



## Ludlow under Pressure a report on urgent social needs



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# **LUDLOW UNDER PRESSURE**

**A report on urgent social needs**

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## Summary

Despite its alleged affluence, Ludlow has areas of significant poverty and deprivation. Severe cuts to local authority services are being implemented. So far only 20% of them have been made, and more severe cuts to welfare budgets are in the pipeline. Two groups most affected – though not the only ones – are older people at risk, and young people, particularly those in the 16-24 age group who are experiencing low employment options and limited housing options. Two key problems affecting these two groups, and many others, are limited community transport and the lack of affordable and social housing.

This report focusses on these needs and problems, but recognises that local unemployment and inequality are closely related to them. Increasing inequality, between rich and poor, and between those who can cope and those who are vulnerable, is morally wrong. Although our country now has to find ways to live within its means, we still have choices we can make about our priorities. Making adequately decent provision for the poorest and most vulnerable people should be a top priority.

More can be achieved with existing social-service resources and voluntary organisations, if there is greater co-ordination and effectiveness between services and greater use of volunteers. But alongside this it is the responsibility of us all to help each other and to work to create a more cohesive local community. We can help our neighbours. We can be involved in responsible political action, engage in social action, and collaborate with other bodies which are trying to create a supportive community. In all of this, the churches must demonstrate their commitment by playing their part.

Justice must be global as well as local. Like all industrialised communities we in Britain, particularly many of us in Ludlow, have more than our fair share of the world's limited resources. We have a duty to take action to protect the environment and make it more sustainable. For example, the more affluent amongst us need to give up aspirations to continually rising standards of living. All of us need to reconsider our values, our assumptions and our actions.

The Churches Together Around Ludlow working group recommends:

- targeting priority help to older people at risk
- targeting priority help to young people in the 16-24 age group who are experiencing low employment options and limited housing options
- increasing the resources for community transport and for social and affordable housing.

## **Introduction**

### **What's this report about?**

In 2012 almost all Ludlow people are feeling the effects of the financial crisis of 2008 and the recession, with the cuts to benefits and services funded by government and by Shropshire Council. Some people are suffering hardship. The demand for churches' food parcels is going up not just nationwide, but also in Ludlow, and we are warned of worse to come. So this report asks two questions:

- What is going wrong for people?
- What can be done to help?

### **Who's behind the report?**

Churches Together Around Ludlow (CTAL) decided to investigate what is happening to our local community in this time of economic downturn. Bearing in mind the concept of 'the Big Society', with its emphasis on localism and volunteering, the CTAL working group collected information and interviewed people from a large number of local organisations. This report presents our findings.

### **Who's the report for?**

The report is for everyone in the Ludlow area, not just members of the churches. We all need to understand what is happening and why, and decide how we are going to respond. The well-being of a community depends on far more than economic growth and material well-being. It also depends on neighbourliness, a sense of belonging, trust between people, justice and a greater measure of equality. But we simply cannot ignore material facts like unemployment and fuel prices. So this report is concerned about what we can all do to improve the quality of life for everyone in our local community in these harsher economic times

## **What are the key social needs in the Ludlow area?**

### ***Ludlow in 2012***

In many ways Ludlow is a place of plenty. It is widely known as an attractive tourist destination. But that is only half the story, as the Town Council showed in 2010 in its report *Ludlow future: Ludlow's plan for 2010-2015*.

The town has an ageing population. In 2010, 27% of the population was aged over 65. Only 56% was of working age. The number of people aged over 75, many of whom have care needs, had increased by 43.7% since 1991.

Economically, Ludlow is a very unequal town. Some wards in the town are amongst the most deprived 20% in England. Although unemployment in Ludlow is not above the national average, many people are in low-paid part-time, seasonal and casual work in tourism, retail, and farming.

The Citizens Advice Shropshire report for April 2011 – March 2012 shows that in the Ludlow district the top four problems were benefits and tax credits (737 problems), debt (581), housing (162) and employment (153). The same figures for the preceding year were 577, 408, 111, and 143 respectively. Latest reports show that the situation is worsening.

The number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in the Ludlow constituency declined from October 2010 to April 2011, but increased markedly between September 2011 and February 2012. The number of young people claiming JSA for more than a year tripled between April 2011 and April 2012; in February 2012 this age group comprised 27.9% of the total number of claimants. Many older women, too, have lost jobs and job opportunities.

### ***The key needs***

The CTAL group's enquiries over the last eighteen months confirm what we have learned in face-to-face meetings with representatives of Ludlow



What are the key social needs in the Ludlow area?

organisations: needs are increasing, the resources to meet them are diminishing, and all the signs are that the situation will only get worse. The full impact of the recession and of cuts in public expenditure has yet to be felt. In this growing crisis, the poorest and those dependent on state support are the first to suffer, and they must be our main concern.

*Amongst the most urgent problems in our area are:*

- *the needs of older people at risk*
- *the needs of people in the 16-24 age group, especially those who are experiencing low employment options and limited housing options*
- *limited community transport, especially for those people who are seeking work and health care*
- *a serious shortage of social and affordable housing.*

The scope of Ludlow Town Council's excellent document *Ludlow Future: Ludlow's Plan for 2010-2015* is naturally wider than that of this report, but we note that its stated priorities for this period include the four key needs identified by this report. On this, see also 'Recent experiences and opinions' on page 36.

The sections which follow provide some evidence, an analysis of the problems and suggestions for future action. Further detailed evidence can be found in 'Recent experiences and opinions'.

## **The needs of older people at risk**

### ***The growing crisis***

According to the 2011 census there were 63,400 people aged 65 and over living in Shropshire, an increase of 23.8% since the census of 2001, and a much higher percentage than the average for England and Wales. The 2011 census also shows 8,400 people aged over 85 in the county, an increase of 35.3% since 2001. About 15,000 of the people aged 75+ are thought to live alone, and most are women. This number is predicted to increase to over 19,000 by 2020 and 26,000 by 2030. Estimated figures for Ludlow are in the 'Experiences and opinions' section on page 36.

The figures show that more people are now needing support and services, and the numbers are predicted to continue to rise steeply. Of those people aged 65+ in Shropshire 29,464 are assessed as having long-term illness and the predictions are that there will be 36,000 by 2020 and 45,000 by 2030. In the Ludlow area there is likely to be a twofold increase in the number of people aged over 85 by 2020. Yet some benefits are being reduced and services to this age group curtailed. For example Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Age UK, the lead agency in the county for older people, suffered a 20% cut in its local authority grant this year, and this required a reduction in staffing and services. Further cuts are anticipated in the years ahead.

### ***Growing anxieties***

The gap between elderly people who are poor and those who are well-off is large, and growing. Some people own their homes, and have savings and a secure employment pension. At present they can meet the cost of care and cope with rising fuel and food prices. But the people who have middle and lower incomes are increasingly worried about the cost of food and fuel (eg the very recent rise of 6-8% in the price of gas), and they are concerned about public transport, social isolation, and about health provision, such as access to NHS facilities, and paying for personal care at home. The possible withdrawal of benefits and concessions, such as bus passes and free prescriptions, is another worry.

