



SHREWSBURY REPORTER

HARDSHIP LOOMS AS COST OF LIVING SOARS

As the price of gas, electricity, transport, food and rent creeps up, everyone in Shrewsbury is feeling the pinch.

For those without a financial cushion, the crisis is a disaster. Shrewsbury's food bank has reported that four times as many people requested help during one week in January compared to the same week in 2021.

According to the property website Rightmove, rents in the West Midlands rose by more than 8% in 2021, and another analysis by home.co.uk sets the average rent for a two bedroom property in Shrewsbury at a whopping £772 per month.

Domestic gas prices increased by 28% between January and November last year and electricity prices rose by 19% (House of Commons Library report). Fuel bills are set to rise again in April when the government raises the cap on prices in response to the rise in the wholesale price of gas and oil.

On top of all this the Government decided to raise tax (National Insurance) for employed and self-employed people, adding £127 to the annual tax bill of someone earning £20k, or £252 if you earn £30k, in 2022-23 (Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies). Council tax will rise too. Conservative-controlled Shropshire Council is hiking its share by 3.99% although the Labour-led Town Council has frozen its precept for the second year running.

Already high prices are likely to rise further as a result of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Consumer prices in January were 5.5% higher than a year earlier and the Bank of England forecasts the Consumer Price Index will reach 7% by April. Food and non-alcoholic drink prices increased by 4.3% in 2021, and campaigners have pointed out that price rises have been much higher for basics like pasta and supermarket value ranges than for luxury foods, hitting the poorest hardest.



Shrewsbury shoppers are facing a storm of higher prices, higher energy bills, higher rents and higher taxes.

SPRING 2022

The Labour Party is resolute in its support for democracy and Ukraine's right to self determination.



LABOUR: WE WILL ABOLISH VAT ON HOME HEATING BILLS

Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, Labour's Rachel Reeves, has sent this message to Shrewsbury residents.

"Energy bills are skyrocketing and inflation is at its highest rate in 30 years as the Conservatives' cost of living crisis escalates.

I recently put forward Labour's plan to help those struggling with increasing energy bills. A Labour Government would cut the rate of VAT on energy bills from 5% to 0%, something that the Prime Minister himself has previously advocated for, and we would expand and increase the Warm Homes Discount.

These plans would save every household an average of £200, with targeted support that would see low earners and pensioners saving up to £600 a year.

The spike in energy prices are resulting in huge profits for North Sea oil and gas producers, and that's why we would pay for this support with a one-off windfall tax on them.

I am disappointed that Conservative MPs voted against a VAT cut on home energy bills, and continue to oppose the solution offered by Labour.

Instead, they are offering a pitiful buy now, pay later loan scheme. People can't pay their bills with the Conservatives' broken promises, and Labour's plan would make sure they don't have to."

SHREWSBURY NEEDS ITS FOOTPATHS!

But they are under a growing threat from Council cuts and new building developments

Footpath encroachment is becoming a problem across Shrewsbury as a result of Shropshire Council cutbacks and the scale of developments currently taking place.

Shrewsbury Labour Party is campaigning for more and better-maintained footpaths. People need them, and so does the planet. Footpaths make it easier for people to travel without a car, and walking benefits our physical and mental health which improves quality of life



and saves money for the NHS.

Legally, a public right of way is part of the Queen's highway and subject to the same protection in law as all other highways, including trunk roads. Highway authorities

- in our case Shropshire Council - have a duty "to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment" of paths in their area. They are legally responsible for maintaining the surface of the path, including bridges, and keeping it free of overgrowth. They have the power to require owners to cut back overhanging growth from the side of a path. They also must be signposted at all junctions with metalled roads.

There is no general rule on the width of rights of way which can be greater, or sometimes narrower than the path itself. Arguably two people should be able to pass each other safely on a footpath, which would require two metres width. Historic distances between boundaries, such as hedges and fences are relevant.

After years of campaigning by the Ramblers and other groups, the

Government announced in February that it was scrapping a 2026 deadline for registering historic rights of way.

To build a footpaths campaign for all Shrewsbury, we need your help gathering evidence. Please send your observations to mail@shrewsburylabour.org.uk or write to **Footpaths Campaign, Shrewsbury Labour Party, Morris Hall, Bellstone, Shrewsbury SY1 1JB.**

Public rights of way include:

Public footpaths, open only to walkers

Public bridleways, open to walkers, horse-riders and pedal cyclists

Restricted byways, open to walkers, horse-riders, and riders of non-motorised vehicles

Byways Open to All Traffic, open to all classes of traffic including motor vehicles

Campaign to clean up the river

Labour has persuaded Shropshire Council to hold water companies accountable for discharging sewage into Shropshire's rivers.

