sup>th</sup> December until end of February the following year (this may be extended in the event of continuing severe weather conditions e.g. as in 2013).

- e) Numbers of people who were classified as statutory homeless in Shropshire in the years 2010 to 2014;

2009/10 - 239

2010/11 - 309

2011/12 - 276

2012/13 - 239

2013/14 – 200.

- f) Cases of homelessness prevention or relief that Shropshire Council actioned, outside the statutory homelessness framework, in the years 2010 to 2014?

2009/10 - 538

2010/11 - 784

2011/12 - 919

2012/13 - 1027

2013/14 - 1026

## **QUESTION 12**

**MR ANDY BODDINGTON** will ask the following question:

In the last four years, the proportion of long-term empty homes in Shropshire has gone up by more than 5%. Nationally, the number has dropped by 28%. Only 23 of 325 local authorities have a worse performance in bringing

empty homes into use than Shropshire. At the current rate, it will take seventy years to clear the backlog of long-term empty homes in Shropshire.

My questions are:

- a) What is the current number of long term empty homes in Shropshire?
- b) How many long term empty homes have been brought back into occupation in Shropshire, for the years 2010/2011 to 2013/2014?
- c) How much funding did Shropshire Council receive through the New Homes Bonus for bringing these homes back into use?
- d) What was this funding used for?
- e) How many households are on the housing register for affordable housing in Shropshire?

**MR MALCOLM PRICE** Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Planning, Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply

- a) As at November 2014 there were 1,549 'Long Term Empty' homes registered in Shropshire. The definition of Long Term Empty being that the property has been unoccupied for 6 months or longer.

- b) Long term empty homes returned to use are as follows:

2009/10 – 26  
2010/11 – 65  
2011/12 – 94  
2012/13 – 74  
2013/14 – 45

In addition, 13 new units of affordable housing have been created in Market Drayton and Oswestry from previously redundant commercial and residential properties as a result of the project work undertaken in the Empty Homes Action Zones. There are other projects currently on site and at the application stage which will return to use and create further affordable units.

- c) Total funding received through New Homes Bonus for bringing empty homes back into use is as follows:

2012/13 - £300,000  
2013/14 - £200,000  
2014/15 - £250,000 agreed in principle but awaiting formal confirmation of funding from Cabinet  
2015/16 - £250,000 agreed in principle but awaiting formal confirmation of funding from Cabinet

- d) The funding was used for Empty Property Incentive Grants in the following Empty Homes Action Zones:  
2012/13 - Market Drayton (including joint project with Wrekin Housing Trust)  
2013/14 - Oswestry

2014/15 Whitchurch (awaiting formal confirmation of funding although preparation work has been underway in Whitchurch for several months in order to identify potential grant cases)

These were offered for empty residential property, unused space above retail premises and on ex-commercial buildings being converted into affordable homes for local people.

- e) As at December 2014 there are 6179 households on the housing register. Shropshire Council recognises the impact of long term empty homes and is committed to reducing the number of empty homes within the County in order to both contribute to the regeneration of Shropshire's communities, and to facilitate and assist in the creation of good quality and affordable housing for local people. The Council's Empty Homes Strategy 2014-17 was adopted on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and re-affirms this commitment, illustrating the Council's proactive approach to tackling this key issue. Additionally, the Council now produces an empty homes newsletter which promotes Empty Homes work and provides updates on empty homes activity and useful contacts.

-----