### ***The greatest anxieties***

The people who are solely dependent on the state pension are the ones who are most at risk. The state pension is supposed to increase in line with inflation, but it fails to keep up with steeply-rising fuel and food prices. Younger people also suffer from fuel poverty; people who live out of town and use oil and electricity for heating are particularly hard-hit, with the oldest most at risk. Some people who live in apparently comfortable homes may be described as 'property-rich and purse-poor'.

In the winter months many people have to choose between eating well and keeping warm. The rise in electricity and gas prices worries people even more than rising food prices. In a very recent conversation in Ludlow with two people aged 86 and 74 we heard that energy prices are 'the thing that can tip you'. They said that there was a time last year when they had wondered how they were going to pay energy costs, and they were afraid that they 'couldn't carry on'.

### ***Benefits***

Some people are reluctant to seek emergency help from the Council, regarding it as 'charity'. Food vouchers may be seen in the same way. In any case, there is uncertainty about the future of the Social Fund, now that it is the responsibility of the local council and not of central government, and now that it is capped and discretionary. A restricted fund will make it hard to meet the demands of a growing elderly population. Another impending policy change is that personal budgets, paid monthly by the County Council, will replace other benefits. Some older people will manage these more easily than others, but there may well be acute anxiety and real hardship. There are a number of good care homes in Ludlow and several sets of sheltered accommodation, but they cater only for those with the necessary capital. The Council allowance is £350 a week, resulting in residents being required to top up from their own resources. A similar demand for payment is made of those who require care at home.

### ***Current services and cutbacks***

Many elderly people live alone and are socially quite isolated. A number of schemes link up people who need personal support with volunteers – these include Healthy Friendships, Shropshire MIND and Age UK (based in Shrewsbury). Alcohol dependence is an increasing problem, particularly for those on medication. One local medical practice has appointed a key worker to help those at risk. There is also a new appointment, supported jointly by the NHS and Age UK, to identify the more vulnerable elderly patients and co-ordinate services to give them support. So there is a limited number of encouraging developments within the NHS and from services outsourced by the Council such as Sustain Consortium which give appropriate service to those in need. A Volunteer Driving scheme exists in Ludlow, as well as the Hospital Car scheme, though there have been complaints about their availability and reliability.

The Guy Thorneycroft Centre is a long established unit providing a programme of activities each Monday when a hot meal is prepared. The purpose-built and well-equipped Helena Lane Centre offers a range of facilities, and about twelve older people attend each day to take advantage of a varied programme of activities. A hot meal may be purchased. The Centre's services are in process of being outsourced and the daily charge will rise to £50, but this could be met from an attender's personal budget. There will be a means and needs assessment to calculate the level of help required, and advisers will be available if necessary to support people in managing their budgets. However, neither of these centres is easily accessible. At present transport to the Helena Lane Centre is available but in future there may be a cost attached to this service. These two Centres could not cater for the much larger population of older people which is expected in the Ludlow area.

The WRVS Meals on Wheels service used to provide hot food, as well as frequent visits. The new delivery of frozen meals on a weekly basis is a poor substitute. Care staff who look after dependent elderly people work to an ever tighter schedule; a half-hour visit allows for little more than immediate

needs of hygiene and clothes-changing. Grants towards the purchase of disability scooters have been available, but many of these grants are likely to be withdrawn and other facilities for disabled people may be under threat. Continuity of services such as these is dependent on commercial or charitable bodies taking them on.

### ***Shortcomings***

Although there are some excellent facilities and caring services within both the voluntary and statutory sectors there is no obvious coordination of provision. Increasingly services are managed by independent organisations supported by a combination of Council grants and charitable giving. Funding is usually time-limited and staff are on short-term contracts. Failure in provision by an agency might well see the Council without the resources to cover the shortfall. Nor is it clear whether the Council or the agency is responsible for ensuring good enough standards of professional performance and delivery of service.

Members of the public are not sure who they should approach for help. People who contact County Hall find that a member of a call-centre team responds to their enquiry, and they need to be very patient and persistent to receive a helpful response. The NHS Booking Service produces a similar degree of frustration for patients making enquiries.

Further shortcomings include the planned move of the GP surgeries out of the town centre, and the proposed loss of the Shropdoc service, to be replaced by a 911 emergency number.

### ***Unacceptable suffering***

We should not accept as inevitable the levels of anxiety and deprivation which are briefly sketched here. Even in a time of financial constraints neither our community nor our country should tolerate them. It is simply not true to say there is no alternative.

### ***Recommendations***

- *Wesley's Café at the Methodist Church in Broad Street is a valuable meeting point. But another town-centre base is also needed, like the Mayfair Centre at Church Stretton, where more socially-isolated elderly people can enjoy companionship and refreshment.*
- *Older People's Forums represent the needs of elderly people in different parts of the county, and it would be useful to have such a Forum in Ludlow.*
- *A co-ordinated volunteer scheme of visitors to older people who are housebound is needed.*

## **The needs of people in the 16-24 age group, especially those who are experiencing low employment options and limited housing options**

We talk about the needs of the 16-24 age group for a number of reasons: they are affected by present and future cuts to services and benefits, the increase in unemployment, the scarcity of training opportunities resulting from the economic recession, the dire shortage of affordable housing, and poor public transport. This age group, of course, includes some young parents with small children.

### ***The needs of the Ludlow area***

The urgent need for more training and employment opportunities in the area for this age group is reflected in the anxieties already felt at school. Ludlow School staff report worries amongst their students about the intense competition for jobs and the lack of training and apprenticeships. Other worries are the availability of higher education and its cost.

With reference to unemployment it has been said that 'the difficulties worsen, the younger you are'. Nationally, unemployment for those aged 16-17 is 38.5%, compared to 20% for 18-24 year olds. These are scandalous statistics, even worse than in southern Europe.

Financial cutbacks and changes are having an impact on this age group, as they are on elderly people. Ludlow College reports no significant impact as yet from the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), even though Ludlow had the highest percentage of EMA students in Shropshire. However, the College is more apprehensive about the introduction next year of the Universal Credit, as families with limited means struggle to survive.

Local surveys also reveal that many people in this age group today feel unsafe and vulnerable. In fact, statistics show that people in this age group are the most frequent victims of crime. Additional worries for 16-24-year-olds in South Shropshire include low wage levels, high house prices, high

private rents, and a shortage of social housing. (On the housing problems, see page 20). Single young men are amongst the most vulnerable members of our community; young parents, too, are not getting as much support as they need.

A less tangible, but no less real need in this age group is for greater understanding and correspondingly less suspicion. A local youth worker, when asked what he wished for, identified not only greater financial resources, but also a change in the perception of young people on the part of adults. An adult can easily feel threatened when she (or even he, especially if an elderly man) walks past a group of noisy, boisterous teenagers in the street. Teenagers easily pick up these negative, entirely understandable 'vibes', especially if they show on the face of the threatened adult. This is not good for the community; older people grow fearful and therefore hostile towards the young, and the young, correspondingly, feel criticised, misunderstood, and therefore hostile in return. More social contact and greater understanding all round will help enormously. The walks organised by 'Walking for Health' in Ludlow which end with lunch at the Ludlow Foyer prepared and served by Foyer residents provide excellent opportunities for such social contact.

