

**MEMBER QUESTIONS**

**Questions for Shropshire Council 26 July 2018**

**Question 1**

**Councillor Tracey Huffer will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Waste and Regulatory Services:**

Shropshire Council's Community Enablement Team provides an invaluable service for communities across the county, especially in our rural areas and market towns. Community Enablement Officers promote networking and collaboration between council, charitable and community health services. They support all generations of our communities, including young people and the elderly. Community Enablement Officers work hard to raise funding to support their activities and those of volunteer groups.

What plans does Shropshire Council have to maintain and fund our Community Enablement Team, especially those in rural areas and market towns?

**Councillor Joyce Barrow will reply:**

Thank you for your question.

Councillors will be aware in the budget agreed that funding for the Community Enablement Team is to be withdrawn from April 2019. Whilst this was considered necessary in order to make the budget balance, many Members of this Council and also Town and Parish Councils have expressed their concern.

The Community Enablement Team is a hardworking, effective and valued resource within Shropshire Council. I have been working hard with Officers and other Elected Members to develop alternatives to disbanding the team and I am optimistic that the position will improve.

In broad terms, it is likely that the Community Enablement Team will be retained, in reduced form, with new management arrangements and a newly defined purpose. The details of this are being worked up by Officers and I expect proposals to be put to Members shortly.

**Question 2**

**Councillor Andy Boddington will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways:**

The government is currently consulting on its Road to Zero Strategy. What are the council's current policies and plans for:

- 1) Ensuring replacement streetlighting columns incorporate EV charging points?

- 2) Installing EV charging points in council owned car parks?
- 3) Requiring EV charging points in new developments, including housing, employment and retail sites?

**Councillor Steve Davenport will reply:**

Shropshire Council is currently in the process of developing an Electric Vehicle (EV) Recharging Policy which will give direction with the aim to achieve the governments new objectives covered by the document you mentioned 'Road to Zero'. This work will be further embedded into the development of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4, which is being launched in the autumn.

The initiatives contained within in the Government's Strategy include considerations to fund charging infrastructure and the need to assess whether new homes and offices should be required to install charge points as standard. The driving force will need to come from policy to promote charging points with the minimum of providing the infrastructure for future consideration. This policy will "cut across " a number of areas such as highways, planning policy and development etc.

Street lights appear the obvious solution to provide a strategic network of EV charging points on the public highway, and where columns are being replaced with new, the need for an EV charging points will need to be evaluated and will be location specific, which further support the need for a clear policy and the operational issues identified, understood etc.

However, we are aware that trials of existing lamp-post outlets have manifested numerous technical and practical issues. The first being how the street lighting cabling is going to carry 5 times the existing load to charge a vehicle, another being to prevent the charging cable from being a trip hazard. We will look to find a solution to overcome this issue to make it viable, which arguably is a national and industry issues as well as a local Shropshire issue to resolve.

Referring to Council owned car parks, a trial at Frankwell is currently being looked at where 10 No. 7Kw charging units are being considered. In addition, we have received grant funding for two rapid charging units to be installed just off the A49 at the Ludlow food Centre and the other at Easthope Car Park in Church Stretton. As yet there is no Countywide scheme, however, charging points at suitable locations has been recognised as the way forward and momentum will build up taking this into account.

I am sure you will appreciate this is at a very early stage and we will be taking on board the mentioned government objectives, current guidelines, local views from Parish and Town Councils while reviewing what grants are available to accelerate this project through a well-researched strategy and policy development whist the national debate continues and clarity is provided at a national level.

### **Question 3**

#### **Councillor Andy Boddington will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport:**

The half a million kilometres of rural road verge in the UK is equal to around half of our remaining flower-rich grasslands and meadows. Wild flower verges are a vital ecological resource at a time when many countryside birds, moths, butterflies and insect species are in decline.

