

to Town and Parish Councils, and Parish Meetings, Shropshire
Dear Chair or Clerk

You will already be aware of the financial challenge affecting councils all over the country and Shropshire has been particularly affected by this. Growing demand and cost for adults' and children's social care is exacerbated by our rural and sparsely populated geography, and our budget is being stretched like never before.

We have already said that we will need to make difficult decisions that we never wanted to make. We know this will have a considerable impact for our communities and for some arrangements that we have with many partner organisations including town and parish councils. However, considering the scale of challenge we face, we have no choice.

Today we have published our updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which outlines a £62m funding gap and many very difficult and tough decisions that we propose to make to close this.

To balance our budget for 2024/25, we must review all of our services. This is particularly true for services that are non-statutory. As we have said before, some will change, some will be reduced and, unfortunately, some will have to stop altogether. It goes without saying that we must also find new ways to deliver our services more efficiently and reduce demand wherever possible.

Some of the difficult decisions proposed in the MTFS are:

- Reviewing the strategy for library provision to make savings
- Reducing support for leisure provision
- Reviewing and reducing the number of household recycling centres
- Charging for green waste collections. Households could opt out of this collection if they wish
- Reducing the number of council buildings and other assets and accelerating the move from Shirehall into alternative offices
- Changing how we meet the transport needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities – a consultation on this has already begun

There will inevitably be effects on some services that we provide with partner organisations and once the budget is agreed we will be liaising with some of you to discuss the possibility of taking over and running council assets or services we can no longer afford, for example some libraries or leisure facilities.

The proposals in our MTFS will be discussed at Cabinet on 21 February and at Full Council on 29 February. A dedicated section of our website www.shropshire.gov.uk/ourbudget2024

Once a budget is agreed, I want to stress that any significant service changes would need further consultation, with both the public, partners and with our staff. This will also offer an opportunity to explore different ideas with a range of partners and stakeholders including yourselves.

However, without the savings of £41.3m that the council has already made in this financial year, the most this council has ever achieved, we would be facing a very much more difficult bigger challenge and I am grateful for your support of the measures taken so far. However, we still have a very long way to go.

As we take the next steps to set this most difficult council budget, we will continue our discussions and lobbying of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for funding reform that takes account of the challenges across councils of every political colour as well as the unique demography and rurality of Shropshire that makes our position even more challenging.

Your continued support in working together for the people of Shropshire is greatly appreciated.