### ***Current services***

Shropshire Council operates Ludlow Youth Centre, and a variety of services and activities based there. The Positive Activities Team (PAT) delivers youth clubs and social activities in the evenings and at weekends, including a club for young people with learning and physical disabilities. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) offers advice on higher education, careers and employment, working with young people who are not in education, employment or training. Targeted Youth Support (TYS) is aimed at 13-19-year-olds, especially those who are not in education or training, in order to help them achieve their potential. Another Ofsted-inspected service comprises work with disaffected young people, individually or in groups, in secondary schools within the area allocated to each youth worker.



## The needs of people in the 16-24 age group

In addition to running its own programmes, the Council lets the premises to other organisations, for example to one which runs sessions for young people with special needs. The Centre is open for youth clubs four nights a week, and there are two homework clubs in the early evening. There is scope for more work to be based here and voluntary groups are always welcomed, as are adult volunteers who would like to work with young people aged 10-16, especially people who have skills wanted or needed by this age group, and who are able to teach those skills. For example, the Youth Centre's well-equipped music room is not used at present. Training and support for such volunteers will be available.

The way that youth work is delivered in Shropshire has changed, and further savings which are due in the Council's funding plans will affect current provision. The Council is now looking to voluntary clubs and volunteers to take a more active role to supplement its own services. The restructuring which has already taken place has been challenging enough for staff, who recognise that youth work in Ludlow will become even more difficult as more young people feel disaffected with their current situation and with diminishing support services.

Ludlow Foyer, one of over 130 Foyers in the UK, provides 'a supportive environment for young people (16-25) moving towards independence'. Foyers offer training and housing-related support. They also operate a crash-pad facility for 16- and 17-year-olds deemed by Shropshire Council to be vulnerable or in housing crisis. The Foyer benefited from being adopted as the Mayor of Ludlow's charity for 2011-12. Its café, staffed by residents and former residents, is open on Tuesdays. In a welcome new development the Foyer management plans to develop this Tuesday provision into a community 'hub', where people can access local organisations and services, such as the CAB and the police.

The South Shropshire Youth Forum, based at the Rockspring Centre, offers social and educational opportunities for 9-25-year-olds. Its activities include awareness programmes about alcohol, drugs and sexual health. It runs a drop-in centre for housing problems, which can be acute for some young people in the upper reaches of this age group. However, the present Lottery

The needs of people in the 16-24 age group

grant, which provides about two-thirds of the Forum's funding, runs out next year, and new funding is urgently needed.

Other groups working with or for children and young people in Ludlow include the Grow Cook Share scheme, which is based at Rockspring, and which runs free gardening clubs and cookery clubs for three partner schools. There is also Community Action, which helps with funding such organisations as Rockspring Holiday Club and the Rockspring Youth and Homework Clubs. The excellent HomeStart scheme, whose support to young families has been identified as particularly valuable, has seen its funding reduced. This is a decision which seems to ignore the value of the most cost-effective organisation working in this field.

Training and employment opportunities in our area for this age group are crucial. So we commend the recent initiative taken in 2012 by John Aitken, former Mayor of Ludlow, in launching the new charitable trust Young Shropshire in Work which will focus on the 16-24 age group and help them by removing the barriers to employment and training, building good relationships with local businesses, matching young people to vacancies available locally, and offering mentoring and support. But it is early days, and this new initiative will need support.

### ***Recommendations***

*The working group considers it vital to consult people in this age group more widely than we have so far been able to do. With that important acknowledgement, we make the following recommendations:*

- *a drop-in centre, for both single people and parents, (staffed by volunteers but with professional help) that is capable of helping young people towards training, work experience, employment opportunities and support systems*
- *an agency to recruit suitable volunteers for existing organisations for this age group.*

Although this report focuses on older people at risk and on people in the 16-24 group who are at serious risk in the current shortage of jobs and training opportunities, we are aware of the often dire prospects for older people of getting any other job should they be made redundant. It is estimated that people aged over 40 are often very unlikely to get full-time employment again.

## **Improved transport**

The shortage of accessible, affordable transport in a rural area particularly affects many elderly people and people in the 16-24 age group who have no use of a car – but also, of course, many other people.

### ***Present needs and future requirements***

We pay tribute here to the work done by the voluntary organisation Ludlow 21.

There are significant gaps in Ludlow's transport services, and cuts in local authority spending are threatening existing services and concessions. In addition, planned changes to other services, eg the creation of the new health village, will create new transport requirements that cannot be met within current resources. With more elderly and less mobile people in the local population in future years, accessible transport will become even more important. According to the 2001 census, 26.9% of Ludlow households had no car.

As this report has already noted, the proportion of Ludlow's population with one or more disabilities is increasing. Key obstacles in Ludlow and the rest of Shropshire include at present a lack of low-floor bus services and poor enforcement of disabled parking spaces. These affect not just elderly and disabled people, but also parents with buggies and those without cars. Nor is Ludlow railway station disability-friendly: the only alternative to the footbridge between platforms is a long steep path, with no staff available to help.

A 2006 Shropshire Council survey revealed that the public's top three priorities for improvements to transport were:

- more controlled road crossings
- more access to voluntary/community transport
- more frequent and more accessible bus services.

### ***Some current services***

A full survey of transport services in, from, and around Ludlow can be found on the CTAL website ([www.ctaludlow.org.uk](http://www.ctaludlow.org.uk)). Here we note two particular schemes and concessions:

- Shropshire Council runs a Voluntary Car Scheme which assists those aged 60 and over, or young people with special needs, to make essential visits such as medical appointments. 20 x £1 vouchers are available as a concession towards the use of the scheme but only as an alternative to the concessionary National Bus Pass. This scheme operates in the Ludlow area.
- Shropshire Council currently provides a free concessionary National Bus Pass to people aged over 60 and people with disabilities. Many older people use these passes a great deal. However there are rumours that charges could be introduced for them, or that they could be withdrawn partially or completely, as part of local or national Government cuts. Shropshire Council is apparently also considering introducing a £10 charge for the currently-free Disabled Person's Parking Permit.

### ***Services not currently provided in Ludlow***

Community transport schemes operate in Church Stretton, Bishop's Castle and Corvedale, but, apart from the Shropshire Link service, there is no equivalent in Ludlow. A local community transport scheme is under investigation and a survey of public opinion on the subject has recently been completed as part of Shropshire Council's Ludlow Sustainable Transport Project. Such a scheme could be operated by a charity, a voluntary community organisation or a social enterprise (eg a Charitable Incorporated Organisation).

Another scheme operating elsewhere is a local Car Club, through which members of the public could hire cars for short periods. This, too, has been the subject of a survey as part of the Ludlow Sustainable Transport Project,

but there seems to be little interest, perhaps because most people without their own cars are unable or unwilling to drive themselves, due to age, disability or other reasons. However it seems likely that a trial will go ahead.

