

SHROPSHIRE AND WREKIN FIRE AUTHORITY

PRECEPT 2006/07

CONSULTATION

**Interim Feedback of
Participants' Views**



**PUTTING SHROPSHIRE'S
SAFETY FIRST**



Revenue Budget 2005/06

- Council Tax rise generally thought to be justified
 - Meets the needs of the Fire and Rescue Service and avoids capping
 - Incorporates efficiency savings
 - Will lead to improved Retained service > essential for Shropshire
 - Investment needed now to prevent future problems
 - Prudent to address the loss and retention of Retained staff
- Proposed increase in SWFA budget seen as fair and reasonable
 - Allows for an increase in service provision whilst Council Tax increase has been kept low
 - A minority prepared to pay more in order to reduce the shortfall/deficit
 - 4.8% given as an example of what they would be prepared to pay



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Revenue Budget 2005/07

- General disconcertion that, until now, the funding situation has led to SWFA having the 2nd highest precept of all combined Fire Authorities
 - Government has not contributed a reasonable share of funds to SWFA
 - Does not reflect the problems of servicing a mainly rural area
 - Given this, it is reasonable that SWFA charges what it does
- Satisfied that Government has acknowledged the need to increase SWFA's share of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG)
 - Would anticipate that the SWFA precept will ultimately decrease because of this
- Recognised that SWFA is not yet getting its full allocation of 6.2%, which has led to it still looking for a rise locally (through Council Tax)
 - *SWFA has been under-funded for too long*
- Others felt the 3.6% increase is about right as *a small shortfall concentrates the mind!*



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Revenue Budget 2005/07

- SWFA thought to offer good value for money
 - Particularly in light of forthcoming investment in the Retained Service and in Community Fire Safety
 - *All other precepting services are much more expensive*
- SWFA should publicise the value for money they offer
 - Use the media to disseminate information on the RSG and the reasons for the Council Tax increase



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Efficiencies and Investment

- Aerial appliance proposals generally accepted as the most efficient way forward
 - Only one manned ALP seems to be needed on most occasions
 - Second can be brought in from an adjoining service if needed
 - Savings can be re-invested in the Retained service
- Loss of 8 whole-time firefighter posts generally supported but
 - Should be due to ‘natural wastage’
 - Should be no detrimental effect on service provision
- Some believed the 8 trained and experienced firefighters should be redeployed within the Service
 - Suggested that they could become the eight Retained Support Officers



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Efficiencies and Investment

- Investment in the Retained Service fully and wholeheartedly supported
 - Retained service = value for money
 - Most people in Shropshire benefit from the service provided by Retained firefighters
 - Improvements are needed to improve morale
 - Breakdown of costs deemed well thought out and balanced > value for money
 - Particularly praised...
 - Ideas for improvement derived from Retained Firefighters
 - Piloting of improvements to ensure they work
 - Additional 3 hours training per month
 - Recompensed for cleaning, maintenance and admin
 - Expenditure on 8-seater fire appliances
 - Retained crews undertaking CFS in local communities
- However
 - Some felt that Retained firefighting could be made more attractive for women
 - Some initially questioned the cost of the Project Manager and the Support Officers



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Capital Expenditure

- Capital Expenditure thought to represent good value for money
 - *These are the right things to spend money on as far as we can tell*
 - Asset Tracking System judged particularly good value for money, as was the £30k for 4 Retained Support Officer vehicles
- Essential to expend money on...
 - Improvement of retained stations
 - Improvement of training facilities
 - Building maintenance
 - Replacement fire engines and rescue tender
 - Replacement of radio communications
- Trust that SWFA are spending wisely on the capital programme
 - *Assuming (and hoping!) that the Authority has looked at each area of expenditure carefully*



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Capital Expenditure

- Concerns...
 - Some questioned whether it is necessary to replace a boat rather than simply mend it
 - Others wondered if it could be rented rather than purchased
 - Maintenance of Shrewsbury HQ deemed expensive
 - Need to maintain it was understood but described as *wasted money* (in light of the advent of regional control in 2009)
 - Should expend on essential repairs only
 - Stakeholders would prefer a newly built station at Shrewsbury - although they recognised that funds are not available
 - Suggested looking at PFI or borrowing, and shared options (with other public services)



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Future Expenditure

- Scale of future increases thought acceptable and well-balanced > **provided figures for injuries/deaths continue on a downward curve**
 - The %'s are well-chosen and investment in the future is appropriate
 - Below 5% capping rate
 - Allows 1% flexibility for 2007/8 if needed
 - Would like to see the precept increases diminish further in future years
 - *If it could be lower than 4% in 2007/8 then good*
 - But some concern about future increases due to expenditure on new HQ in Shrewsbury
 - Stakeholders questioned whether a gradual reduction in the precept is realistic due to the need to continually modernise the service
- Increase is above inflation > most believed it should be no higher than proposed
 - *Value for money is essential and the increased Revenue Support Grant should not be seen as an excuse to spend money!*



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Future Expenditure

- SWFA's Government grant allocation should increase further
 - SWFA has been under-funded by govt
 - Should be balanced by increased RSG in future years
 - RSG should increase to cover non-local issues that are not necessarily fire-related e.g. RTCs, terrorism
- Should be a balance between the RSG and local responsibility for local services
 - The RSG should increase but, to an extent, responsibility for local issues should remain in the locality (through Council Tax and Business Rates)
 - *Government should fund more although local people don't mind subsidising local services*
 - However, if an increased RSG allows a Council Tax reduction, this would be welcomed!



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