

## Notes from Chairs, Mayors & Clerks Meeting

8 June 2016

7pm, Oscars Ludlow Assembly Rooms, Mill Street, Ludlow

### Attending

- **Albrighton Parish Council** - Chairman Cllr Phil Harrison & Vice Chair Cllr Sandra Kirkland
- **Bridgnorth Town Council** – Mayor Cllr Vanessa Voysey and Town Clerk Anne Wilson
- **Broseley Town Council** - Mayor of Broseley Cllr Simon Harris
- **Church Stretton Town Council** – Mayor of Church Stretton, Cllr Mike Walker & Cllr Bob Welch.
- **Cleobury Mortimer Parish Council** - Chairman Cllr Sean Thorogood and Vice Chairman Cllr Debbie Brown
- **Craven Arms Town Council** - Chairman Cllr David Mills
- **Ludlow** - Mayor of Ludlow, Cllr Paul Draper, Deputy Mayor Cllr Colin Sheward, Cllrs Tim Gill, Glenn Ginger, Diane Lyle, Viv Parry, Jim Smithers and Gina Wilding, Town Clerk
- **Much Wenlock Town Council** - Mayor of Much Wenlock, Cllr Herbert Harper
- **Oswestry Town Council** - Mayor of Oswestry, Councillor Paul Milner, and Town Clerk Mr David Preston
- **Wem Town Council** - Deputy Mayor Cllr Edward Towers

**Apologies received from:** Ellesmere Town Council Town Mayor, Cllr Ian Wards , Cllr David Minnery, Mayor of Market Drayton, Bishop's Castle Town Council, Minsterley Parish Council, Shifnal Town Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, and Whitchurch Town Council.

- **Ludlow Town Council**

Initial meeting with Cllr Stuart West & Chris Edwards on 27 April 2016

Initial proposal from Shropshire Council |(SC) is 197% increase to precept

On 11 May 2016, Ludlow Town Council resolved to:

- Worked on a number of strands simultaneously;
- That Shropshire Council secures funding for services in Ludlow via their reserves, central government or a loan to pay for the services

for two years to enable the Town Council to produce a sustainable plan for taking on services and maintaining them;

- Detailed financial information is provided by Shropshire Council and regular discussions continue to create consultation options to bring back to the Council in July for approval;
- Shropshire Council is asked to acknowledge the need for continued countywide funding support and press for a referendum to enable Shropshire Council to increase the Council Tax to support countywide service provided;
- A press strategy is devised to create a dialogue with residents;
- Ludlow's MP is urged to support a referendum to enable Shropshire Council to continue to fund local services.
- The Town Clerk consults with Town Councils of a similar size;
- To urge the MP to lobby Shropshire Council for the car park income.

1 June 2016, Chris Edwards informed us that some local services were being taken 'out of scope' and Ludlow Museum Resource Centre, Ludlow Library, Customer Service Points, Ludlow Leisure Centre, and youth activities will continue to be funded to some extent by Shropshire Council beyond April 2017

The Leisure Centre is "out of scope" for the current discussions because a new Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy is currently being developed by Shropshire Council and they are planning to consult on this new strategy over the summer with decisions being taken by SC in the autumn.

Shropshire Council has adjusted its position on youth activities and the £10,850.00 grant will be retained into 2017/18, but the grant will be cut to zero from April 2018. Ludlow Youth Centre is currently funded by Shropshire Council, but it is proposed to be placed on the Community Asset Transfer list (CAT), which means that Ludlow Town Council or another community organisation could consider the asset.

Ludlow Town Council has received no assurances from Shropshire Council that services and facilities will remain permanently out of scope, however, it is a step in the right direction and the unrealistic deadline of committing to 197% increase in delivery of services representing a precept increase from £360,411.00 to over £1million by September 2016 has been reduced to a 48% increase to £538,764.00.

The situation is by no means resolved and there are still important local services that Shropshire Council will withdraw funding from April 2017 including Ludlow Assembly Room, Visitor Information Centre, Ludlow Museum, outdoor recreation areas, a grant to Rockspring Centre, Ludlow Youth Centre and from 2018 youth activities.

- **Albrighton Parish Council**

Population of approx. 4,500 and the precept had not needed to be raised for previous ten years.

The Council have taken on the library - the process has taken 12 months and resulted in a 300% increase in staff. The Parish Clerk works part time 3 days a week.

The process was demanding in terms of time and energy of clerk and cllrs. The parish council does not have the energy or the finance to take on any other services.

- **Bridgnorth Town Council**

The council have been looking into Youth Services and Grounds Maintenance. Figures from SC show very low library usage

The council will be meeting with the Head of the Library Service and the Head of the Youth Services in the near future

Members have not expressed any willingness to take on new services, but no decision have been made.

- **Broseley Town Council**

Pop. Approx. 5,000

Undertook a local consultation and gained 87% support for taking on local services.

The council began the process of taking on the library two years ago and have now moved into the building, although the move was conditional on taking on the car park.

Council has a SLA with SC (not yet signed) and have received £40,000 payment for the first year.

The council has also acquired two parcels of land (leases as yet unsigned)

The youth club was due to be closed due to lack of funding. However, much Wenlock gave half their £3,000 funding to Broseley and SC match funded. The

Police Crime Commissioners grant of £8,000 has covered one years running costs.

Council have found that it is difficult to get information out of SC and the council had to be prepared to walk away before the info has been forthcoming. The council has informed SC that they will attend one more meeting and is insisting on an equal footing at meetings. In general, SC's way of working is found to be inefficient and problematic.

The Hub is a co-operative information sharing initiative between Much Wenlock, Broseley and Bridgnorth that began last November. George Candler will be attending a meeting soon.

