

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTION 1

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question:

I note the following paragraph was included on page 2 of the recent report to Environment Services Scrutiny Committee. The 4 page report contained very few details. Can you please confirm which 6 of our libraries are to be helped by this fund and how much has been allocated to each of these 6 libraries? I note this external grant of £520k is to be spent before the end of March 2016. Is there any capital available to facilitate the transfer of the other libraries listed in the report either during 2015/16 or 2016/17?

Relevant paragraph of the report presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 22nd June:

'4.4. £520k of external funding is available by through a Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) to facilitate the transfer of 6 libraries to new community based management arrangements in 2015/16.'

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

By way of summary, the Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) Programme is:

- A Department for Communities & Local Government funding stream;
- Builds on the success of Community Budget pilots;
- Enables transformation, service re-design, re-engineering;
- Creates services that are sustainable over the long term;
- Creates better outcomes for citizens;
- Supports partnerships with other local authorities, public sector bodies, voluntary and community groups (and private sector);
- £89.4 million awarded to 73 projects which will save over £900 million in the long-term; and
- Shropshire successful with a £520k bid.

What the TCA monies will be used for:

The programme will support the re-design of existing face to face customer focused services, including our libraries and customer service points, to provide places that residents can easily get information and advice that both helps them and enables them to help others within their community. The funding will enable us to transfer the management of 6 libraries and other face to face services to

others who then have the flexibility to adopt new and innovative approaches to developing community hubs.

How the TCA funding has been allocated:

- Building capacity within the voluntary and community sector and town and parish councils to build the resources and knowledge required to take over the ownership of buildings and services and deliver services within local communities that are locally owned and tailored to meet local needs - **£50,000**
- Investing in library buildings so that they are fit for future community management and their future purposes - **£470,000**
Total = **£520,000**

Work to date to deliver the programme:

We are using our locality commissioning approach to transfer a number of our libraries to new management arrangements. We are not currently able to formally confirm which of Shropshire's libraries will be supported with TCA funding, either because the development of proposals is still underway or formal consultation and decision making has not yet taken place.

The libraries that have confirmed **proposals** for community management are:

- Church Stretton;
- Bishops Castle;
- Broseley;
- Cleobury Mortimer; and
- Shifnal.

All of these proposals are still in development and all but Church Stretton require public consultation on proposals. They all have potential to be able to use TCA funding. Other libraries may well develop proposals sufficiently over the course of the year to be able to access the funding. The costs of the capital works needed to enable a new management arrangement at each library have not yet been confirmed and therefore the TCA funding hasn't yet been formally allocated.

At present there is no money in the capital programme for works associated with the transfer of libraries to new management arrangements. However, any requests for funding will be looked at on a case by case basis as the re3dsign model progresses.

QUESTION 2

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question:

To the Leader of Council.

I understand as Leader you have just taken over the IT Portfolio of the Council. What plans are there to improve the antiquated IT system at present in place in the Shirehall.

Also can all members be informed, so they know where to direct questions from residents, which cabinet member is responsible for which portfolio, this is especially applicable when in year alterations are made.

MR KEITH BARROW, Leader of the Council will reply:

I would like to thank Councillor Evans for his question.

Priority has been given to further improving the resilience of the ICT infrastructure ensuring that the integrity of the Councils data network remains safe and secure.

We are working with specialist ICT suppliers and the Local Government Association to learn from national best practice on bringing additional expertise to the business to support the Council's ambitions to becoming a commissioning Council. We are undertaking a programme of work to identify which systems that need to be retained and which need to be decommissioned to ensure we meet our commitment to maintaining compliance with national standards such as PSN.

Work is also progressing to make applications available from a secure, resilient "Private Cloud" e.g. we have moved away from hosting the email system on servers in our data centre and have this provided to us in the same way as you would access for example EBay, Facebook, Twitter and Amazon.

So, as an example we have moved Office 365 to the Cloud, providing staff and members with 24/7 access to email, calendaring and Microsoft Word etc.

