

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 – QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6

QUESTION 1

MR A N MOSLEY will ask the following question:

"The Shropshire Partnership has included "Responding to climate change....." as one of 3 priorities within the draft Community Strategy. It also declares an aspiration that: "Shropshire will be recognised as a leader in responding to climate change". In view of this, does the Portfolio holder think that the Council should reconsider its recent negative decision and join the nationwide '10/10' campaign regarding carbon emissions and in so doing respond to and lead the county in its endeavours? Does he now believe that the Shropshire Council should join the large number of councils, businesses, voluntary organisations, political parties, educational institutions, health authorities and other public and private groupings in pledging to exhibit real ambition in reducing its impact on climate change?"

MR D W L ROBERTS the Portfolio Holder for Local Environment and Economy will reply:-

The 10:10 campaign is an initiative launched in September to encourage people, businesses and organisations to reduce their carbon footprint by 10% by the end of next year. The aim is to raise individual and collective awareness to the problem of global warming and secure commitments to take positive action, particularly in weeks leading to the Copenhagen summit.

Last month plans were agreed for a clear and deliverable Carbon Reduction Programme based around known and costed projects over the next 12 months and 5 year project year timeframe. Through this agreement Shropshire Council is committing to reduce the carbon footprint of council activities by some 35%. This agreement has been confirmed by the Government Office for the West Midlands as being both reasonable and deliverable given the authority's formation in April. To seek to accelerate the planned delivery in the initial stages of our programme to meet the 10:10 pledge would have cost and logistical implications and in reality is unlikely to be achievable.

QUESTION 2

MR J TANDY will ask the following question:-

"Shropshire council taxpayers are faced with additional costs of £100,000 for the Quantum Leap, Shrewsbury, in excess of the price agreed by developers during the tendering process. Would the Portfolio Holder please explain:

How this overspend has arisen?

Were there mistakes made in the site investigation, design, budgeting and/or construction on the part of the council or the construction company?

Why the final structure is significantly different from drawings and artists impressions, particularly the prominent solid concrete bases?

Is it a normal form of contract to allow such large variations in price following a competitive tendering process?"

MR S F CHARMLEY the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure will reply:-

The Quantum Leap Project was an initiative of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council to develop a piece of public art as a lasting memorial to Charles Darwin's Legacy. Shropshire Council has inherited the responsibility to see this work successfully completed.

The £100,000 allocated to the Quantum Leap project covers the costs of re-orientating the Quantum Leap structure to avoid the temporary works required for the construction damaging the root protection area of the surrounding trees as required by the Council's Tree Conservation Officer as described below.

Work necessary for this purpose included:

- recalculating the localised bending within the Quantum Leap Arch due to the 500mm level difference from original position.
- redesigning the foundations and piling.
- redesigning the central steel spine which had to take into account the increased length in the Quantum Leap Arch
- additional engineering/materials required

In respect of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council all proper site investigations were carried out in advance of a builder being appointed. Subsequently, after the appointment of the builder the builder undertook

a site evaluation for the construction of the structure and identified that he needed a larger working area than originally had been anticipated and this would encroach on to the tree protection root area. At this stage the foundations had not been constructed so it was possible for the precise location of the Quantum Leap Structure to be moved to protect the tree roots. The change in position of the structure gave rise to some of the additional costs, see above for details.

During the construction the structure had to be deconstructed because it was incorrectly aligned at the centre of the arch. This has now been corrected. We are not in a position to comment in regard to the Construction Company.

We do not believe that the final structure is different from the original sketches and drawings. We believe that the drawings and artists impressions gave a reasonable interpretation of the finished structure. With regard to the prominent solid concrete base, a number of issues were raised during the consultation phase, including concerns raised by the Environment Agency as to the impact the presence of the structure would have in a flooding situation. With regard to your point in respect of the solid concrete bases, I assume you are making reference to the concrete infills to the bottom few ribs at each end. The detailed drawings approved by Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Development Control and Environment Protection Committee on the 9th September 2008, show, "infill between ribs to discourage climbing and gathering of debris". In addition, the bases ensure compressive strength in times of flood, which exerts horizontal pressure to the base and eliminates any sway in high winds, which exerts vertical pressure on the base.

The construction of the Quantum Leap has been let on a normal form of contract, in which there are provisions to allow for variations. The additional costs in this project are higher in percentage terms than might normally be expected, however, it should be recognised that the Quantum Leap structure is unique in its design and construction and has presented a number of complexities to be solved.

QUESTION 3

MRS E A PARSONS will ask the following question:

"Would the Portfolio Holder please outline what progress has been made towards the provision of suitable and easy access to Shropshire Council services at the Guildhall, Frankwell in Shrewsbury, especially for the disabled, wheelchair users, electric scooter users and those with pushchairs?"

MR P A NUTTING the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Performance will reply:-

As Portfolio Holder for Asset Management I am concerned that the Council should make reasonable adjustments to its property to facilitate access to our services and I thank Mrs Parsons for her question. Whilst the Guildhall is accessible by people with disabilities, the footbridge from the car park is not, nor is it easily crossed by people with children in pushchairs. I am pleased to advise Mrs Parsons that following her earlier enquiry on this matter an appraisal was undertaken of the prospects for improving accessibility and we propose to bring forward a formal capital appraisal to be considered as part of the Council's future Capital Strategy.