In December 2021 Severn Trent was fined £1.5 million for illegal sewage discharges. A report from the Environmental Audit Committee published in January says English river water is the worst in Europe and found multiple failures in the monitoring, governance and enforcement on water quality.

The report singled out the chief executive of Severn Trent for making the "disingenuous" claim that its sewer overflow discharges were 'pretty much already rainwater'.

"As water companies do not routinely test the quality of the discharges from storm overflows, they are in no position to make this claim. Discharges from overflows can be highly contaminated with raw sewage and other pollutants. To claim otherwise shows a disregard for the public's concern about water quality in rivers."

Last October Conservative MPs, including Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski, voted to reject an amendment to the Environment Bill to hold water companies to account



for dumping sewage. Following public outcry the Government made a U-turn and the Environment Bill was amended to place a legal duty on water companies to secure a progressive reduction in the adverse impacts of discharges from storm overflows.

But it does not give water companies a timetable to invest and update the largely Victorian sewerage system, and there remains no legal duty on water companies to prevent sewage release. Water firms recorded discharging raw sewage into English waters 403,000 times in 2020, an increase of 27% on the previous year.

The water utilities were privatised in 1989 and since then water bills have increased by 40% in real

terms, while water companies paid out £57 billion in dividends to shareholders (by 2019) and collectively cut investment in wastewater and sewage networks by almost a fifth.

Meanwhile steep funding cuts to the Environment Agency has led to a reduction in front line officers and workforce to inspect water quality incidents.

Councillor Kate Halliday who proposed the successful motion to Shropshire Council said:

"There has been ongoing disinvestment in sewerage infrastructure, together with ongoing cuts to the Environment Agency over the last 10 years, and we have a mountain to climb to reverse these changes. Hopefully we will begin to improve the quality of our rivers in Shropshire following the council's vote to scrutinise the issue with the water companies."

Paul Forrest, chair of Shrewsbury Labour Party, said, "The pollution problem underlines the need for effective river management from source to estuary, including the challenges of increasingly frequent and serious floods."

"They fail on every front"

Conservative-run Shropshire Council is hiking the council tax by 3.99% while it cuts basic services again. Labour is calling for investment in the wellbeing and safety of residents, and the environment, instead of vanity projects and risky commercial ventures.

Twelve years of austerity cuts from central government to Shropshire Council has left Shropshire £220m worse off.

Cuts to local government by consecutive Conservative governments have dumped the tax burden onto local council tax payers, who now foot more than three quarters of the bill for local government spending.

Julia Buckley, leader of the Labour Group on Shropshire Council, laments the failure of Shropshire Council's Conservative leadership to do a better job of negotiating with the Conservative government for a better deal for Shropshire.

"There is a lot we can't do because even though we have a Tory government, the Tory council has not been able to negotiate. Other Tory rural councils have negotiated better settlements, we have one of the worst. Telford and Wrekin, a Labour controlled council, have got a better settlement than Shropshire.

This year's meagre settlement will not cover the core costs of delivering basic services to Shropshire's rural, ageing population with a budgeted shortfall of £49m.

Shropshire Council's short-term response is to identify a further £10.55m of service cuts, includ-



Julia Buckley, leader of the Labour group on Shropshire Council, with Shrewsbury Town Council's Labour leader Alan Mosley

ing redundancies for library staff, and another council tax increase of 3.99% when residents can least afford it.

"Our council is failing on every front. 97% of people will be paying more for less.

"Other councils in the county have managed to uphold service levels and freeze council tax, such as Labour-led Telford & Wrekin and Shrewsbury Town Council.

"Short-term cuts leave residents with reduced services, impacting on their health and storing up longer-term and more expensive problems in future years," said Julia Buckley.

YOUR LABOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Belle Vue: Cllr. Kate Halliday
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Bayston Hill, Column & Sutton: Cllr. Ted Clarke,
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Cllr. Rosemary Dartnall
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Cllr. Tony Parsons
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Labour councillors are happy to help with enquiries from any area, or contact your ward representative, below, at labourshrewsbury@gmail.com

Abbey: Martyn Harris
Bagley: Paul Hollington
Battlefield: John Turnbull
Bowbrook: Tom Doolan
Burnell: Kay Askew
Copthorne: Julie Baines
Longden: Wynn Davies
Loton: Gianluca Cerritelli

Castlefields & Ditherington: Cllr. Alan Mosley
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Harlescott: Cllr. Elisabeth Roberts
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Monkmoor: Cllr. Pam Moseley
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Sundorne: Cllr. Kevin Pardy
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Sutton and Reabrook Cllr Phil Gillam
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Meole: Phil Adams