Shopmobility schemes operate in Oswestry, Shrewsbury, Telford and Hereford. The very large number of visitors to Ludlow suggests that such a scheme would be popular and successful here.

There are very few cycle lanes in Ludlow, and most of these come to an end abruptly when the road narrows. As it is, the congestion, illegal parking and narrow roads make cycling difficult and dangerous. Users of mobility scooters are also at risk from other road users, and they themselves are a risk to pedestrians, particularly in the town centre. The number of mobility scooters is likely to increase, particularly if a Shopmobility scheme is introduced.

The new health village at the Eco Park, which will house Ludlow Hospital and both GP surgeries, currently located in the town centre, will require significant improvements in transport and access for town centre residents. One extra pressure, noted in a recent conversation with elderly people, occurs when medical appointments before 9.30 am are given to older people who cannot use their concessionary bus passes until after that time.

The new health village also means that Ludlow town services will need to be extended to areas not currently covered (eg Linney), and all buses will need to have low floors and be wheelchair- and buggy-friendly. Additional bus shelters will also be needed, as well as controlled crossings, improved footways and dropped kerbs. Finally, a foot and buggy/wheelchair/bicycle bridge will be needed over the A49.

### ***Recommendations***

- *Lobby Shropshire Council for improvements in accessibility of train services, inaccessibility, range and frequency of bus services, for better parking enforcement, and more footways and crossings.*
- *As setting up and running a community transport scheme as a registered charity, a voluntary community organisation or a social enterprise would be costly and difficult, support a local community transport scheme set up by others. Such support could be financial (buying or leasing vehicles or office/garage space) or human (volunteer administrators, mechanics, and drivers).*
- *Shopmobility is another option, but would be less visible, though probably be easier and cheaper to set up and run. The safety risks to and from mobility scooters in Ludlow mean that this is probably a less fruitful area to explore.*

There is scope here for consultation and cooperation between groups in the community which are concerned about transport.

## **Housing needs**

The housing situation in Britain continues to be a national scandal, partly the result of neglect or mismanagement by successive governments over many years. Nationally 5 million people are on social housing waiting lists, and millions more are dependent on private landlords who experience limited controls upon their behaviour – unlike in Germany, where they are not allowed arbitrarily to impose dramatic rent increases.

Ludlow and South Shropshire are no exception to the general rule. The working group was told by our MP and by a member of Shropshire Council that housing problems are the most frequent matters raised in their regular surgeries.

According to Ludlow Town Council a proportion of the local housing stock now falls below the 'decent homes' standard for heating, insulation, repair, health hazards and modern facilities. This relatively inefficient housing contributes both to fuel poverty and to a high carbon footprint.

Ludlow and the surrounding villages attract retired people and second-home owners. This inflates house prices for other residents, and reduces the stock of housing available for local people. It also accentuates a division in the community between poorer and more affluent people. Such private housing development as there is at the present time serves only the more wealthy. Comparing current market prices with average local earnings, housing affordability in South Shropshire is among the worst in England.

### ***Social housing***

There is also a very severe shortage of rented social accommodation. Former council-owned properties are now managed by Shropshire Housing Group, but they do not expect to add to the existing stock of affordable homes in the coming years. The 2001 census found that 18.9% of households in Ludlow rent from the local authority, from a housing association or from a registered social landlord. The Housing Group currently has 597 people in Ludlow alone registered on its waiting list, and every vacancy has on average 55 people applying. It has been estimated



that those people in their 40s who are currently on a social housing waiting list are unlikely to be allocated any such accommodation in their lifetimes. Currently there is no social housing at all available for single people in the Ludlow area.

The Housing Group is providing outstanding and imaginative service in many ways, but continues to suffer the uncertainty created by successive government announcements about local planning and the likely availability of housing finance.

Temporary emergency accommodation for homeless people is the statutory responsibility of Shropshire Council and, with the demise of the South Shropshire District Council, provision is managed from Shrewsbury. It must be applied for by telephone (on an expensive 0845 number) to a switchboard in Shrewsbury, and applications must be made directly by the homeless person and not on their behalf by any third party. Any request received in this way will then be handled within the Council's administrative network, with a view to out-sourced commercial accommodation being found in the Ludlow area, according to availability.

### ***The dangers of the impending introduction of Universal Credit***

The housing crisis involves the biggest political challenge out of the four key needs in this report. The working group accepts that the level and nature of housing benefits needs to be re-examined, though whether in the way and at the speed currently being implemented is more open to question. Group members have been told repeatedly by members of the medical and other caring professions that introduction of a Universal Credit that must be self-managed may produce very serious risks for people who have no bank account or who have limited financial-management skills, especially for those who have visual impairments or learning difficulties. One danger relating specifically to social housing is that if house rents are no longer paid direct to the housing provider, tenants who lack the necessary skills, understanding, or self-discipline will be especially vulnerable to doorstep

pressures from informal debt-collectors. Such operators will successfully obtain money that should in fact be reserved for the payment of house rent, with the result that vulnerable people may quickly accumulate impossibly large rent arrears and as a result become liable to eviction and homelessness. There are great dangers in making unrealistic assumptions about the 'improved well-being' that will automatically flow from 'reduced benefit dependency' sought by introducing the Universal Credit.

It remains to be seen whether new government initiatives will relieve the appalling levels of human suffering and deprivation behind national housing statistics.

***Recommendation***

- *A sustained informed campaign addressed to whichever political party has a majority either at Westminster or in Shrewsbury for a greater measure of housing justice. That will involve some major changes in policy, and some major new building initiatives.*

## **The wider picture**

The focus of this report is Ludlow, but the crisis which we all face is brought about by pressures on a national and global scale. We are dealing not with a little local difficulty but with major changes in the wider world.

The present recession should have ended any assumption that economic growth and improving standards of living will continue indefinitely. There is always pressure on governments – including the pressure of the next election – to concentrate on the short term. But we cannot ignore the long-term future of humankind and the wellbeing of future generations. This wider crisis will require a major readjustment by all of us in the years ahead.

### ***Inequality, global and national***

Inequality is a major concern. Globally, industrialised nations have the power to maintain their privileged position, at least in the short term. They claim an unfairly large share of the world's natural resources. Emerging nations challenge that imbalance, and unless there are major concessions there is likely to be increasing military conflict over access to the finite resources of oil, gas, minerals and water. Investment in expensive renewable sources or the development of nuclear power will add to the pressure on welfare, health and education budgets.

Inequality leads to unstable, stressed communities and countries. Recent experience and research suggest that societies thrive better where there is less disparity in living standards. But in recent decades the gulf between rich and poor in the UK has widened, evidenced in the lavish life style of the privileged and at the same time in the growth of food banks and child poverty.

### ***Climate change***

Climate change, too, is happening and human activity is a major contributor. Many parts of the world are experiencing extreme weather conditions. Drought and flooding threaten food production, pushing up food

prices and making famine relief much more difficult. In sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, there is enormous suffering. But household budgets are affected world-wide, including in our own country, and including the budgets of families who have previously enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. Local farmers struggle to remain competitive in a global market.

