

## Shropshire Council Annual Report

### 2021/2022

As part of the election campaign, we promised three things:

1. Local housing for local people - when our housing company (Cornovii) build houses they're offered to local people first. Cornovii are delivering on this promise.
2. Secondly, we promised that we would put £40 million into the Highways Capital Programme, we've now increased that to £60 million and
3. We promised a third wheelie bin which will take all your plastics, cans and glass and stop it blowing all over the road. For those of you that have registered they will be delivered over the summer months. If you haven't already registered for your third bin, then you can still do so but it won't be delivered until the autumn.

### Covid and Ukraine

I am extremely grateful to the staff at Shropshire Council who continue to manage our Covid situation. Many officers were doing one job one day and doing something completely different the next, some staff have not yet returned to their original roles.

However, the last two years has taken its toll on the staff and for some staff they've had no break whatsoever because as Covid has become more manageable unfortunately we find ourselves in the middle of a humanitarian crisis. We are trying to arrange for as many Ukrainian people and families to come to Shropshire as possible. I am sure you can imagine that there is a lot of pressure on our staff to ensure that all the safety checks are put in place, it's a responsibility we must take incredibly seriously.

Shropshire has 100+ individual hosts registered on the Foundry system which make up 155 offers of accommodation, we have started DBS checks and we have also started the triaging of the property offers. The schools team continue to liaise with head teachers. The setting up of community hubs is well and truly up and running now and is being led by Amanda Jones from Shropshire Supports Refugees and Chris Childs from Energize.

Further information can be found on the Council's website here [Homes for Ukraine | Shropshire Council](#) and key links can also be found at

['Homes for Ukraine' scheme launches - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Homes for Ukraine scheme: frequently asked questions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Apply for a visa under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme \(Homes for Ukraine\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

### The Budget

I think it's fair to say that most of the Council's time over the last year was spent trying to ensure we produced a balanced budget for the 2022/23 financial year. This work also included looking ahead to 23/24. It will be no surprise to you, as I talk about this at almost every parish council meeting, that financially Shropshire Council is in a very precarious position. It is worth repeating the issues, we spend over 75% of our net budget on social care, i.e., Adult's or Children's Services and yet only 3% of the population actually benefit from these services. On average, each year our adult social care bill goes up by £12M. This year our care providers (residential and domiciliary care) are also in financial difficulties, and we are having to increase their payments. Therefore, our already high costs will be even higher. This is simply not sustainable.

The Government's social care scheme, which they launched last year and came into effect last week, whereby extra national insurance payments go towards social care will not help us. For the first three years

only a fraction of this money will come to local government, the majority will go to the NHS. The additional difficulty we face at Shropshire Council is that 85% of the adults who seek Adult Care Support do not receive it as they are signposted to other organisations who can help them. This help might come from the voluntary sector or other sectors. This type of support is almost always better for the person, and it is these partnerships enables us to keep our social care costs as low as possible. The difficulty we now face is that the government has said everybody is entitled to an adult social care assessment so the 85% is likely to plummet. If that 85% plummets, then our costs will increase significantly.

Over Covid we also saw a significant increase in the number of looked after children coming into our system. Despite our current financial circumstances, we have invested further in prevention measures. Preventing children coming into our system has to be the best thing, it's better for the child, it's better for families and ultimately it is more cost effective. We have an excellent record with fostering and adoption, this leaves us with the very complex cases. These young people can be extremely expensive to place, very often out of county. We have one young person whose placement costs are over £1M per year. For local government this is unsustainable.

Shropshire Council's net budget for 21/22 was £208M of which £163,500M was for Social Care leaving £44.5M for everything else. At least half of the £44.5M is spent on the Waste Contract. So, the remaining £22.5M covers everything from Libraries to Pest Control, Highways to Environmental Health and it is this area that gets squeezed every time to social care costs increase.

I am constantly in contact with the government and ministers to try and alleviate the situation but if nothing changes, we will not be able to provide a balance budget for 23/24. This is not news; I have said this many times. We are facing a £60 million deficit in 23/24, if the Government funds us to the same level as for this financial year it will come down to £30M. Although in all honesty I expect our deficit figure to rise significantly due to the social care costs that I mentioned earlier.

You have also heard me talking about fair funding. Providing services in a rural area is far more expensive than providing them in urban areas. You will be aware that we did not receive a Bus Back Better grant, we don't deny that it will be more difficult to deliver services in rural areas but that is exactly why we needed that money because it does cost more to deliver bus services in the rural area and for many of our residents it is not about improving a service it is about keeping or initiating a service.

Urban areas are funded so much better than us in many different ways. Telford and Wrekin are funded far better because they have large urban areas and the data shows areas of deprivation. Shropshire has deprivation too and much of it is masked by rurality. We suffer from poor funding in many areas due to the urban/rural divide, our public health budget is the third worst funded in the West Midlands and we are in the bottom 10 nationally. Shropshire may be leafy green but there are many pockets of deprivation and this will become even more significant with the rise in the cost of living.

So as I said earlier most of my time is spent chasing funding, talking to ministers, talking to civil servants to ensure we are funded properly, that local government is funded satisfactorily.

### **Council Tax Rebate**

Earlier this year the government announced that all Council Taxpayers living in properties Band A to D will be eligible for a £150.00 Council Tax Rebate. If you already pay for your council tax via direct debit you do not need to do anything the £150.00 will be credited to your bank. If you do not pay by direct debit, you will be written to with further instructions as to claim the rebate.

## **It's Not All Depressing News**

It's not all doom and gloom, Shropshire Council has some extremely high performing service areas and Adult Social Care is one of those services. WE regularly receive visits from other Councils keen to learn from us.

Only two weeks ago our Children's Services retained its Good OFSTED rating. Bearing in mind that this is two years of which we have been in a pandemic, we were absolutely delighted, and I pay tribute to how hard the staff, especially our social workers, worked throughout the pandemic.

We have also won many awards, we've had more awards for our housing services, we had awards for our children services and we had awards for adult social services it will shock you but we have even won awards for highways especially the work that we are doing to try and make our highways repair programme carbon neutral.

## **Climate Change**

In terms of climate change there has been good progress made this year. The Cabinet and Executive Management team have undertaken and passed carbon literacy training, and this will be rolled out to more members and staff over the coming months and all cabinet and council reports have to make a significant effort to look at how our policies impact on climate change. We are one of the top councils for producing our own green energy and this year we will be opening another solar farm and extending another. Shropshire Council is only directly responsible for a very small percentage of Shropshire's overall carbon footprint, but we can certainly do what we can to encourage others and currently there is work being undertaken on our procurement policies and procedures.