We will continue to identify other systems for moving into the Cloud but recognise that some applications that we use are not "Cloud Ready". Where this is the case we are relocating these systems to externally hosted datacentres e.g. Planning System, Education Management system, Revenue & Benefits system, HR & Payroll System, Finance System, Social Care System.

All of this will improve security, ensure data integrity and increase availability, and, furthermore will provide robust disaster recovery, and business continuity processes for the Council. In addition it will further enhance remote working for staff across Shropshire thereby supporting the ambition to reduce our property portfolio.

In respect of informing members, they can access this information via the Council's website which is regularly updated and a recent email was sent to all members on 22 May regarding the most recent changes. In addition to this, portfolio holder job descriptions are also on the website for all to see.

QUESTION 3

MR ANDY BODDINGTON will ask the following question:

The Council has recently consulted on changes to opening hours of Registrar Offices around the county. Under Option 2, which appears to be the preferred option, the office in Ludlow will have reduced hours while the office in Oswestry will have its hours extended.

A visit to the Registrar Office is booked into half hour slots. The nature of the service means that not all slots can be filled.

This working pattern means that in Ludlow, the Registrar's Office is open for 1.5 hours for every visit made by a member of the public. In Oswestry, the office is open for 1.8 hours per visit. Under Option 2, Ludlow will be reduced to 0.9 hours per visit and Oswestry increased to 2.1 hours.

The number of visits and the length of opening hours are reflected in costs. It costs nearly a third more for a 30 minute appointment in Oswestry: £88 compared to Ludlow's £67.

- 1) What is the total income of the Registrars Service and what is its expenditure?
- 2) Why is Ludlow being targeted for cuts under Option 2, while the less used – in terms of appointments per hour – and more costly office in Oswestry is set to see extended opening hours?

MRS KAREN CALDER, the Portfolio Holder for Health will reply:

Thank you for your question.

The proposed opening hours take into account the current usage of the registrars' services across Shropshire. Page 5 of the consultation document sets out the reason why the service in Ludlow is proposed for reduction in opening times. Along with all council services, staff within the registrar's service were eligible for the voluntary redundancy (VR) offer which was introduced by the Council as part its financial savings plan and at which time a member of staff in that office applied for VR. If VR is granted the post cannot be replaced.

Page 5 in the consultation document also provided information relating to the Oswestry Office and its increase in opening hours. If the outcome of the consultation determines that the office in Bishops Castle closes, there is a member of staff who works in Bishops Castle and in Oswestry who will transfer

her to the Oswestry office. In the rest of the north, the proposal would be that the Wem office closes which would reduce the number of available hours in the North of the County by 17 hours (net) including management time. By adding 4.7 hours to the availability in Oswestry seeks to balance the situation.

As the outcome of the consultation cannot be pre-empted, and no decision has been made as yet, these proposals will be reviewed in the light of the feedback received.

The following figures are the outturn figures for Registrars for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Registrars			Actual	Actual
			2013-14	2014-15
EMPLOYEES	Total	613947		542616
PREMISES RELATED	Total	10003		11204
TRANSPORT RELATED	Total	18597		17335
SUPPLIES AND SERVICES	Total	59831		51259
SUPPORT SERVICES	Total	256820		203130
Total Expenses			959197	825544
INCOME			-735606	-741287
BELOW THE LINE			-20012	-9561
Redundancy Cont./	CAPITAL		-39468	
Total				
NET BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE			<u>164111</u>	<u>74697</u>

QUESTION 4

MRS VIVIENNE PARRY will ask the following question:

To the Leader:

- 1) When will Part 5 of the Council's Constitution be updated to bring it into line with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014?
- 2) Was removal of cameras from members of the public at the 14 May Council meeting legal, given that these regulations came into force on 6 August 2014?