### ***The current economic crisis and its consequences***

The global, and more particularly the European, economy is in crisis. Nations have lived on credit, assuming that their economies would continue to grow. Faith in financial institutions has now been shattered. Austerity measures provide no long-term solution and have already resulted in increasing unemployment and expenditure on benefits. Civil unrest reflects the anger of disillusioned and marginalised people as is happening in Greece and Spain at present and was felt, briefly but sharply, in the UK disturbances of 2011, riots in part perpetrated by those who feel they have no stake in society.

The context of Ludlow under pressure is a world under pressure, which cannot be ignored. We have to manage the consequences of all this if our society is to flourish. We shall need to order our personal lives and institutions very differently, and to face the future with a greater sense of urgency, and with greater personal and spiritual resources than in the recent past. But crucial and critical though the wider picture is, it does not alter the need for us to do what we can now in Ludlow, particularly for the neediest people. Justice, local and global, remains a moral imperative. 'Think globally, act locally' is a good motto for us all.

A fuller discussion of the argument here can be found on the CTAL website ([www.ctludlow.org.uk](http://www.ctludlow.org.uk)).

## **Key resources**

The main provider of funding to Ludlow is central government, which funds benefits and council services, and the main provider of services is Shropshire Council.

### ***Shropshire Council***

On top of previous large cuts Shropshire Council is aiming to reduce spending by £20,171,000 for 2012-13, by £17,834,000 for 2013-14 and by £9,220,000 for 2014-15 (these were the 2011 projections). Parallel major economies are also required within the West Mercia Police and the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Shropshire Council have stated their commitment to 'protection of frontline services (particularly for families and the most vulnerable)'. However, we in the working group question whether services can be maintained at a satisfactory level in the medium and long term. For example, whilst we welcome some of the aims of the recent initiative Investing in Communities, including the shift from dependency, entitlements and 'wants' to needs; that is surely right, especially in the light of what are rightly called 'significant funding pressures'. But will the new way of working meet all needs, or achieve the Council's nine stated outcomes? These outcomes are to be welcomed. But ensuring everyone has 'a decent place to live' (for example) is not going to be achieved without major new policy initiatives which are adequately funded.

We in the working group fear that the principle of a well-managed welfare state – a fair and predictable standard of provision, irrespective of the recipient's ability to pay – is under threat. Local authorities are encouraged to become commissioners of service rather than providers. We are disturbed by sweeping statements in the media about people who depend on benefits as misusing the social security system. There are abuses to remedy, though not as many as the media would have us believe, and there is a danger that a severe reduction of public sector provision will force people to fall back on to charitable funding. Local authorities are encouraged to become commissioners of service rather than providers.

This is the unavoidable background to current trends. Shropshire Council's policy is to outsource many services which it had previously staffed and managed. Voluntary agencies and local enterprises are given grants to develop services in the community. (Shropshire Housing and the South Shropshire Furniture Scheme do outstanding work locally). But the franchising of social welfare makes less clear who is accountable: the provider or the Council? Changes like these are driven by the need to reduce budgets and demand. But can this be achieved without sacrificing the quality and range of services?

Shropshire Youth Services have suffered severe cuts over many years and have recently implemented savings of 38%. Operational staff have adapted well, but how much longer can they maintain current levels of service if further cuts have to be made? We in the working group believe we detect some wishful thinking in political circles. The Council acknowledges that further savings due in the Children's and Young People's Directorate will have 'service delivery implications'.

Recent local experience shows that such services, especially educational programmes such as the recent successful alcohol-awareness programme at Ludlow Youth Centre, cannot be provided solely by volunteers. (And investment in preventative programmes is surely preferable to much greater expenditure on control and criminal justice measures).

### ***Voluntary organisations***

Volunteers are a key resource and do have an important part to play in youth work and in many other areas. We have been impressed by the range and quality of care provided by voluntary organisations in and around Ludlow. Many of them are doing outstanding work to help people in need with ingenuity and commitment. The South Shropshire Furniture Scheme, employing 25+ staff and 90+ volunteers, and offering training opportunities to young people, is an outstanding local example of a social enterprise and charity. There is a long list of organisations on the CTAL website ([www.ctaludlow.org.uk](http://www.ctaludlow.org.uk)), and we welcome information from those which are not yet on that list.

During 2012, thanks to the initiative of Nicola North of Ludlow Relief in Need and Sam Hine of Communities Can, over thirty representatives of local voluntary organisations (including the churches) and some of the statutory services met twice at the Rockspring Centre to share experiences, problems and opportunities.

Now a new initiative is being undertaken. The aim of Ask the Rockspring will be to make support options as simple and accessible as possible, so that people in Ludlow can get the help, advice, and support they need. This will involve recruiting and training a number of volunteers to become experts in signposting people to the services and support they are looking for. If, as seems likely, social needs increase and resources diminish, this kind of centre will be invaluable in promoting efficient collaboration between voluntary bodies and integrated care in the community.

Many voluntary organisations are under severe financial pressure at a time when demand on their services is growing. Those which depend on official funding are struggling as grants are withdrawn or cut. Charitable funds cannot possibly meet the shortfall. Shropshire Housing Group's funding has been severely reduced. The work of the CAB has almost doubled in the past year and yet they face a 20% reduction in their funding over the coming three years. HomeStart is starved of funds and depends on the dedicated efforts of a few people. Voluntary organisations need more donations and volunteer time.

### ***Individual volunteers, and their limitations***

Mutual help and self-help are flourishing. As well as volunteering with organisations in the Ludlow area, many people give help in the form of family and neighbourly care. But there is an urgent need for more volunteers, and the working group trusts that many more people will come forward if the needs addressed by this report become more widely known.

However, gaps in trimmed-back social services cannot automatically be filled by volunteers. Social care, policing, social work intervention and youth

leadership require training and cannot be picked up effectively by people who are simply good-hearted.

Whatever the resources, they need to benefit the many, not only the few. The UK's political, economic, and financial systems may not be in good working order at present, but we can all play our part in our local community.



## **What can the churches contribute?**

### ***The churches and politics***

Some past attempts by churches to challenge social policy have been dismissed as unwarranted meddling in politics. One response in the 1980s to the Church of England's report *Faith in the City* condemned it as a 'Marxist manifesto'. A more recent political voice claimed 'We don't do God'. But Christians should most certainly do politics, for politics is about how society orders itself in the interests of all its people. The churches and the government should share a concern for social justice. So whichever party or parties are in power, the Church has a moral imperative to speak truth to power. The truth isn't always easy to see, but we have to try to see it, and that includes observing and listening to what is really going on.

### ***Prophetic communities***

Governments face complex decisions when deciding on priorities within limited resources, so tough decisions have to be made. The emerging economic crisis is bound to involve the reduction of some benefits we have previously received. Yet churches are called to be prophetic communities, sometimes speaking uncomfortable truths to those in power and asking searching questions about contemporary capitalism – a system now so clearly under strain. In this prophetic role the churches must always seek to protect the most vulnerable people in the community, as well as being concerned for the whole community, not just those who attend its worship.

