

## **Church Stretton Town Council**

### **PRESS RELEASE - December 14<sup>th</sup> 2016**

#### **Town Council addresses local Services at Risk and votes to lobby for change in the system of local government taxation**

On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December, Church Stretton Town Council faced up to the prospect of cuts, actual and proposed, in the county funding of a range of local services in the coming years, including the Library Service, the Leisure Centre and Swimming Pool, the Visitor Information Service, youth service funding, environmental maintenance and other support grants. The Council also voted to lobby for a fairer system of local government taxation.

Decision-making at Town Council level is currently highly problematic because the scale and timing of the cuts by Shropshire Council remain uncertain and subject to change. As a precautionary measure, councillors voted to recommend that £10,000 be added to the local precept in 2017/18. Conscious of the already high rate of the local precept and the likely increase in the county precept next year, councillors were anxious to limit the rise to an estimated £4.70 on an average Band D property.

In addition, the Council agreed to allocate a sum of £30,000 from the financial year 2018/19 towards the 'At Risk' Services Budget. It is already known that Shropshire Council will cease running the local Library Service in 2018/19 and begin reducing its funding, although it has yet to finalise its funding strategy for libraries across the county. The Community Consultation in the summer clearly gave majority support to the Town Council to support the retention of this service.

Amongst other things, this amount of funding and the timing of the decision allows both known applicants to run the local Library Service in future to submit Expressions of Interest to Shropshire Council, before the deadline of January 16<sup>th</sup> 2017. The two current applicants are the South Shropshire Academy Trust and the Church Stretton Library Support Group. Other applicants could come forward during the procurement process that will be undertaken throughout 2017 by officers of Shropshire Council. It is Shropshire Council which will make the final decision but town councillors stressed that the Town Council subsidy would only be justified if the successful applicant could guarantee the future sustainability of the service.

The Council also voted unanimously to lobby the Department for Communities and Local Government for a radical change in the system of local government taxation. In this county, continued reliance on the centuries-old collection of 165 town and parish councils to raise local council tax has produced an indefensible and unfair disparity in local rates. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in 2016/17, householders in an average Band D property, in most small parish councils paid less than £20, householders in Shrewsbury paid less than £40 but householders in Church Stretton paid more than £160.

The Mayor of Church Stretton, Cllr. Michael Walker, concluded: "If small towns, such as ours, are to be expected to fund alone ever more of their local services, despite serving wider areas, the current unfairness will only be made worse, unless the system is changed."

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