

**MARKET TOWN CLERKS MEETING – 28TH JANUARY 2016
NOTES AND ACTIONS**

Present:

Chris Edwards - Area Commissioner South, Shropshire Council (Chair)
James Walton – Head of Finance, Shropshire Council
Hayley Deighton, Business Growth and Prosperity, Shropshire Council
Nicola Fisher, Senior Community Enablement Officer, Shropshire Council
Dianne Dorrell - SALC
Joanne Hughes – Note taker, Shropshire Council

Clerks:

Penny O'Hagan - Wem
Helen Ball – Shrewsbury
Gina Wilding – Ludlow
Julie Jones - Market Drayton
Sharon Clayton – Much Wenlock
Trudi Barrett – Broseley
Matt Sheehan – Cleobury Mortimer
Steven Platt - Whitchurch

Apologies: Marion Giles – Church Stretton, David Preston – Oswestry, Anne Wilson – Bridgnorth, Mary Seldon – Bishops Castle, Mandy Evans – Ellesmere

Town Clerk's comments shown in blue.

Discussions	Actions
<p>1. Council finances following spending review and Financial Strategy – James Walton</p> <p>James Walton attended the meeting to give a presentation on Shropshire Council's financial position following the government spending review in the autumn and the Financial Strategy which has been approved to legally balance the budget.</p> <p>In 5 years' time the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from central government will disappear, so the task is to find ways to provide essential services without reliance on the grant. It was agreed by Cabinet to write a 3 year strategy.</p> <p>JW explained the graph at slide 2 in the presentation, which shows resources and RSG reducing and no council tax rises. Therefore the services in the hatched and spotted areas will not be affordable. The 'temporary' services in the hatched area can be delivered only until the RSG reduces to nothing. The services in the dark green area are protected ones, such as Adult Social Care, child protection, waste collection, school transport and debt management. Revisions to the spending review were received in December 2015 which allowed an increase in council tax. This makes the overall position better (slide 3), but temporary services will still cease.</p> <p>The announcement that authorities can keep 100% of Business rates was heralded as good news by the government, but the responsibilities may outweigh the benefit. Slides 6-10 explain the government's claims of the spending review and the bullet points are the reality for Shropshire. JW encouraged clerks to make their members aware of these facts.</p>	<p><i>There is more certainty of government plans within the next 3 years</i></p> <p><i>e.g. approx. £40m extra revenue from business rates but could create an additional cost of £1m cost for associated costs (burden).</i></p>

Shropshire will receive a Rural Services Delivery grant over the CSR time frame which will help, but it only offsets the changes in calculating RSG which disadvantages rural authorities. Work has been done to find £35M savings in 2016/17 to sign off a legal budget. However, in 2017/18, there will be £11.5M to find which SC is seeking assistance from communities, partner and town and parish councils to find. If these are not looked at now, it will just store up problems for 2017/18 and hence the Big Conversation that SC has embarked on with the public and partners is vital in identifying which areas are most important to Shropshire people and to raise awareness amongst communities of the services that they may lose if no other solutions are found to sustain them.

The cuts that have been identified can be achieved but are not palatable and are politically challenging as they include closing leisure centres, museums, libraries, reducing bus subsidies, reducing frequency of street cleaning, grass cutting and reducing the Community Enablement Team which support local communities, clerks, members and Town and Parish Councils. If early intervention work is withdrawn, problems will in all likelihood present at a later date at a higher cost so is not financially sustainable in the longer term.

Our local parliament MP's are lobbying central government for a fairer system of funding and a vote takes place on the 12th February so the situation may change. JH to send presentation with notes to all clerks.

Questions and comments followed, summarised below:

Q. Are members reducing their costs and allowances?

A. These are being looked at in the Corporate and Democratic core savings proposals

Q. If outside funding was used for projects such as the Shrewsbury Museum, would this have to be paid back if it closes?

A. Yes, a penalty would apply. This would need to be recouped against reduced running costs or would not be viable to do.

Q. Are members aware of the consequences these cuts may have, such as reduced grass cutting in their wards. Complaints will increase.

A. Members need to be made aware of the implications. Members and town and parish councils need some awareness training on the difficult financial situation as the feeling is that they are not all on the same page.