### ***Practising what we preach***

The churches cannot exhort governments to re-order their priorities unless they take a hard look at how they use their own resources.

Each of us also has to look at our personal life style and decide what we can do to reduce inequality, protect the environment, and relieve suffering.

## ***Changing what we can***

Contrary to what is often supposed, Christian faith does not concentrate on heaven to the exclusion of earthly matters; it calls people to be instruments of God's love and to work for a better world. For some Christians, this means playing a full part in civic affairs. The churches also encourage values beyond the economic which enable a community to thrive, values such as neighbourliness, trust and justice.

## ***A snapshot of the churches' current work***

All the members of Churches Together Around Ludlow which have accessible 'customer-friendly' premises make them available to other organisations. For example, some twenty organisations use the Parish Room at St Peter's Roman Catholic Church. The Methodist Church and the Quaker Meeting House are also extensively used, the former accommodating for example, the important new service Options, a pregnancy advising service.

The churches work together to run Wesley's Café, which is open six days a week at the Methodist Church. They also all run their own programmes. Regular events for people who have no connection with the churches include the lunch club at the Baptist Church, the drop-in centre and Youth Club at Elim Church, and the parents and toddlers' and mums and tots' clubs at St John's (Church of England) and the Methodist Church. The St Vincent de Paul Society (St Peter's) works with people on the margins of society, and gardening and DIY work for elderly people are organised by the Elim and Living Waters churches. Occasional or annual events include Swap-Shops (Baptists), the Pudding Festival during the Ludlow Food Festival (Methodists) and the many civic events hosted by St Laurence's (Church of England).

The number of volunteers from all the congregations is very large. For example, as well as caring for members of their own churches (as in the St Laurence's Link scheme) volunteers assist with transport to hospital and doctors' surgeries for isolated, elderly people, and lead 'walks for health' for them and their carers. (These walks are also appreciated by Ludlow Foyer

What can the churches contribute?

residents – see the section on the 16-24 age group). Volunteering by church members covers a wide range of organisations and activities, including the CAB, HomeStart, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, and Ludlow College. (For more details see the CTAL website, [www.ctaludlow.org.uk](http://www.ctaludlow.org.uk)).

### ***On not giving up***

Belief in God gives hope that even bleak situations can be transformed, and it helps people to realise that those situations are not inevitable. Christians take the view that, with God's help, humankind can create a more compassionate and peaceful society. We believe that the churches have a vital role in enabling the community to meet the challenges ahead.

For a fuller discussion of some of these issues, see 'A Christian perspective on the current crisis in the UK' on the CTAL website, ([www.ctaludlow.org.uk](http://www.ctaludlow.org.uk)).

## What needs to be done?

It is, of course, easier to criticise than to propose practical solutions. There are many people right across our community who are working to implement solutions, but are finding they are aiming at a constantly changing set of targets in a fast-moving situation. As a next step in this long, hard process we offer for discussion the recommendations made in this report:

*For older people at risk, especially those who are isolated and housebound, those who are living in fuel poverty, and the increasing numbers of people affected by present and future cutbacks in services:*

- *a centre in the town centre, staffed by volunteers, but with professional help, to which older people can come for companionship, refreshment and support*
- *a Forum which will represent their concerns and interests*
- *a co-ordinated volunteer scheme of visitors.*

*For people in the 16-24 age group, especially those who are experiencing low employment options and limited housing options:*

- *a drop-in centre, for both single people and parents, (staffed by volunteers but with professional help) that is capable of helping young people towards training, work experience, employment opportunities and support systems*
- *an agency to recruit suitable volunteers for existing organisations for this age group.*

*To meet transport needs:*

- *lobby Shropshire Council for improvements in services, for better parking enforcement, and more footways and crossings*
- *explore options for new community transport schemes.*

*To meet housing needs:*

- *a sustained, informed campaign for a greater measure of housing justice.*

These recommendations will be fully explored, and a programme drawn up for their eventual implementation. But we suggest that after the recommendations have been thoroughly explored, and no doubt improvements made, they form the substance of a five-year plan to try to meet the key needs identified in this report.

This report is a call to action – a call, in the first place, to the churches. But, since the needs we have identified are so great, and growing all the time, we hope that the wider community will respond as well.

*Two more things follow from all of this:*

- *A volunteering community: The need for more volunteers in all kinds of care and community work will keep growing. We can all help our neighbours. Ludlow's voluntary bodies, too, need our support: our time, skills, experience, knowledge, donations, and fund-raising.*
- *Ludlow together: We all need to join forces to do together what none of us can do on our own. It will be important to share information between individuals and organisations, to avoid duplication of effort.*

## **What next?**

At the 2012 AGM of Churches Together Around Ludlow on 29 November the working group is hoping for:

- a commitment by each member church to accept and work with the above recommendations, including a new initiative to raise levels of volunteering
- a commitment to a continuing watching brief on Ludlow's needs
- a commitment to work with those organisations which attended the Ludlow in Need conferences held during 2012, and organisations with environmental concerns. The Town Council should also be a major partner in any action which stems from this report.

We believe that, with the rising levels of need – often desperate need – around us, the churches of Ludlow and the whole community are facing one of the biggest challenges we have faced in many years. Justice for the poorest and the most vulnerable people means giving them their due as human beings and as children of God. Christian belief in God both compels action and gives hope.

## **Members of the working group**

Mike Beazley, Tim Coles, Michael Day, Barry Forrester, Dave Lines, Viv Parry, Neil Richardson (Chair), Colin Sheward, Laurence Taylor, Penny Wake; Margaret Edwardson (minutes). With thanks to Wendy Bartlett for editorial assistance.

## Recent experiences and opinions

The working group met with a series of local informants to listen to their experiences and opinions. Some felt able to speak on behalf of their organisations, in which case their main points are summarised below.

**John Aitken, former Mayor of Ludlow, Ludlow Town Council** (October 2011)

The Town Council has limited statutory functions, but is concerned that the demise of the South Shropshire District Council should not damage the ways in which social needs in and around the town are addressed. The detailed *Ludlow future plan for 2010-2015*, based on current statistical information and extensive public consultation, published in December 2010, was read by the CTAL group. Despite the passage of time, the main thrust of the analysis and of the priorities adopted remains valid. Some of the key statistics are:

- The population of Shropshire and particularly of Ludlow is growing rapidly, almost entirely due to movement into the area by people of retirement age. 25% of Ludlow's population is aged over 65, and over 52% are over 45. The number of 75+ year olds has increased by over 43% since 1991, while the number of 16-19 year olds has decreased by over 24%. The lack of employment opportunities and affordable housing means that young people who leave to study can rarely afford to return to Ludlow.
- Ludlow is generally affluent because of the incoming retirees but has wards where deprivation ranks among the worst 20% of wards in England.
- Housing affordability and social housing availability are among the worst in England, and much of the cheaper housing stock falls below recognised 'decent homes' standards.
- Unemployment in and around Ludlow has for many years been below the national average, but the official figures disguise the number of people in low-paid, part-time, casual and seasonal employment.

