

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 8

QUESTION 1

MRS MADGE SHINETON will ask the following question:

The new procedure for highways maintenance which has now been in use for twelve months has not proved successful for the everyday timeliness or quality of emergency or planned maintenance on the roads for which this Council is responsible. What revision of the procedures will the Portfolio Holder recommend for the future of this vital service which is a basic need for the whole county?

MRS CLAIRE WILD, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport will reply:

The West and Shires Permit scheme, commonly referred to as WaSP, has been in operation since April 2014. It is a bespoke statutory instrument applicable to Shropshire and recognised nationally through award nominations and endorsement. Shropshire Council's scheme is recognised as one of the most successful in operation. Whilst there have been internal challenges with Highways staff and Ringway, our term contractor, adhering to the scheme as it was phased in, this should not detract from its overall success as detailed below.

Key elements of WaSP:

A reduction of approximately 13,000 days of roadwork durations by checking and challenging requested permit lengths (this is achieved by calculating the difference between the work providers permit application for work time i.e. 7 days to fix x, and what is actually negotiated and agreed with the provider i.e. new time period of y, or where existing closures by another provider can be utilised to minimise or prevent new disruption) Fostering closer relationships with stakeholder's utility companies such as BT or Severn Trent Water through collaborative working and inspections; and generation of c. £450,000 in permit fees annually. For information the Inspectors operate at nil cost, and generate a surplus over and above their costs, which has to be reinvested within Highways as a condition of the scheme.

In the 2014-15 financial year 520 sites were arranged for collaborative working between commissioners, undertakers & contractors through WaSP. This approach builds closer relationships between parties and allows an area of the network to be improved as much as can be during the same time period, minimising disruption to the network. Emergency works have not changed since phasing in a permit scheme. The same process of making a site safe for the public and retrospectively informing Street Works remains and true emergencies always take priority on the network.

The headline change since bringing in WaSP has been a shift to proactivity rather than passivity. All contractors and undertakers are treated with parity and scrutiny is a level field. The primary challenge is providing continual training and assistance to Ringway to ensure this requirement is met and all work is delivered in an efficient manner, this training and assistance is now bedding in.

Shropshire Council and Ringway have produced a programme of work for the current financial year. This has led to Highways being proactive in listing required works and allowing our term contractor to organise an annual programme and apply for permits with appropriate lead-in times. There are legislative timescales that all works must adhere to; for example all work that is part of the annual programme, take more than 10 days on site or require a road closure (exception to this is emergency work) have a 12 week lead time, this timescale helps ensure that legal orders are in place and any consultation and communication with residents can take place in a timely fashion. All other work that will be identified throughout the year by the highways teams only require 3-10 days lead in time depending on the length of time the work takes on site. The permit scheme does rely on pre –planning and prepared works in advance, which also support Ringway delivering directly or through their supply chain providers.

Working in this way, drives efficiency improvements, encourages financial savings and builds a collaborative approach for the betterment of our road network.

Examples of the scheme in practice, in the Member's area are:

- Park Close – Kinlet – carriageway resurfacing – extent of scheme 250 sq.m of carriageway resurfacing. Scheme is sited directly outside Kinlet C of E Primary School which required the scheme to be undertaken during school holidays. Works completed including advance notification to residents that the road would be closed whilst Ringway were on site.
- B4194 Kinlet to Catsley – carriageway patching – 1652 sq.m of carriageway patching works. Works required road closure due to width of existing carriageway and extent of carriageway repairs. Works completed on time.
- B4363 to Rays Farm – carriageway resurfacing – 430 sq.m of carriageway resurfacing. Scheme involved closure of carriageway to undertake resurfacing. Advanced notification to local businesses and residents required as a condition of the permit. All notification, consultation undertaken prior to commencement of works. Works completed on time.

As you will appreciate since the inception of the Permit Scheme there have been issues identified, the vast majority of these issues are in relation to a change of approach and process by Ringway, so they may be scheduling of the work, preparation and advance notice of work, resource or material availability.