There are more than 5,000km of roads in Shropshire. Many lengths of verges must be cut regularly to ensure road safety. But many verges are being cut because they are on a schedule, rather than they need cutting for safety. This prevents many wildflowers from developing and seeding. That reduces the biodiversity of our county.

- 1) What account is taken of biodiversity in policies for verge cutting?
- 2) Has the council reviewed those policies against the road verge management guidelines presented by Plantlife in its Good Verge Guide?

#### **Councillor Steve Davenport will reply:**

We carry out regular safety inspections of our roads, and as part of the inspection process we aim to identify grass verges which have become overgrown and which may pose a hazard to highway users.

Verges are cut to:

- maintain visibility for road users, especially on road junctions, visibility splays and crossroads
- keep traffic signs clear
- keep verges passable for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists

Verges provide important habitats for a variety of species of insects and animals. As a consequence, we cut a limited width of most rural verges only once a year. By keeping the width of cutting to a minimum, the remaining verge area can provide an important habitat for wildflowers and wildlife.

Wild flower rich road verges can be reported on line via the link below:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity-ecology-and-planning/wildflower-rich-road-verges/>

We'll find the location of your verge and our Natural Environment and Highways teams will update their map-based records.

The information provided about the verge will be assessed by our Natural Environment team.

Where safe to do so, the Highways team will ensure the verge is managed appropriately using the guidelines provided by Plantlife.

There are many logistical challenges involved in managing particular areas of verge within the wider network. Every effort is made to ensure our staff and contractors adhere to these specific maintenance requirements where possible. However, road traffic and pedestrian safety **must** be prioritised at all times, and may lead to areas requiring more thorough works outside of the specified environmental interest requirements.

#### **Question 4**

#### **Councillor Vivienne Parry will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport**

Ludlow's Eco Park, fully owned by Shropshire Council, has been neglected for years. The park and ride is meant to be a primary gateway into Ludlow. Yet, its surface is severely damaged and has recently had nearly half the area barricade off, reducing the parking area by nearly half. Antisocial behaviour, littering and fly-tipping is commonplace. The CCTV doesn't work. The bus shelter is an embarrassment.

What plans does Shropshire Council have to maintain this part of its estate and upgrade it to the standard expected for a gateway to a premium tourist destination?

#### **Councillor Steve Davenport will reply:**

Ludlow Eco park, Park and Ride is inspected on a monthly basis and any safety defects are rectified in accordance to Shropshire Council's inspection manual. With regards to the recent maintenance issues resulting from the latest antisocial behaviour the works to remove the damaged sections of car park and fill voids with stone went ahead as planned and were completed on 10/7/18. All the barriers which were required due to safety reasons were removed on 10/7/18 on completion of the safety work.

With regards to the permanent fix of the carpark surface we will need to look at ways of securing the site more effectively to prevent the antisocial behaviour which has been identified as the root cause of the ongoing maintenance issue. Options Shropshire council could look into include the installation of knee rail along verge and lockable barriers on entrance and exit, there obviously will need to be processes established to open and close these barriers at appropriate times to allow the carpark to be used during operational hours. When the site is more secure we would then be at a point to look at what options are available to improve the carpark as a whole and improve the facility for visitors to Ludlow. Quotations for the work are being obtained , and subject to available funding the work will commence.

## **Question 5**

### **Councillor Pam Moseley will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Services, Health and Social Housing:**

Cabinet recently approved 2018/19 and 2019/20 budget cuts to services including a total of £1.615 million from Public Health Commissioned Outcomes, £588,000 in this financial year and £1.027 million in 2019/20. Of these, £730,000 are red RAG rated and £602,000 are amber rated. These cuts will impact on the community drug and alcohol service, integrated sexual health services delivered through pharmacies and school nurses, vision screening, mental health promotion and infection prevention control.

The proposed service cuts will be subject to the need for an Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) and “any necessary service user consultation”.

