

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTION 1

MR JON TANDY will ask the following question:

In February 2011 the government issued a consultation paper on "Access to elected office for disabled people"; did Shropshire Council submit a response to this consultation and if so were any elected members involved in making the response.

When was the last review of Shropshire Council's disabled facilities carried out and which elected members and representatives of disabled groups were involved in the review.

MR STEVE CHARMLEY, the Portfolio Holder for Disability, will reply:

Shropshire Council did not submit a response to this consultation. However, when vacancies arise, Shropshire Council ensures that the information sent out to applicants includes details of our commitment to equality and diversity and the support available.

A thorough review of all Council properties and disabled facilities will be undertaken as part of the asset management strategy currently being considered by Performance and Strategy Scrutiny Committee. This will ensure that the service requirements of all disability groups are considered and implemented as the Council plans, with partners and stakeholders, how public services will be delivered in future and from which properties.

Property audits were last undertaken in November 2010 and included an assessment of the suitability, sufficiency and operability of disabled facilities. Further audits and reviews will be prioritised after the Council asset management strategy has been approved by Cabinet on 3 August 2011. Council officers continue to meet regularly with Local Access Groups who represent disabled people across the county. Elected Members will be involved in future asset management plans and will be invited to participate in specific reviews, which will also involve local disabled group representatives.

QUESTION 2

MRS MARY NICHOLLS will ask the following question:

Can the Portfolio Holder please advise when the road sign for Highley Park Homes is to be erected. I have been repeatedly informed since July of last year that the sign has been commissioned but it has yet to materialise. Ambulances and other emergency services cannot find the site because it is not registered on Sat Navs and there are approximately 85 (mostly elderly) households on the site.

Following repeated requests for information on the 40mph buffer zone to the south of Highley, can the Portfolio Holder please advise whether the scheme is to go ahead or not. Speed checks were carried out last year which clearly showed the need for the speed restriction and the Police gave their full support to the proposals. However, the scheme appears now to have stalled with no information forthcoming.

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Transport, will reply:

The road sign for Highley Park Homes has been ordered from our contractors and it is due to be erected within 4 weeks. It will be a double sided sign and is to be mounted on the existing post opposite Netherton Lane. There has been an undoubted delay in installing this sign and we apologise for this.

The proposed 40mph buffer zone to the south of Highley is programmed to be carried out this financial year and we are now preparing a plan for statutory advertisement shortly. Assuming there are no objections following the 21 day consultation period, the scheme will be progressed on site as soon as possible with the signing and accompanying lining works as planned.

QUESTION 3

MRS MARY NICHOLLS will ask the following question:

Will the Portfolio Holder please confirm if Shropshire Council will transfer the management of Silverdale Terrace allotments to Highley Parish Council at a lease cost of £35 per annum. I have been informed that Shropshire Council may authorise the transfer but it is proving most difficult to make any progress with the administrative arrangements.

MR MARTIN TAYLOR-SMITH, the Portfolio Holder for Service Transformation and Organisational Development, will reply:

I have no previous history of the request to manage the allotments, at present we have the licences with the allotment holders. I will be happy to discuss the future of the site directly with the Parish council to agree the future management and organise the administrative arrangements.

QUESTION 4

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question:

One of the last acts of Shropshire County Council was to provide improvements in the concessionary fare scheme across the County. At its meeting in February 2009 it agreed that:

- those eligible to have bus passes could use them free all day, including before 9.30a.m.
- to have 100% fare reimbursement on all community transport essential journeys

- tokens or vouchers as an alternative to a bus pass
- carers to be eligible for a bus pass or alternative.

Can an update be given of what is on offer now together with what the cost savings for a full year are estimated to be by removing the concession for those with bus passes from using the Park and Ride scheme at anytime. How was this total arrived at and what were the actual savings achieved in April 2011 compared with April 2010.

When concessionary fare holders board a bus now, they are being issued a flat fare receipt. This cost is therefore no longer dependant on the length of the journey taken by the resident. Does the value of the ticket issued vary from route to route. Is the cost/benefit to the council being monitored and if so how. What are the expected savings in doing this especially as the number and frequency of rural buses, those with the longer routes are being reduced.

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Transport, will reply:

The current concessionary travel scheme (2011 - 2012) consists of a number of elements. Applicants are entitled to **one** of the following;

Bus Pass - Older or Disabled People

Concessionary bus pass for eligible passengers allowing free travel on any local bus service in England between 9.30 am and 11 pm Monday to Friday and all day at weekends and bank holidays. Shropshire pass holders are also able to travel on buses after 11pm within the County. Bus passes are no longer accepted on the Shrewsbury Park & Ride service.

Shropshire pass holders can also use their concessionary travel card to travel free on most Community Transport Schemes. Shrewsbury Dial-a-Ride charge £1 per trip on production of a valid pass.

Disabled passengers who find it difficult to use buses without assistance from another person may be eligible for a companion pass that allows their carer to travel free of charge when accompanying the individual. Companion or carer passes are available to anyone in receipt of either Attendance Allowance at the higher rate or high rate mobility component of DLA with the high rate care component. Companion or carer passes can only be used on journeys starting in Shropshire.

National Travel Tokens - Disabled people only

Applicants are entitled to National Travel Tokens to the value of £30 per year. Travel Tokens can be used for travel on public bus services, trains, community transport services and some taxis.

