

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL REPORT FOR 2017/18 – Uffington Parish Council

Budgetary Pressures

It is now accepted both locally and nationally that Adult Social Care and Looked After Children create major pressures on Council's available budgets. Over 50% of Shropshire Council's annual net budget is spent on Adult Social Care and this figure continues to rise by an average of £8m year on year. In addition to this, the increased costs (on average £4m year on year) of Looked After Children presents Shropshire Council with a major budgetary problem. This is not just an issue for Shropshire Council. Representatives from Shropshire council (and councils across the UK), along with our MPs are lobbying government to find a formula as we have for schools so that adult social care is funded on a national rather than local basis.

The current administration of the Council has forecast a balanced budget for the years 2018/19 and 2019/20 but to balance the budget over a five-year term, 2022/23 there is a current budget deficit of £43m.

The Administration of the Council has altered its focus to concentrate on increasing income both within commercial and trading services, but it is inevitable that there will need to be further cuts.

Adult Social Care

Adult Social Care (ASC) has had a year of challenges and changes. In June we welcomed a sector led improvement peer challenge. The Peer Review team were complimentary about the work of ASC and noted the enthusiasm of the ASC workforce and all stakeholders they engaged with. The Peer Review saw a clear commitment to making a positive difference to the lives of Shropshire residents and achievement was recognised in the Council's approach to partnership and engagement.

Adult Services net budget has increased by £5.8m from 2016/17 to 2017/18, due to the combination of a growing and ageing population, increasingly complex care needs, and increases in care costs. It is well evidenced that the demographic pressures on adult social care will increase further in the longer-term. Shropshire Council's expenditure on adult social care is forecast to increase by £7m next year, and by an average of £8.3m per year over the next 5 years.

Adult social care continues to flex and adapt to an ever-changing landscape of challenges; more people with more complex needs, care providers struggling to recruit staff in rural areas and of National Living Wages, and healthcare colleagues working to reorganise hospital-based services. There are considerable uncertainties around future funding initiatives from Government in relation to Adult Social Care and the across the wider health & social care economy. Short term funding initiatives such as the Improved Better Care Fund have brought in welcome funding and enabled a number of exciting initiatives such as 2 carers in a car, but the concern does remain that this is not long-term funding and ASC cannot rely upon it.

Local Plan Review

Shropshire is in the fortunate position of having a sound local plan and a six-year land supply. The current adopted Local Plan covers the period 2006 to 2026. Consultation took place in late 2017 on the first review of our plan covering the period 2016 – 2036 (an extra 10 years). The Planning Policy Team consulted on the Preferred Scale and Distribution of Growth as part of the ongoing Local Plan Review. Around 650 responses were received including many responses from Town and Parish Councils, local organisations, land owners and developers. The Policy Team are currently reviewing these responses and a Summary document is being prepared and will form part of a Cabinet Report for the 2nd May. This Cabinet Report will also clarify the future timetable for the Local Plan Review.

The next Key stage of the Local Plan Review is a public consultation on Preferred Site Allocations in October 2018. This will set out the proposed sites in Shrewsbury, Market Towns, Key Centres and, if necessary, Community Hubs. To inform the choice of preferred sites the Policy Team are currently preparing a number of supporting documents, including the Green Belt Review and a new Landscape Capacity Assessment. We have also started the conversations with the Town and Parish Councils where we are proposing development, and these discussions will help inform the eventual choice of preferred sites.

Environmental Maintenance Grant

After pressure from rural councillors Cabinet have agreed to reinstate Environmental Maintenance Grants. You should soon receive a letter containing the details of the revised scheme and will be asked to comment. The scheme is limited to a maximum of £1,500 per parish and will need to be match funded 100%. For example, to receive the full grant you will have to spend £3,000 on eligible schemes within your parish. The activity eligible for funding by the Environmental Maintenance Grant will be undertaken on Shropshire Council owned land and assets only.

Kier Contract

A new partnership responsible for delivering a wide range of highways maintenance and environmental maintenance services in Shropshire began work on 1 April 2018.

The Shropshire Highways Alliance is made up of Shropshire Council, WSP – the council's engineering consultant, and Kier – the council's new highways maintenance contractor.

From 1 April 2018 Kier will be responsible for highways projects and schemes, pothole repair, gritting, bridge maintenance, grass cutting, drainage, street lighting, emergency responses, vehicle maintenance and more.

It was disappointing that the start of the new contract coincided with further bad weather, however Kier have already employed an additional number of work teams to reduce the backlog of work that was left by the previous contractor (who were disappointing to say the least). The new contract has also seen an additional £1.85m from national government to specifically deal with the many potholes on our roads.

Local Matters

Locally, planning issues and highway matters are still hot topics for my inbox and I am hopeful that we will be able to find resolutions to some of these matters over the coming months.

The long-awaited Traffic Management Scheme has again been postponed but I am hopeful that I can secure another funding source for this scheme. As for finding a solution for the Sundorne Roundabout, it is now a decision for the Parish Council as to how they finance the scheme.

I would like to thank you for making my first year an enjoyable one and I look forward to the coming year.

Lezley Picton

Shropshire Councillor for the Tern Division