

Transfer of Services

Expression of Interest as agreed on 30.6.16

Morgan Library - The Town Council seeks the transfer of the freehold of the Morgan Library and the attached residential property from Shropshire Council to the Town Council. This agreement will be subject to the Morgan Library building being in vacant possession before it is transferred and that a full structural and condition survey on the buildings is carried out by Shropshire Council prior to the final agreement to transfer.

Existing Library - The Town Council has expressed an interest in providing limited financial support to enable the continuation of the library service in Wem subject to a more detailed breakdown of the financial contribution required. This agreement would be for a time limited period only until the Morgan library can be transferred into the Town Council's ownership. Once this has been undertaken then additional discussions on the relocation of the library into the Morgan library building could then take place. In addition the Town Council would also like to enter into talks about the possible relocation of the Town Council offices to the library as part of any transfer deal.

Play areas - The Town Council is willing to accept the freehold transfer of ownership of the 3 play areas and 1 open space owned by Shropshire Council but already managed by the Town Council namely Cordwell Park, Lowe Hill Gardens, The Grove and Randford Way.

Land - The Town Council has expressed an interest in the transfer of the freehold ownership of the field off Lowe Hill Road/Wemsbrook Road to the Town Council on the proviso that it is transferred without any covenants.

Press Statement issued by Shropshire Council on 20.7.16 Timeline for town and parish councils to work up proposals for the future of local services to be extended

Cllr Malcolm Pate, Leader of Shropshire Council announced on 13th July that funding will be made available to enable town and parish councils more time to take on local services including libraries, museums and leisure centres.

Councillor Pate said 'Shropshire Council finances are extremely tight and finding this extra money will be difficult, meaning we will only be able to do this for a short time. All service areas will have to be managed extremely efficiently by continuing to make every possible saving; and the Council will have to use some of its reserves. Town and parish councils have been working hard to put plans together for the services in their area they would consider delivering or funding in the future and there is a fantastic amount of energy and innovation going into finding ways to sustain these services that are really important to our communities.

Shropshire Council has been listening to the town and parish councils who have made it clear that the timeframe of September 2016 is too tight for the working up of definitive proposals for the future delivery of the services they are interested in taking over. Shropshire Council's Cabinet has taken this feedback very seriously and is keen to support town and parish councils with these more readily achievable timescales'.

Councillor Cecilia Motley, Cabinet Member for Rural Services and Communities, including town and parish councils, said, 'It is important that we trust what town and parish councils are telling us and Cabinet members are very keen to support the transition of services to local councils. We decided that the fairest way to do this is to continue to fund the services at risk until March 2018, which will give councils the time they need to work up robust plans. We will review these fully worked up plans in September 2017 and plan for their implementation in April 2018. This will allow more time to develop innovative or cross-sector partnerships that will result in services continuing if Shropshire Council can no longer afford to fund them and they are at greater risk of closure.

The discussions that are currently taking place between local councils and officers at Shropshire Council on the future of local services and assets should also continue as planned. We are very encouraged by the progress that is being made by many town and parish councils in considering the future of the services local to them and it's really important that this momentum continues, using the additional time to make greater progress and not as a reason to pause discussions and the work that is going on'.

Councillor Stuart West, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture said 'We recognise that town and parish councils are at different stages in planning for taking on services from Shropshire Council that are at risk. Some local councils have grasped this as a real opportunity and they have been quick to put proposals together to deliver services themselves. We need to continue to support these ambitious and pioneering councils who can pave the way in delivering local services and I believe that an additional year of preparation will go a long way to assisting them before they stand alone from March 2018'.

Clive Wright, Chief Executive of Shropshire Council, said 'Unfair funding from central government and the fact that we have 30% more older people than the national average in Shropshire which has to be supported by the local Council Tax payer means that Shropshire is millions of pounds out of pocket. This is leading to pressure on maintaining important local services and the need to come up with innovative ways to keep them going. Funding these at-risk services for a further year will enable proposals to be developed and put forward. It will be a challenge to find the additional funding required and we will do this by reviewing our earmarked reserves and by selling buildings and land to generate capital receipts'.

Town Clerk's Recommendation

The transfer of services was considered by the Amenities and Services committee on 19.7.16 and the following recommendations were made in the minutes for consideration by the Town Council.

- **A community engagement exercise is undertaken during the Autumn prior to the setting of the 2017-18 budget. The consultation to be funded using the transfer of services budget and its purpose would be to seek the views of residents on the continuation of a library service in Wem.**
- **Discussions to take place with neighbouring parishes who have over 50 registered users of the library to ascertain whether there would be any commitment to helping to support the library service in Wem financially for a 3 year period.**

However in light of the above press release, as there is more time available to the Town Council it may be better undertake the following course of action;

To set up a working party with the remit to;

- **To liaise with Shropshire Council and enter into early stage negotiations on the transfer of services as identified in the expression of interest.**
- **To identify any additional services / facilities that may be better run by the Town Council.**
- **To undertake due diligence checks and financial risk assessments for each asset.**
- **To oversee a town community engagement initiative to seek the views of the community on the potential transfer of assets.**
- **To develop relationships with neighbouring parishes.**