MR KEITH BARROW, Leader of the Council will reply:

- 1) Amendments consequential to the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 have now been made to Part 5 of the Council's Constitution and are available to view on the Council's website
- 2) I was not in the chamber at the time this happened, but I am advised that the Members of the public were asked to leave their cameras at the desk where

the minute takers sit in order to calm the meeting down as the atmosphere was beginning to get quite tense. There is nothing unlawful in asking someone to do this. It remains the Chairman's responsibility to ensure that the use of such equipment does not interfere with the overall integrity of a meeting. In such circumstances and in accordance with relevant legislation, the council may use its "power of exclusion to suppress or prevent disorderly conduct or other misbehaviour at a meeting.

QUESTION 5

MR RICHARD HUFFER will ask the following question:

The last government considerably extended permitted development rights. For example, the rights allow conversions from: office to residential; agricultural to residential or office use; and conversions of public houses to a range of uses. Members are not currently notified of these changes.

The Kremlin public house on Clee Hill recently sought prior approval for conversion from A4 (drinking establishments) to A1 (shops). By the time local councillors were aware of this, it was too late to consider any urgent action that might have secured the future of the pub.

1) Could Shropshire Council in future inform members of applications for prior approval in their divisions and could these applications be listed on the Council's Planning Portal?

2) What can be done by communities and Shropshire Council to oppose any change of use proposals that might be damaging to the fabric of communities or are unsuitable for their location.

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services Housing and Commissioning (Central) will reply:

The Kremlin "application", was an enquiry to establish whether the proposed change of use was permitted development or not. Previously such enquiries would have been dealt with by way of an exchange in correspondence and interested parties are not normally notified. Looking ahead, we intend to introduce a process for dealing with these.

The Council has 56 days through the formalised process to make any comments and local Members could be notified in the future of such cases, the officer will also check to see if the property has been registered as a Community Asset. However if the application is permitted development then the option available to the community is to seek to register the building as a community asset. In England, an asset of community value (ACV) is land or property of importance to a local community which is subject to additional protection from development under the Localism Act 2011. Voluntary and community organisations can nominate an asset to be included on their local authority's register of asset of community value.

The owner of an asset of community value must inform the local authority if they wish to sell the asset. If a group wants to buy the asset, they can trigger a moratorium for six months, to give them a chance to raise the money to purchase the asset. The owner does not have to sell to a community group. The asset of community value listing only improves the chances of community groups being able to purchase by providing more time to raise funds. It does not require the owner to sell at a discount.

QUESTION 6

MR CHRIS MELLINGS will ask the following question:

The Business Plan and Financial Strategy Paper to Council in February referred to a number of Strategic Working Groups involving Administration & Cabinet Members “developing, challenging and testing alternative approaches and options for consideration.” Can the Cabinet Member for Resources advise Council of the makeup of these Groups and the outcomes to date?

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

Strategic Working Groups were put in place covering a number of areas for review across the Council. These included review of management structures, IT and income generation. The groups were led by Directors of the Council and Portfolio Holders and included other officers and Members of the Administration as necessary. The outcomes of the work undertaken resulted in the production of the Business Plan and Financial Strategy approved by Council on 26 February 2015.

QUESTION 7

MR CHRIS MELLINGS will ask the following question:

What are the current risks to the Council’s budget / financial strategy and what is being done to address them?

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

The risks associated with the Council’s budget and Financial Strategy were reported to Council on 26 February as part of the Business Plan and Financial Strategy report, beginning on page 55. In addition, the Council’s strategic and operational risk registers take account of any identified risks, and actions are in place to mitigate these risks where possible. Quarterly reporting on the Council’s budget monitoring position, both capital and revenue, is taken to Cabinet for ongoing review.

QUESTION 8

MRS CHARLOTTE BARNES will ask the following question:

It was recently stated that some ip&e employees have moved to Jupiter House which they rent from Shropshire Council who in turn lease the building from someone else. Although I understand many conversations have taken place to sell Shirehall is it sensible to have the council owned company giving money to an outside body at this time. I would have thought it better to invest the income raised by ip&e in a building owned by Shropshire Council. Could the portfolio holder or a board member give an explanation of the thought process around this please?