Comments:

- Good to debate now as still time to consider options for alternative delivery of services that public value.
- Message needs to be communicated widely and strongly.
- SC and cabinet members are paid, but many local parishes are made up of volunteers and therefore not happy to take such important decisions. There is a need to encourage more people to stand as parish councillors.
- What other things could be coming to town and parish councils for delivery?
- What happens at the end of a 3 year contract to run a library for example if SC has no more money?
- Members need to discuss and challenge the implications that cuts will have, such as impacts on health and the obesity problem.
- Town and Parish Councils need to be bidding for other grants constantly,

£23m savings will be needed to prop up 2016/2017 budget.

Closure of museums may cost in terms of HLF grants and the associated financial penalties.

Councillors allowances cost approx. £1.1m per year

JH

<p>the CET team can help with this. SALC have run a grant bid workshops and are happy to repeat.</p>	DD
<p>2. Grounds maintenance and Street Scene services post Ringway contract</p> <p>CE advised that the current Highways and Environmental Maintenance contract with Ringway will end on the 31st March 2018. Before Shropshire Council became a unitary authority, the boroughs and district councils undertook much of the grounds maintenance and street cleansing work, but then it was merged into one big contract which has not been without its problems to manage.</p> <p>Cabinet agreed to allow a procurement exercise to begin to renew the contract and some soft market testing has been taking place by officers. The preferred option would be to have 5 or 6 smaller contracts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Major resurfacing/traffic work 2. Depots and day to day operational work 3. Grounds maintenance/Street Scene 4. Street lighting 5. Bridges and structures 6. Traffic signals <p>The grounds maintenance and Street Scene contract lends itself to local commissioning where town and parish councils could undertake the work and provide a better and sometimes cheaper service for the public. Obviously, with 150 parishes across Shropshire, some clustering of the work would be advisable in order to share costs such as equipment.</p> <p>There would be some issues to unpick in deconstructing the existing contract in relation to TUPE implications for staff. Plans of public open spaces could be provided for each council to consider. The task of local grass cutting is a simple one to transfer but consideration could also be given to transferring play areas, green spaces etc. There are opportunities across the board which are open for discussion. CE asked for feedback on these suggestions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be a good idea to ask schools/academies to quote for grounds maintenance work as they already maintain school sites. • Ask Housing Groups also to quote as they have maintenance teams and may welcome an extra income stream • Resources – a local team from a larger council could be peripatetic. This would assist the smaller councils and also create an income stream for larger councils. • In exchange for grounds maintenance work, SC could take back street lighting responsibilities – individual negotiations possible <p>CE suggested an initial engagement exercise with town and parishes could be organised through SALC nearer the time. CE needs to take legal advice around procurement rules and awarding of smaller contracts by delegation or agency agreements.</p>	<p>Problems are due to the present contractor under pricing and is now losing money.</p> <p>Procurement will begin spring/summer</p> <p>Shropshire Council needs to identify ownership of land</p> <p>Brainstorming event</p> <p>CE DD</p>

3. Big Conversation update – Tom Dodds	
TD did not attend so agenda item postponed to next meeting	JH
4. Market town mapping – Nicola Fisher NF advised that Cllr Mal Price has recently written to all town and parish councils to let them know that an annual Place Plan review will not be taking place this year. Two areas have volunteered to be part of the mapping exercise and these are Whitchurch and Shifnal. This is a big task as various organisations hold information about health, land, assets, population, diversity, demography etc. Shropshire Council will have property and land information that is owned by the authority. Clerks are keen to include health data in Place Plans in future. A workshop to share ideas will be planned in September in respect of the trial areas' data gathering exercise.	These councils are being used as models because they have a Neighbourhood Plan. Parish Council assets need to be identified. It was also suggested that demographic statistics should be included in Place Plans.
5. Future agenda items Next meeting 21 st March, 10am, MR1 West Wing, Shirehall Big Conversation update – Tom Dodds Marches Growth Hub – Hayley Deighton/JH to invite Encouraging people to stand as town/parish councillors – Dianne Dorrell SAMdev update – Andy Mortimer 25 th May meeting, 10am, Wenlock Room Financial update – James Walton Veolia waste contract – Paul Beard	NF
6. Date of next meeting – 21st March 2016, MR1 West Wing Shirehall at 10am	