Ludlow Town Council has adopted and published a range of objectives and

actions, together with indications of funding sources, target dates and ways of measuring success. These are broken down into sections on Youth, the Elderly, Residents, the Economy, Environment, Affordable Housing, and the Town Centre.

**Iona Aylen, Citizens Advice Shropshire – South Shropshire Bureau**  
(January 2012)

The Bureau is open three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday and has about 20 volunteers. Volunteer tasks vary from reception and IT through to Gateway and Generalist Advisers. It takes approximately 12-18 months to train as a Generalist Adviser and 3-6 months to train as a Gateway Assessor. The main resource people are the retired. There has been a rise, across the county, of volunteers in their early 20s possibly due to the lack of job opportunities and the possibility that this type of work will be helpful in obtaining a permanent position or strengthening a CV. The majority of funding for Citizens Advice Shropshire comes from the local authority. This funding has been cut by 20% over the 3 years 2011-2014, at a time when the service is seeing an increase in demand.

The number of people within the local area requiring help in specific problem areas has risen in recent months. Local Citizens Advice Shropshire statistics show that during the six month period to October 2011 the number of people presenting with welfare and benefit problems was 432, whilst in the previous 12 months the number presenting the same problem was 506. This increase is likely to continue with changes due to welfare reform coming into effect in 2013. Clients may present with one problem but on interview it often becomes apparent that the presenting problem is intertwined with others.

In CAB experience there is usually a dip in people presenting with problems around the Christmas/New Year period. This did not happen in 2011. Over the last year they have seen an increase in the number of clients presenting with welfare issues following changes to their employment status. Some of this group of people have never had to claim benefits before and request



assistance in understanding how the system works and may be concerned about making their mortgage or rental payments.

Some clients, currently in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, are experiencing additional strain at present as their current eligibility for benefit is being reassessed for transfer across to a new benefit, Employment and Support Allowance. This may require a medical assessment. Incapacity Benefit is a benefit paid to people unable, due to illness, to carry out the job they were originally doing, as long as the claimant meets certain eligibility criteria. The new Employment and Support Allowance considers whether the applicant is capable of carrying out any type of work. Citizens Advice, both locally and nationally, has expressed concern, through its Social Policy Work, with regards to the medical assessment. If clients are found fit to work, as a result of the medical assessment, they have the right to appeal this decision. Whilst appealing they will receive benefit at the lower assessment rate, which can add further financial pressures and this appeal can take several months to get to a tribunal for a decision, which is an added stress.

Although Citizens Advice agree that the current benefits system requires reform, the scale of these changes and the speed with which they are to be implemented will have a significant impact on local people. One of the main changes will be the introduction of Universal Credit. This new benefit will replace all means-tested benefits and tax credits. All existing working-age benefits (such as Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support and Working Tax Credit) will be subsumed within one monthly household payment of Universal Credit. It'll be paid to people both in and out of work. Changes in the way housing benefit rates are set will mean that fewer properties will be available to rent within the benefit rates available. This change will adversely affect those single clients, aged under 35 with no dependents, who will only be eligible for the shared room rate of Local Housing Allowance. CAB is also experiencing a number of young people attending who require help in completing forms due to their level of literacy.

**Philip Dunne MP** (March 2012)

An important role for the voluntary sector is to seize opportunities and

expand its activities. Several charities have a secure base and government can look to them as credible partners for help where government agencies are not delivering acceptable outcomes. Some voluntary sector bodies are large enough to support or supplant relevant existing government provision, for instance in relation to children services, such as Barnado's provide in Australia, or supporting those with medical conditions in which charities specialise, such as the blind. There are well-established ways of commissioning such agencies to perform specific services.

Unemployment has been relatively static in Shropshire with only modest increases locally in the past couple of years, although there has been some reduction in part-time hours worked. There have been recent increases in local firms taking on new staff. The bigger problem is youth unemployment, partly linked to the severe lack of local low-cost housing. New more effective policies are intended to tackle this.

Transport problems are an acknowledged challenge in rural areas, especially for those seeking work, but are to some extent being addressed by Dial-a-Ride and volunteer driver schemes.

The move to Universal Credit may cause some concern initially, but will simplify a very complex welfare system and encourage claimants into work. For those unable to work it will provide continuing support, while also reducing Incapacity Benefit abuse.

Developed western economies will see relative standards of living under pressure. This is partly the result of huge global economic, geopolitical and climate changes with influence shifting towards emerging growth economies. In this context the coalition government wants to encourage a society where people who can take responsibility for their own lives, with government itself and 'the big society' at large focussing their help on those who cannot.

**Rev. Jon Edwards, Ludlow Baptist Church and Rev. Ann Barge, St Laurence's Church** (December 2011)

Over the last couple of years the community has become more closed: whereas at one time bits of work were available to a wider number of people, these odd days of employment are now kept among a closer set of people, i.e. within the family. This has had the knock-on effect that those on benefit were worse off than previously. Within the Sandpits area there are now only a handful of families with both parents employed. The requests for CTAL food parcels have doubled in the last 2½ years. Many of these referrals come from Shropshire Housing and CAB. An estimate would be that of those in social housing, 75% would be receiving some form of benefit.

Among this 75%, young people are the most greatly affected. Lack of money means people are housebound, underemployed, or suffering boredom, which leads to under-age drinking and unsocial behaviour. The lack of youth services within the area exacerbates the situation. The boxing club was a wonderful resource and the football club when it was up and running did a great deal for the youth of Ludlow.

Whatever might be provided for these young people, those working with them must be prepared for periods of anti-social behaviour within the group, and it would be of great value to all to involve people who lived in the Sandpits area as volunteers.

Although young men have a huge problem in obtaining employment, young women are in a worse position. Some of them appear to have very little self-esteem. A huge change in the mind-set of these young women would be needed for them to feel valued.

There are also many elderly people who are isolated and need to be reached.

**Martin Holland, Chief Executive, Shropshire Housing Group** (October 2011)

The housing crisis is more serious than at any time during the last thirty years. With a cutback of 68% in government funding for new build, it will be impossible to increase the social housing stock – there will be perhaps 5 or 6 new houses in Ludlow over the next few years. Government at national and local levels is shedding responsibility for housing, and hoping that the private sector and housing associations will pick it up. Nationally the problem is just as serious in rural areas as it is in urban areas where attention is usually directed.

There is also a very severe shortage of rented social accommodation. Former council-owned properties are now managed by Shropshire Housing Group, but they do not expect to add substantially to the existing stock of affordable homes in the coming years. The Group currently has 597 people in Ludlow alone registered on its waiting list, and every vacancy has on average 55 people applying. Single people and couples without children will have to wait many years on the housing register and many are unlikely to be allocated any such accommodation before they die. Currently there is very little social housing at all available for single people below retirement age in the Ludlow area.