The council does not feel that SALC offers the right fit for this situation.

- **Church Stretton Town Council**

The council started discussions to take over Rectory Woods and field two and a half years ago. Negotiations included funding for tree maintenance over a five year period. The contract was signed 5 weeks ago. The council have the freehold, but covenants prohibit the sale of the land. (SC had offered a 125yr lease)

Library Commissioning process pilot was undertaken in Church Stretton and Sc's plan was rejected by a local group who undertook a judicial review of SC's decision which resulted in 18 month court process that culminated in a hearing in Birmingham, although this did not go ahead as SC offered not to proceed to avoid court costs. Judgement has been deferred and until the matter is resolved the library cannot be relocated.

Swimming Pool – the pool and leisure centre are being looked at, but significant capital investment is required from SC – the centre made a £90,000 loss last year.

Members have written to Greg Clarke and expressed concerns about the short timescale for change. The council is going to consult local residents next week. There are also concerns regarding double taxation.

A personal view was expressed that there should be a referendum.

- **Cleobury Mortimer Parish Council**

Population 3,500

Council has arranged meetings with Chris Edwards. The library and the leisure centre are subject to funding clawback.

A view in support of a referendum and public consultation was expressed. The general feeling was that SC were in the business of getting rid of as much as possible and were talking to town and parish councils individually to push this agenda through. SC are also insisting that assets are transferred on a 125 year lease, although it is apparent that other town and parish council have successfully negotiated the freehold to land and buildings.

A joined up approach from town and parish councils would be a good way to proceed.

- **Craven Arms Town Council**

Population 3,800

Precept has been raised year on year and services have been taken on including the community centre, public toilets and playing fields.

The library has moved 3-4 times. The council would like to undertake a local consultation.

Areas under consideration include play areas, although the economy has stagnated the population because people are staying in their houses longer, so young people are not moving the area, and there is less need for the play area than when they were first conceived.

Car parks are also being considered. More money needs to be raised whether as a collective deal locally or at the county level.

- **Much Wenlock Town Council**

Offered some comparative figures:

There are 1,276 households in Much Wenlock and the band D is £153.64

There are 31,000 households in Shrewsbury and the band D is £39.89

Proposed transfers of service including leisure centre would require a 50% increase in precept

The council leased the library and the museum to SC, although in principle the council would take on the library as they believe this would be advantageous to the town centre. However, not prepared to take on the museum, although there are strong connection to Telford users / Iron Bridge Trust that presents another option for SC

Open Spaces might be considered if the freehold is available.

It was reported that car parks were under discussion at one point, but SC realised they are a source of income.

- **Oswestry Town Council**

Population 18,000

The council are being asked to consider a 280% increase in precept.

The stated costs are not the full costs which will include;

TUPE, pensions, tree surveys, specialist advice and risk assessments.

The library has a lease that runs until 2020 and there is a very complex lease on the leisure centre. The council has written to Greg Clarke and express two main points:

To ask his thoughts on a precept rise; and to seek assurance that town and parish councils will not be capped otherwise we only have one chance to get it right and the picture is so complex that would be a huge risk with potentially catastrophic and long term consequences.

The council are going to look at making a decision in principle on 22 June and are adopting a jigsaw approach.

Taking on services could affect the dynamics of the organisation. A parish poll could provide a mandate, but no point going to the electorate until the council has all the information required to fully understand the situation.

- **Wem Town Council**

Population 6,000

The council has felt that it has been unfairly treated in their area because they have been subject to parking charges, which have helped people to decide to shop elsewhere with free parking. The council has previously taken on the public toilets.

Historically NSC had closed the pool although it is now turning a £40,000 profit under the management of a CIC. External sources of grant funding are increasingly difficult to win. Users are up from 200 to 300, but it is accepted that there is a 10% ceiling which would be 600 users.

There are plans to build a gym and cafe to extend the facilities of the pool – with cost estimated in the region of £750,000.

The town hall had been put to use by Thomas Adams School, but they have experienced funding issues and have pulled out of the building. A trust runs the building and it is used to show local films generating £4,000 income

Volunteers may be one answer, but they are finite resource.

Highest Band D top of the table:

1. Church Stretton
2. Much Wenlock
3. Wem

Morgan Library and Museum being considered.

The proposed process could be damaging to the relationship of town and parish councils. SC would have to give delegated authority to transfer some of its services – and in these cases the liability would remain with SC.

#### **4. General Discussion**

SALC is having a meeting at Cavern Arms on 30 June.

The services have already been paid for through Council Tax to SC and it feels like SC want to sell us things we do not want without any tangible freehold benefits.

Broseley have found that CIL monies for significant local developments are not available to them

Bridgnorth has found that it has to ask neighbouring parish Tasley for CIL money because the most development is designated in the parish, but the facilities are provided by the town. SC threw out an application to merge Bridgnorth and Tasley.

It was felt that the MP was not taking an active role.

There was a census from those present that:

- It may be possible to commit to collective action.
- There was concern regarding double taxation
- Concern that if town and parish councils raise the precept in year one – will we be capped in year two.
- There should be a referendum for countywide funded services. The understanding being that the cost would be spread across the county and therefore no one area would be penalised and the county would act for the mutual benefit of all towns and parishes.

#### **Closing comments**

There was a consensus in agreement with 'Memorandum of Cooperation' that was being worked on as part of the process towards commitment in principle in Oswestry on 22 June.

David Preston had been contacted prior to the meeting by BBC Shropshire Radio and agreed to provide a press release for the breakfast programme.

It was agreed that meeting notes would be provided to all invited