Porthill: Cathie Joyce

Quarry & Coton Hill: Paul Forrest

Radbrook: Julia Williams

Rea Valley: Jean Garner

Severn Valley: Jim Healey

Tern: Alan Herbert

Underdale: Roger Bell

LABOUR'S ALTERNATIVE 2022-23 BUDGET

Capital expenditure

1. Scrap the North West Road, saving **£5.6m** in the first year

2. **Re-invest in:**

Road safety with people-friendly 20mph speed limits in all residential areas, leading to immediate improvements to public health, fewer accidents, better living conditions, less noise, reduced carbon emissions. Cost **£1.2m**

Active travel - connecting car-dependent housing estates on the edge of towns to new and existing walking and cycling networks. Cost **£1m**

Net savings: £3.6m, reducing costs of borrowing by £187k in year 1 rising to £4m by year 5.

Revenue expenditure

Reduced debt repayments, saving **£187k** (see above).

Halve spending on print and postage costs by offering one-off discount to residents who opt for electronic billing. Expected saving: **£20k**

Total saved £207k, allowing the council to:

Stop the cuts to library staff.

Library users, especially elderly people, benefit from their interactions with staff, and machines cannot replace this. Cost: **£50k**

Support children's mental health. Covid had a dramatic impact on children's and adolescents' mental health.

We would re-establish open access youth clubs in the areas of most need as safe spaces for teenagers. Cost: **£80k**

Also invest directly in **mental health support workers**

to address the epidemic of distressed young people becoming more severely unwell because of the very long waiting times for help. Cost: **£77k**

LABOUR'S BUDGET SECURED SUPPORT FROM ALL THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ON SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

NOT GOOD ENOUGH!

Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski narrowly escaped a by-election when he was suspended from Parliament for “damaging its reputation and integrity”

Our Conservative MP has brought embarrassment to the town again and again by his behaviour.

Most recently he had to stand up in the House of Commons to apologise publicly for the second time in a few months, and face a day’s suspension.

Fellow Conservative Sir Bernard Jenkin, a member of the Standards Committee, told the House that the suspension would have been for a “significant period” but there were mitigating circumstances. Mr Kawczynski has been “candid in discussing his mental health issues”, Sir Bernard said.

If Mr Kawczynski had been suspended for two weeks, a recall petition signed by ten per cent of voters would have triggered a by-election.

Daniel Kawczynski was originally investigated last year for bullying



Daniel Kawczynski MP apologising to the House of Commons for the second time.

parliamentary staff. Parliament’s Independent Expert Panel (IEP) had concluded he should be suspended for a day and make an unreserved apology in the House of Commons for “grossly unprofessional” behaviour which was a significant breach of Parliament’s Behaviour Code.

He made the apology but the next day in an interview with BBC Radio Shropshire he undermined it by saying he had no choice about the apology, and also mentioned the job title of the person who had complained about his bullying.

As a result he was investigated by the Committee on Standards which

led to the second suspension, on 20 January. His actions had “caused significant damage to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole” according to the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner.

As well as being an MP with a salary of £81,932 Mr Kawczynski is employed by an American mining hedge fund, the Electrum Group, for £3000 a month. He is well known for supporting regimes with poor human rights records, especially Saudi Arabia and Russia. Leaked WhatsApp messages recently showed he had been looking for work with a Saudi Arabian company. He also said he would like to be UK ambassador to Saudi Arabia because he was disillusioned with parliamentary politics.

According to the Russian government news channel Russia Today Mr Kawczynski visited Russia in 2016 and while he was there called for closer relations between the UK and Russia and criticised the sanctions imposed by the US and Europe on Russia after it annexed the Ukrainian region of Crimea in 2014.

JOIN US!

Do you want to help our campaign to replace Daniel Kawczynski and this Tory government at the next election?

Why not join Shrewsbury Labour Party? We are a friendly bunch with lots going on, including five active local branches, policy groups, social events and a Women’s Forum.

Whether you’re interested in policy discussions, delivering leaflets or other jobs such as helping with our social media or administration we would love to meet you! Visit shrewsburylabour.org.uk or email our secretary Jordan Bines: secretary@shrewsburylabour.org.uk. Or call us on 01743 650434.

SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM ON A KNIFE EDGE

PROBABILITY OF WINNING NEXT GENERAL ELECTION(%)

Labour	52
Conservative	48
Lib Dem	0
Green	0
Other	0

Source: electoralcalculus.co.uk Feb 2022

As the chart above shows, Labour is set to regain the parliamentary seat of Shrewsbury & Atcham, replacing a part-time mining consultant (Mr Kawczynski) with an effective full-time local advocate for all of us.