‘Homelessness’ has a statutory definition based on housing legislation and national regulations, and this definition sets out who the Council has a legal responsibility to house. There will therefore be lots of people who many would consider to be ‘homeless’ but who don’t actually fit the government definition and therefore do not get any practical help – only advice. Homelessness is now the responsibility of Shropshire Council, and, with the demise of the South Shropshire District Council, is managed from Shrewsbury.

The terms ‘social housing’ and ‘affordable housing’ can also be confusing and different local authorities have different definitions. Broadly speaking however ‘social housing’ is considered to be any property which has been

subsidised in its construction from government funding and then either let or sold at sub-market rates (rented housing, 'part rent part buy' schemes etc).

'Affordable housing' on the other hand should be considered as any form of tenure which is affordable by the majority of the people in the community. This could therefore include social housing but might also include low cost housing for sale or housing for rent at below market rates. Individuals might need to use benefits to pay for these housing costs but can still 'afford' to buy or rent the property. There is almost no property in this area which is for sale and which is 'affordable' to the majority of people.

### **Lyn Hosking, Shropshire Council Youth Services (January 2012)**

Shropshire Council Youth Services offer:

- Positive activities, including youth clubs and social activities
- Information, advice and guidance, formerly known as 'Connexions'
- Targeted youth support, for young people needing extra help and guidance to ensure they reach their potential (this includes working with young people not in education or training, and is aimed at 13-19-year-olds).

Since local government re-organisation there has been a reduction of 38% in the service. Youth workers cover all the secondary schools within their area. Individual work or group work is done with disaffected young people. Each school has a designated person to oversee referrals, usually the deputy head teacher. Close monitoring takes place to ensure that the required outcomes are achieved and the overall service is Ofsted-inspected.

Concern was expressed that the Youth Centre premises in Ludlow are not used sufficiently and discussion took place around the possibility of the opening hours being extended and activities run by volunteers. But volunteers, no matter how willing and competent in life, do not have the skills to engage with some of these disengaged young people. Discussion highlighted the difficulty in providing for the diverse range of requirements

within the area. The cutting of the Youth Services budget has added to the problems, and more young people are slipping through the net. Finding training and housing for young people will continue to be a problem in coming years.

**Jean Jarvis, South Shropshire Furniture Scheme** (February 2012)

The initial idea of the Scheme when it was set up in the 1990s was to provide unwanted furniture to people who were in need. Much of what was donated was too large for the homes of the Scheme's clients, so the Renaissance Centre was organised to sell the larger furniture, much of which was good quality. Some of the quality furniture needed refurbishment prior to being sold, so a carpentry workshop was set up employing staff, offering training, and providing work experience.

The Scheme has recently taken over the running of the Ludlow Rockspring Centre, having been asked for help when the Centre was likely to close, and now providing support to families living locally.

As the Scheme has continued to evolve it has become a fast-growing Social Enterprise, providing training and work experience for the long-term unemployed, and taking on people as part of the Community Service Order scheme. People come to the Scheme through both private and public sources i.e. West Mercia Probation Trust, and Training Contract and Skills agencies facilitated through Shropshire Council.

A lot of young men in the 18-25 age range are referred, never having worked. A number of these are now employed by the Scheme. More recently there has been a rise in the number of men in their 50s being referred. Many of these men have worked locally on a casual basis for a large part of their lives but much of this work is not now available.

The Scheme is constantly looking for ways to increase revenue and looking for organisations offering grants. There is always a cash flow problem.

**Clive Paddock, Shropshire Council Support Services** (November 2011)

The working group were not given permission by Shropshire Council to print our summary of our conversation with Clive Paddock, then Head of Support Services, now no longer employed by them. We were informed by a Council spokesperson that that summary did not reflect Council policy then or now. So the space below represents this gap which we cannot fill. However, we go on to add our own reflection on that discussion.

We were given to understand that a support network consisting of the Foyer, two hostels, and intensive support programmes was used by the Council to help vulnerable families and young people, and people with mental-health needs and learning disabilities. If so, it seems sad that this wasn't and isn't Council policy. We were also given to understand that Support Services currently had a programme working with young people over a period of two years, and that, due to funding cuts, this programme would be reduced to sixteen weeks. Presumably, this wasn't or isn't Council policy either. We got the impression that a co-ordinated effort by the voluntary sector would be necessary to fill gaps left by the statutory services. That comes as no surprise. However, we came away from this discussion with the impression that volunteer groups may be able to get guidance from Shropshire Council about which areas are most in need of help. But perhaps that never was – and isn't – Council policy, which would be a pity.

**Councillor Martin Taylor-Smith, Shropshire Council** (March 2012)

Shropshire Council's current income and expenditure amount to £624m, of which £408m comes from government and other grants.

The priorities and criteria that have guided the Council in determining where budget cuts should be made were approved in its Medium-Term Financial Plan (February 2011), setting out priorities for reshaping the role of the Council and redesigning service delivery. While some areas of expenditure – including General Fund Housing and Locality Working (devolved budgets) – have seen cuts in excess of 20%, every effort has been made to keep budget reductions on Safeguarding and Care in relation to vulnerable adults and children below 10%. Having made these cuts, the Council's highest priorities remain protecting the vulnerable and delivering a flourishing Shropshire economy.

The Council supports government's policy of introducing personal budgets so that those eligible for social care support can buy their choice of suitably-charged day-time services. In the words of one councillor, 'we want to develop a service that meets the needs of our customers and at the same time make the savings due to Government cuts'.

The Council sees the role of the voluntary sector as being a key contributor to the future of public service delivery. To this end it seeks to give the sector more commercial expertise and capacity in winning work, building stronger links between the sector and Shropshire's business community, and support for social enterprises and health sector provision. In this context, the Council seeks to revamp its approach to procurement and commissioning by moving from largely grant-based funding towards payment by results.

The Council is also reshaping its management approach to bring greater localism through new Area Directors, and giving local communities the lion's share of new development funding, together with their new powers under the Localism Act to take over and run services.



The Council's financial reserves stood at £3.9m at the beginning of 2011-12, approximately 0.5% of the gross revenue budget (as opposed to the Audit Commission's recommendation of 2%). The estimate for the end of 2011-12 is approximately £3.4m. There are plans to raise the level of reserves to £11.4m by 2013-14, but further austerity measures from the government will prevent this level ever being attained.

## **How to find out more**

You can read more on the CTAL web site, [www.ctaludlow.org.uk](http://www.ctaludlow.org.uk):

- Mike Beazley, 'Ludlow transport'
- Michael Day, 'Reflections on the national and global context of the crisis in Ludlow'
- Neil Richardson, 'A Christian perspective on the current economic crisis in the UK'
- Church activities in the Ludlow community, 2012.



"Our hope is that our report will be a catalyst for change. We all need to appreciate what is happening and why, and decide how we are going to respond. The wellbeing of our community depends in part on state provision. It also depends on neighbourliness, a sense of belonging, trust between people, and a greater measure of equality. So this report is concerned with what we can all do to improve the quality of life of everyone in our local community in these harsher economic times"

Churches Together Around  
Ludlow working group

November 2012