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

It is not possible to contain all staff in Shirehall, whether employed through the Council, or ip&e Ltd. From time to time, it is therefore necessary to supplement this accommodation with a number of leased properties in the locality, when appropriate.

Within the Council's Asset Strategy (approved by Cabinet on 11 February 2015), we state that:

"We aim to improve quality of the existing estate, ensure that it is fit for purpose for the commissioning Council and provides opportunities to maximise our mobile and flexible working agenda. Where this is not the case, we will source suitable replacement property. We will identify, where possible, opportunities to provide accommodation for the Council's service delivery function and partners that are cost effective for the Council tax payer."

In partnership with ip&e, we made arrangements to lease Jupiter House with a local provider at a rate that demonstrated value for money as the existing portfolio did not have suitable accommodation. This building is shared by both Council and ip&e staff to ensure best use of the space.

Both ip&e and Shropshire Council are working to create a flexible workforce that is not reliant on a costly accommodation base. Jupiter House hosts a proportion of the total staff within ip&e, who use it as a central base only, with the remainder of people being mobile and out in the community, directly with the people they serve.

QUESTION 9

MRS CHARLOTTE BARNES will ask the following question;

The Council is having to find various savings due to cuts in Local Government. One of the areas that appear to be suffering are leisure

services. Living in a largely rural county it is almost impossible to make leisure centres profitable - especially those with pools - and for that reason many rely on local government subsidy. There is a leisure services strategy in place which should remain in place until 2019 however the strategy was first introduced before the cuts to local government were implemented. For this reason could a Strategic Review of Shropshire's Leisure Services be carried out please?

There are many things which need to be considered ahead of changes to leisure service delivery. Below are some of the areas which need to be taken into account should the strategic review be accepted.

1. Primary school children have to have ten swimming lessons per year as part of the primary curriculum. Due to lack of funding we may see a reduction in the amount of pools available to swim in in the future and capacity to deliver for every Primary school child must be put in place.
2. The schools forum have suggested and as a result the changes have been implemented that funding is now distributed on a per pupil basis this means that joint use facilities have had significant funding reductions especially in the more rural areas.
3. There is a lot of emphasis on the health and Wellbeing. We would need to think of ways to enhance and protect people's health access to exercise and fitness. Fitness on prescription is also a vital measure bringing people back into full health.
4. One of the largest costs for running a swimming pool is the cost of utilities. Due to green energy incentives Shropshire Council could make council owned leisure properties more cost effective by implementing green energy such as photovoltaic technology and a good level of insulation.
5. Many of the outsourced leisure services do not have contracts that last more than twelve months. This may be the reason managers are not inclined to invest in sites.

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

A Leisure Facilities Strategy was completed in 2009 and covers the period up to 2019 for all swimming pools and leisure centres that are under the control of Shropshire Council. A Playing Pitch Strategy was completed at the same time covering the same period. There are no plans at present to update the Leisure Facilities Strategy as we are only just over halfway through the timeframe it covers.

The Commissioning Strategy is the overarching strategy leisure works to as do many service areas across the council. In this role as a commissioning authority, Shropshire Council have been working against the backdrop of identifying significant savings to transfer direct management responsibility of

leisure facilities to schools/Academies or other third party organisations. This has resulted in a current situation whereby the Council directly operate only 3 facilities plus Meole Brace Golf Course (originally 18 facilities).

In terms of the levels of reduction of joint-use funding as a result of the changes to how monies are distributed, and associated timescales, these are not based on rurality. All 18 schools have seen a 25% reduction for 2015/16 as a result of the changes in how schools are funded.

As a result of this redistribution of funding based on an Age Weighted Pupil formula, Shropshire Council have begun to discuss future options at directly operated joint-use sites and will address this issue at other centres along with the contracted operators of those facilities. The priority to date has been at those directly operated sites that will be subject to the most significant reductions.
