

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTION 1

MR TED CLARKE will ask the following question:

What efforts were/are being made by this Council to persuade the Lord Chancellor's Department to retain local County Court provision in Shropshire?

Reported closure announcements now seem to leave Shropshire entirely un-provided for. Residents requiring access to the Civil Courts system will in future have to travel considerable distances "out of County" to pursue/defend their rights.

Will this Council lobby for the retention of our County Court and District Registry in Shrewsbury at least; perhaps co-located in the Magistrates building opposite Shirehall?

MRS ANN HARTLEY, the Deputy Leader will reply:

Shropshire Council previously considered this matter on 22 July 2010, when it resolved to raise concerns about the closure of Shropshire's courts and the impact for Shropshire residents with the Ministry of Justice. This was in response to the Government's public consultation on the future of the Court Service; which at that time proposed the closure of 103 magistrate's courts and 54 county courts in England & Wales, in order to reduce costs.

As Members will be aware, courts at Market Drayton, Ludlow and Oswestry closed earlier this year. With effect from 30 September 2011, Shrewsbury County Court closed, with all work being processed at Telford County Court.

As a result of our lobbying, and that by others locally, Shropshire has been successful in retaining some County Court functions, which are co-located at Shrewsbury Magistrates Court. A District Judge hears cases at Shrewsbury Magistrates Court each week on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. It is likely that the weekly hearings will be reduced to two days a week from April 2012.

Clearly, there will be additional journey time and cost implications for Shropshire residents who are using the court service; particularly for those users who reside in the North and South of the County. However, consideration is being given to ways in which witnesses could give evidence by video links from local police stations, to avoid the need for travel to the court. There has also been some impact on local businesses in the market towns where court closures have taken place, but the scale of this is difficult to measure.

Shropshire has been successful in retaining some County Court provision, and we will continue to lobby to ensure that this provision remains at Shrewsbury Magistrates Court.

QUESTION 2

MR MANSELL WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

Shropshire Council is to be highly commended on achieving a recycling rate of 54%, well above the average for local authorities, but still some way short of some of the best performing councils who are achieving in the high 60% and some already as high as 75%.

However, what the domestic cardboard report reveals is that the Council and its contractor has fallen well short of best practice with regards to cardboard in continuing to compost cardboard when the majority of composting facilities produce a high quality product, thanks to advances in technology and equipment. So why does the problem of contamination only seem to be affecting two councils?! Have the other local authorities anticipated the problem or is it because Veolia facilities are not up to removing contaminants? At High Peak the solution is to recycle the cardboard with the paper.

And there is also the issue of why we are still composting cardboard in the first instance. In the report (4.3 and 5.4) it states that if 1,000 tonnes are diverted from composting into recycling the Council benefits from £50,000. And according to 4.3 they estimate we are composting 4,000 tonnes of cardboard/annum. If so for the last several years the council has been composting £200,000/annum, or is the 4,000 tonnes a gross UNDER estimate? At today's prices (£95-£105/tonne) we are composting £400,000/year. So why does the report quote the price as £50/tonne – half what it has been throughout this year?

Are we therefore to conclude that the problem that is only very belatedly being addressed is only a problem for us and High Peak? Is this because we have not managed our waste in line with best practise for several years, as we seem to have been composting nearly £0.25m/annum?

Would the Council agree that pressure should be put onto Veolia to invest to provide the service that other commercial waste collectors provide for the retail trade and other commercial operators? Almost every authority in England moved away from Composting Cardboard a few years ago as the value of recycled cardboard rose. For years Cardboard for recycling was worth £50/tonne, it dropped for a few months to £20/tonne on the spot market but has been over £100/tonne for most of 2011.

Does the Council agree that composting cardboard is costing the council substantial money and that our best course of action is for the Council to instruct Veolia not only to cease composting cardboard but to collect cardboard as a recyclable and process it in line with best practice, which is clearly commercially in the Council's interest and is certainly better environmentally.

MR MIKE OWEN the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Prosperity will reply:

There are a series of questions here which I will answer sequentially.

Firstly, the inclusion of cardboard with garden waste for composting has provided a successful and popular service and, combined with our dry recycling collections, has resulted in achieving a 54% recycling & composting rate in Shropshire.

This approach was encouraged in the past to boost recycling and composting rates. It was deemed to be a cost effective and environmentally beneficial method of diverting cardboard from landfill. Best practice methods for waste management take into consideration the geography of the collection area. In a rural area such as Shropshire, where long distances are covered in the collection of waste, the collection of cardboard with compostable waste is a sensible option, spreading the collection task more evenly across the fleet, and enabling the use of compacting vehicles. Using composting as the main treatment method also reduces the distances which waste has to be transported, as the composting sites are within the county. It was also a simple system for residents to use.

It is not the case that only two councils have this problem. Under the new PAS 100 standards which have triggered changes in Shropshire and elsewhere, it will not be possible to compost general household cardboard anywhere in England and still meet the standard. With regard to removal of cardboard at composting facilities, this has been explored with the compost producers and was eliminated from further consideration, as it would have required major changes to the composting facilities that are being used at the moment and would have no guarantee of removing the cardboard, now deemed to be contamination. One of the companies at work locally already sorts at the facility, but were unable to meet the new standard on the trials they carried out, as it is difficult to remove cardboard from the green waste once it is wet.

Cardboard prices have reached a record high in 2011. However, those prices were only achieved after significant sorting and grading, which in itself is an expensive process. The current market value of mixed cardboard is an estimated £50 per tonne. This value is likely to fluctuate, depending on the quality and geographical location of the market, and is not the same price nationally

The material would also need to be separately collected. Other Councils have different systems of collection, where recyclates are separated by machine and hand in a factory environment, not on the kerbside as happens in Shropshire. The 4,000 tonnes quoted in the report is a best estimate of the total mixed cardboard collected with garden waste. So the potential income of £200,000 would be outweighed by having to provide additional vehicles and staff for collection of this material, added to sorting costs.

The changes to the PAS 100:2011 standard were only recently announced, and we have only recently been informed that the compost producers no longer accept cardboard. In the short time available, Shropshire Council and Veolia have been working together to explore whether there was a practical and affordable way to avoid making the change. That proved to be

impossible to achieve, which is why we are now exploring other affordable methods of collecting cardboard. In the meantime, local residents are able to dispose of cardboard with their general waste, and are not inconvenienced by the change.

The national policies leading to this change have been implemented without consulting local authorities, who are the end users of the service, and the change has been brought in under an unnecessarily tight timescale. The Council and its contractor Veolia are seeking to identify sustainable ways of reintroducing cardboard into the recycling stream in a sustainable and cost-effective way. There are several alternative methods of doing this, all of which will require changes to the way that residents deal with cardboard, the use of our collection fleet, or possibly major changes to the number and type of vehicles used. For these reasons, the operational and financial implications of any alternative approach need careful consideration, rather than a knee-jerk reaction.