Senior Railcard - Older people only

The senior railcard entitles the holder to one third off the cost of rail travel for most national rail services. The cost is £5 per applicant and is valid for 12 months from the date of issue. Applicants receive a voucher which is redeemable at any staffed railway station to receive the railcard. Eligible passengers can have a bus pass and a railcard but will need to pay the full price of £28 for the railcard from a staffed railway station.

Community Car Vouchers - Older people only

The community car scheme assists local people to make essential journeys such as visits to medical centres, dentists and to visit family and friends in hospital. Applicants are entitled to 20 x £1 vouchers for use within the remit of the Community Car Scheme.

Bridgnorth Cliff Railway Voucher - Older people only

The Bridgnorth Cliff Railway voucher is free of charge and entitles the applicant to 36 return tickets for use on the service at anytime.

Budget consideration

The saving from the withdrawal of concessions from the P&R was calculated by taking the previous yrs reimbursement which at the time of calculating the saving was estimated to be £224,000. However it was also recognised that the removal of this concession will deter some concessionary pass holders from using the service and others will migrate on to the local bus network where they will be able to continue to use their passes. Therefore saving the full level of expenditure on reimbursement for concessions on the P&R is likely to be offset by reduced levels of passengers and increased use of local bus services. It was estimated that not allowing concessionary pass holder's free travel on Park and Ride services would save in the region of £135,000 per annum.

The cost of allowing travel before 09.30 for financial year 2010/11 was approximately £260,700, around 8.6% of the total operator reimbursement. However, with the withdrawal of this enhancement a percentage of passengers will simply alter their travel arrangements to post 9.30 and therefore the full cost of the enhancement will not be saved. Should 50% of passengers, as it has been in other parts of the country, do this it will equate to a saving of around £130,000.

It is anticipated that reimbursement for concessionary travel in the current year will be within the revised budget.

With reference to the second part of the question, the method of reimbursement is specified by the Department for Transport and Shropshire Council follows this guidance. Following the guidance ensures that Shropshire Council adheres to the underlying principal that the bus operator can be no better or worse off from taking part in the scheme whilst recognising that the scheme generates a significant level of passengers.

For a number of years reimbursement has been based upon an average fare calculated from a basket of products purchased by fare paying passengers including cash fares, daily tickets, weekly tickets etc... By following this methodology the reimbursement received by the operator takes into account any commercial discount that would have been applicable should the concessionaires purchased tickets. Therefore there is no requirement to record the journey undertaken by the passenger just the number of single trips that have been undertaken.

The average fare is calculated by operator however there is some flexibility in this to ensure reimbursement is based on actual conditions. For example some operators provide contracted services where the fare charged is

specified by Shropshire Council and is low compared to commercial fares. It is therefore not appropriate to include these fares when calculating reimbursement for commercial services where a higher fare would be charged.

Reimbursement is paid to operators on a monthly basis and is calculated using the DfT reimbursement calculator. Operators are also required to supply ticket machine information to back up their claims.

There are no expected savings as reimbursement has been based upon the average fare principle for a number of years. Reimbursement costs are increasing as the average commercial fares increase. There will be a slight reduction in the reimbursement for concessionary travel due to the withdrawal of some services as specified within the bus strategy. This will mainly be from the reduction in Sunday and Evening services in Shropshire. It is unknown what the level of saving will be as many passengers will simply travel at alternative times. Changes to bus services will happen in mid July after which reimbursement is likely to decrease.

QUESTION 5

MR ANDREW BANNERMAN will ask the following question:

What total income was achieved from parking charges in Shrewsbury Town Centre over the period April 1st – 30th 2010 and 2011 respectively. How does this equate to the number of vehicles in each year.

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Transport, will reply:

In April 2010 income of £184,000 was raised from 86,356 paying vehicles.

In April 2011 income of £195,000 was raised from 76,684 paying vehicles.

QUESTION 6

MR NIGEL HARTIN will ask the following question:

Could the Leader advise what the cost has been to the Council of its membership of a) LGiU b) SOLACE over the last two financial years, including conference registration fees & accommodation booked & who has attended meetings of these bodies representing the Council over those years.

Looking forward could the Leader indicate whether this Council intends to continue membership of both LGiU & SOLACE in future years.

THE LEADER of the Council, **MR KEITH BARROW**, will reply:

The cost of the initial LGIU annual membership taken from the 1st June 2010, was £11,350.

Membership of LG Flood Forum was taken from 1st July 2010, at a cost of £300, and this ends on 30 June 2011.

Membership of Sustainable Social Care Learning Network was taken from November 2009, to March 2010, at a cost of £500. This has not been renewed.

No conference registration fees were paid in this context. Four Elected Members of the Council attended related meetings in this period, (Cllrs Peter Phillips, Roger Evans, Madge Shingleton and Gwilym Butler), and the associated accommodation costs were £471.30

With regards to SOLACE, it has been the Council's policy to meet the costs of professional subscriptions required for senior staff, as part of their work. Within those arrangements, the cost of subscriptions for membership of SOLACE was £804 in 2009/10 (covering 4 members of staff) and £406 in 2010/11 (covering 2 members of staff). Conference registration fees for the Chief Executive in this context were £1,380 in 2009/10 (for 2 members of staff) and £690 in 2010/11 (for 1 member of staff). Related accommodation costs were £200 (approx) in 2009/10 and £95 in 2010/11.

As part of the Council's wider cost cutting measures, the annual membership subscription to LGIU was not renewed in January 2011, as this was felt not to represent value for money, given the relative benefits involved.

As part of wider changes to reduce staffing costs, the Council will no longer pay professional subscriptions for its staff, who can choose to do so for themselves in future.