

TOWN MAYORS & TOWN CLERKS MEETING
12th July 2018 at the Guildhall Shrewsbury, convened by the Mayor of Shrewsbury

Present

Bishops Castle		
Bridgnorth	Cllr Ron Whittle (Mayor)	
Broseley	Cllr Michael Burton (Mayor)	Cllr Ian West (Deputy Mayor)
Church Stretton	Cllr Michael Brade (Mayor)	Danny Chetwood (Town Clerk)
Cleobury Mortimer		
Craven Arms		
Ellesmere	Cllr Ryan Hartley (Mayor)	Jo Butterworth (Deputy Town Clerk)
Ludlow		
Market Drayton		
Much Wenlock	Cllr Graham Edgecumbe-Venning (Mayor)	Sharon Clayton (Town Clerk)
Oswestry	Cllr Sandy Best (Mayor)	David Preston (Town Clerk)
Shifnal	Cllr Robert Harrop (Mayor)	Mac Sandal (Town Clerk)
Shrewsbury	Cllr Peter Nutting (Mayor)	Helen Ball (Town Clerk)
Wem		
Whitchurch		

Introductions

Cllr Nutting (Mayor of Shrewsbury) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He had agreed to convene this meeting following a similar meeting that was convened by his predecessor and he was keen to engage with other Mayors throughout the county. He was also conscious that he wore another hat, that being the Leader of Shropshire Council and it was likely that Mayors & Town Clerks comments and concerns might be focussed more in relation to the ongoing relations between Unitary & Town Councils. He had not set an agenda and was keen to learn more of any Town Council Issues.

Town Council views being taken into account - Much Wenlock representatives expressed concerns that the town's interests were being overlooked whenever anything was raised; with a standard answer being "Shropshire Council's policy on Parking/Traffic Management/Local Plan is....." Why is there a constant need to unify policy across the county when issues locally are very different? The Town Council wants assurances that their views are being taken into account.

Development beyond the Town Boundary – Bridgnorth expressed concerns that the market towns were beginning to expand beyond their administrative boundaries into neighbouring rural parish council areas. PN explained that this was the reason why the CIL charging had been amended so that CIL money did not necessarily have to be spent in the parish council area but the broader Place Plan area.

Infrastructure associated with major development – Shifnal expressed concerns that the creation of development infrastructure was more reactive than proactive. This was certainly the case in Shifnal, which had seen 1400 homes built in a very short period and this had put an unnecessary strain on schools, GP surgeries, roads and drainage. Whilst it could be understood that CIL payments on these development sites were being staged to help developer cash flow, this was not helping the proactive development of supporting infrastructure. Shifnal representatives also expressed concern about the sometimes-piecemeal development in certain areas and the fact that the often-medieval nature of market town road networks could not cope with the direction of travel.

PN advised that CIL has not delivered on creating the levels of funding needed to support the needs of new communities and new development sites. Sometimes these have to be supplemented by additional s106 agreements

Declaration of Interest – a number of Town Councils were concerned about the potential conflict of interest and how to declare interests when Councillors were both unitary Councillors and Town Councillors. The biggest example was Shrewsbury with 15 out of the 17 being twin-hatted. PN explained how he has ensured he declares the right interests and at which council. He also mentioned the need to consider issuing dispensations to certain councillors to ensure the proper discussion and decision-making.

Struggle with SC Officer Engagement – Church Stretton representatives commented on the poor levels of communication between Officers and the Town Council and they often struggled getting a response of inviting officers to meetings. PN advised that if Town Councils were having difficulty in communicating to copy him into correspondence.

Level of business acumen – Much Wenlock representatives commented on the lack of business motivation and good business management sense amongst some officers. PN did advise that he has been encouraging recruitment not just from the public sector but more from those with commercial experience.

Planning Decisions – A number of Town Council representatives made reference to planning decisions and whether they are in the best interest of that particular Market Town. They asked to what extent the threat of appeal affects the decision making process of the Planning Authority. PN reported on the recent success of the Planning Authority in defending appeals and the number of occasions that members of the area planning committees had voted against officer recommendations, as they were felt not in the interests of the community.

Highways Development Control – A number of Town Council representatives expressed concern about the comments submitted by Highways Development Control which seem to be at odds with highways comments that the Town Councils submit as part of the planning process

Over-Consultation – A number of Town Council representatives questioned why Shropshire Council often consult about a new initiative/scheme, then after consultation when the initiative/scheme may have changed as a result of the consultation, they have to consult again.

Boundary Reviews – PN advised that annually the Home Office contacts principle authorities to ascertain whether there is a need to undertake any boundary reviews within their jurisdiction and whilst Shropshire Council has always decided against such a route, in all likelihood this would probably need to take place after the elections. The Market Towns are expanding beyond their administrative boundary, which means some people living in the extended parts of town within neighbouring parish council areas feel they are more part of the town, but are not contributing towards the cost of running services. PN was also keen to ascertain what the optimum size a Parish Council should be. There were many parish councils in the county that provided very few services and often only levy a precept to pay for the Clerk.

Mayoral Training – A number of Town Mayors expressed concern about the lack of provision of training to allow members to not only fulfil their civic duties but also their statutory duties as Chairman of Council. Whilst some Town Councils have very comprehensive Civic Manuals and a process for handover from one Mayor to the next, some do not. A number also expressed concerns about the

timeliness of training that SALC provides. It was suggested that Mayor-elects be invited to any meetings of this group in the New Year ahead of them taking office in May.

Presidency of the Society of Local Council Clerks – David Preston (Oswestry Town Clerk) recounted his experiences of relationships between the Principal Authority and Town Councils over the years. Whilst Mayors felt the relationship at times was strained, his experiences of travelling the country in his capacity as President of the SLCC has shown that Shropshire Council's relationship with its Town Councils is much better than other places. He felt that some of the key headline issues for Town Councils in this county that this Group could explore were:

- Economic Development in Market Towns and the role Town Councils could play
- Discretionary Services
- Budgetary considerations and how that might affect Town Council decision making
- Standards in Public Life, Code of Conduct and the Declarations of Interest
- Civic Leadership

Future Meetings

It was agreed to meet probably 3 times a year with the next meeting being **Thursday 13th September at 3.00pm** (at which Clive Wright will be in attendance) looking at Shropshire Council relations with the Town Councils with a meeting in the New Year to look at Civic Leadership involving Mayors elect. It was also agreed that an invitation should be extended to both the Town Mayor and Town Clerk so that the broadest perspective on running the Town Council can be explored and shared.