Can the Portfolio Holder please advise:

What alternative course of action will be taken if the outcome of the ESIIA demonstrates that the proposed cuts will impact too greatly on service user groups?

When, and what form will the consultation with service users take, and again, what contingency exists should the results of such consultations demonstrate that the effects of the cuts will have an unacceptable level of impact?

On 8 September, Shrewsbury will host the 2018 UK Recovery Walk, which celebrates freedom from drug and alcohol dependence. In welcoming the award of the event last July, the Portfolio holder’s press statement said that “hosting the UK Recovery Walk would provide an opportunity to highlight the achievements of the Shropshire recovery community, alongside the valuable lifesaving work of our drug and alcohol treatment services”. Is it not therefore both regrettable and an embarrassment to the Council that it is proposed to cut a red RAG rated £250,000 from the Council’s Community Drug and Alcohol Services in 2019/20?

### **Councillor Lee Chapman will reply:**

The proposals set out in the paper presented to the Cabinet on 4th July identified proposals for freeing up funding from the public health grant and re-investing such funds in other areas of the council’s activity to support public health outcomes. As the Public Health Grant is a ring-fenced allocation of funds from the Department of Health, any released funds will be focussed on programmes that will be utilised to achieve public health outcomes.

A key focus for public health interventions is addressing health inequalities. Whilst the overall health of the population within the Shropshire Council area is better than that of England, particularly in relation to life expectancy, there is still a gap between the life expectancy of those from the least deprived backgrounds and those from the most deprived backgrounds. Whilst this gap is smaller within the local population compared to the average figure for England, it remains a focal point for any health promotion intervention within the County.

In relation to consultation with stakeholders, the paper submitted to Cabinet covers a range of contracts and programmes. Some of the financial figures identified refer to contracts that have been negotiated with service providers and where efficiencies have been achieved. Other contracts such as that for the Substance Misuse Treatment Service are due for review as the current contract is due to end in March 2019. In such circumstances, the normal process for tendering the contract will apply and the local authority will seek to commission services within the national guidelines whilst achieving some savings in the cost of the service. Where such tenders will take place the Local Authority will engage with appropriate stakeholders regarding its proposals. This will include detailed discussions with partner agencies that may be affected by the proposals.

With regard to the current substance misuse service, the current service provider has already be advised of the intention to tender the service. Council officers have met with its Chief Executive, Chairman and other staff from this organisation. It is recognised that Shropshire Council's intention to tender is similar to other local authorities in England.

The RAG rating referred to in the Cabinet paper relates to the potential difficulty of achieving this level of saving from the current service model with Green indicating that the saving has been or will be achieved.

### **Question 6**

#### **Councillor Roger Evans will ask the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport:**

I note the Environmental Maintenance Grant (EMG) programme was recently consulted on with the following introduction.

Highways and Transport team has operated the Environmental Maintenance Grant (EMG) programme for the last 8 years. The programme has operated successfully and is seen as delivering a number of benefits.

The recipients of the grants are overwhelmingly rural Parish Councils and a small number of Town Councils. There is one community group using a grant to enable local residents to carry out litter picks and environmental tidy-ups.

The Cabinet originally decided not to continue with this programme even though a Task and Finish Group of cross-party Members showed how useful it was. The excellent value for money it provided for Shropshire Council. The Cabinet at the request of several Members then revisited this and reinstated the grant programme for 3 years.

Can you please confirm how much money has been allocated to this grant programme for this year and the following two years please?

Finally, can you please inform Members and Parish Councils when applications can be made for money to assist in delivering this programme?

**Councillor Steve Davenport will reply:**

The Environment Maintenance Grant has been subject to Task and Finish Group and Cabinet decision.

A revenue budget of £75k has been allocated for this financial year, with the intent that this budget is available for the forthcoming years at the level of £75k, as approved by Cabinet, obviously any revenue commitment is open to review in the future.

Applications for this year's grants, as per the new criteria, will be opened by the end of this month – July 2018.