Examples of this are:

- B4363 Wall Town Farm – drainage investigation and repairs – Shropshire Council had been made aware that following periods of heavy or persistent rainfall the highway drainage system in the vicinity of Wall Town Farm did not function correctly which allowed an area of standing water on the carriageway surface to form, this was a potential danger to the road user. The local Highway technician had arranged to investigate the blockage and found that the carriageway surface would need to excavate and a repair to the drain carried out. Due to the location of the excavation the B4363 would need to be closed. An order was raised and a permit applied to close the B4363. Permit would be granted as long as the conditions applied to the permit would be met. Local businesses were to be notified in advance of closure in order to discuss ramifications of closure and how any issues could be mitigated. Dialogue was then opened between client officers and proprietor of business. The permit for this work was then withdrawn due to the fact that a second order had been subsequently raised for carriageway resurfacing works which were located on the same section of carriageway which would require a second closure. It made sense to reorganise both elements of repairs under one closure, however this created a problem in delaying the repair to the drain and also the fact that communications had commenced between SC and local businesses in regards to the drainage repair, this delayed the scheme, but had to be balanced with the disruption that dis – joined scheduling of works could create.

Summary:

Following its first year, a review of the Permit Scheme and the approach by Highways and Contractors is being organised and will commence in May 2015, this has been agreed and is being prepared, also sight should not be lost that the Permit system allows for Shropshire Councils own appointed Network inspectors (financed via Permit application fees from contractors) to ensure that the integrity of any work by a utility company for example is completed safely, and re-instated appropriately to ensure health and safety and that future maintenance costs are minimised or prevented by ensuring the integrity of any repair or reinstatement to the highway network.

QUESTION 2

MR MILES KENNY will ask the following question:

In an era when we are told that things will be done differently why is it that the review of bus services is being carried out the same old way? Why cannot the review be carried out more imaginatively serving the user instead of serving the provider?

MRS CLAIRE WILD, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport will reply:

As you will be aware the Council's approach to service development is Redesign. Public transport is a small element of the current and ongoing Transport Redesign. The Redesign approach works with users and non-users through an extensive consultation and data gathering process. We are going through this on a service by service basis, any developments in service are based on the user consultation period and also acknowledge the current budgetary pressures.

QUESTION 3

MR MILES KENNY will ask the following question:

In 2014 Council agreed to reduce the reliance of the use of the private motor car for short journeys from the then 2/5th of short journeys to 4/5ths:

- a) How much progress has been made towards achieving this target?
- b) How will stopping the Sunday bus service help us achieve this target?
- c) Following a spate of cycle thefts at the Shirehall some staff have been advised not to cycle to work. If Council can spend £500,000 on the 'West Wing' it can do more in providing secure cycle parking, which would cost considerably less and for which there is outside funding to bid for to do this. Why hasn't more secure cycle parking been provided?

MRS CLAIRE WILD, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport will reply:

a) With reference to the Council Meeting on 8th May 2014 10.00 am, minutes show that the target was not adopted as part of Cllr Kenny's motion. However the Council's wider policy contained within the Local Transport Plan supports the use of alternative modes of transport to the motor car for such trips and as such this remains a key piece of work for the Council. Monitoring of such activity in the original motion was quoted from national survey statistics and at the time of writing we're not aware of any other update to the 2013/14 survey results. Officers will report to Council further on release of these statistics.

b) Although this target was not adopted by the Council, we still support the bus network with the aim of changing peoples' short journey travel habits. The Sunday bus network was supported by external LSTF funding and is over and above the minimum standard in the Council's adopted bus strategy. Were the Council to continue to fund the Sunday bus service network at its own expense, funding for this would have to be found from within the existing public transport budget.

c) The Council has not issued any advice stopping staff cycling to work. Staff have been advised to park their bicycles at North Entrance. Following the incidents of the 7th and 8th of April security guards were engaged to allow for contractors to be engaged to focus the CCTV camera over the North Entrance cycle store this has been completed. The Leader of the Council has also authorised the removal of a parking bay in the underground car park so that it can be assigned as cycle parking and work is in progress in this regard.