QUESTION 4

MRS E A PARSONS will ask the following question:

"What changes to the provision of services does the Administration foresee as a result of implementation of the Gender Equality Duty and how might any necessary changes impact on the forthcoming Budget?"

MR K R BARROW the Leader of the Council, will reply:-

The Gender Equality Duty is designed to address inequalities for men and women. It also requires public authorities to consider the need to prevent discrimination and harassment against transsexual people.

The Duty was introduced in 2006 and we have worked with our staff and communities to ensure equal and fair access to services and employment. As part of the service planning process Equality Impact Needs Assessments (EINA's) are undertaken to ensure there are no negative or adverse impacts on either men or women. If a negative impact is identified then appropriate actions are taken to remedy this and these are built into the service planning process.

The duty also includes the requirement to consider the need to have objectives to address the causes of any gender pay gap. Shropshire County Council's Gender equality scheme was published in March 2007 and each year since then a statement has been published detailing the positive actions being taken to address equal pay and to implement the national single status agreement.

Shropshire Council does not foresee any impact to the forthcoming budget in fulfilling our duties against the Gender Equality Duty.

QUESTION 5

MR P F PHILLIPS will ask the following question:

- (a) Can you acknowledge the contribution that Wheels to Work makes in terms of youth employment and training in remote rural areas?
- (b) Can you confirm the current level of budget for Wheels to Work and where the contributions come from?
- (c) Can you confirm that Wheels to Work's budget is safe in the current and next two financial years?

MR D W L ROBERTS the Portfolio Holder for Local Environment and Economy will reply:-

The Council fully acknowledges the important contribution that Wheels to Work makes in supporting young people from remote rural areas in accessing employment and training opportunities.

The scheme, which is managed by the Community Council of Shropshire under contract to Shropshire Council, covers the whole of Shropshire and offers a number of interventions, including the moped hire service that is of particular benefit to young people living in areas not served by main bus and train routes.

The majority of Wheels to Work clients are referred from other support agencies including Jobcentre Plus, County Training and the Probation Service, and it has become a vital strategic tool in combating rural isolation and worklessness. There is an increasing demand for the service during the current period of economic uncertainty.

To provide an indication of the scale of the scheme, the following information shows the total number of people aged 21 and below that have been offered assistance through Shropshire Wheels to Work since April 2006 to the present day. The information has been broken down into the old district council areas and by 'transport solution' offered. The total number of under '21s' interviewed since 1st April 2006 to 25th Nov 09 was 630, of which 609 were offered assistance.

It will take more time to provide specific data on remote rural areas and the split between beneficiaries that used the service to access employment and/or training. To do this, each individual's case file would need to be checked manually by the Wheels to Work Co-ordinator, Mark Powell.

Shrewsbury and Atcham District

Mopeds offered:	51	
CBT only offered:	1	(i.e. just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	40	
Bicycles offered	3	
Grants offered	3	
Travel plans only	25	

Total offered assistance 123

Total interviewed 128

North Shropshire District

Mopeds offered:	88	
CBT only offered:	2	(i.e. just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	59	
Bicycles offered	3	
Grants offered	5	
Travel plans only	31	

Total offered assistance 188

Total interviewed 198

Oswestry District

Mopeds offered:	29	
CBT only offered:	0	(ie just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	50	
Bicycles offered	1	
Grants offered	2	
Travel plans only	18	

Total offered assistance 100

Total interviewed 102

South Shropshire District

Mopeds offered:	55	
CBT only offered:	3	(ie just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	34	
Bicycles offered	1	
Grants offered	3	

Travel plans only	8
Total offered assistance	<u>104</u>
Total interviewed	107

Bridgnorth District

Mopeds offered:	47	
CBT only offered:	1	(ie just moped training - client had own moped)
Driving lessons offered	21	
Bicycles offered	1	
Grants offered	5	
Travel plans only	19	
Total offered assistance	<u>94</u>	
Total interviewed	95	

Financial position

From 06/07 to 08/09, the total Wheels to Work capital and revenue costs were picked up by grant funding through the Shropshire Access Partnership (AWM funding). This amounted to circa £110,000 per annum.

This arrangement was set to continue in 09/10, but following budgetary cuts within AWM, no decision on continuation funding had been reached by the start of the year. Shropshire Council agreed to support the scheme on a short-term basis pending an eventual decision by AWM.

Following pressure from the Council and Shropshire Partnership, agreement was reached in August 09 that AWM would provide support to Wheels to Work for a further year, but at a reduced level of £67k. To fill the funding gap, Shropshire Council is providing £30k to the scheme through LAA reward monies.

Discussion is ongoing regarding funding from April 2010. An application is being prepared for Rural Development Plan England funding. This is a regional bid, led by Staffordshire's Wheels to Work scheme, but Shropshire will have an autonomous budget within this. The bid will be submitted soon and, if successful, will provide funding for at least three years. However, whilst there is confidence that the bid will be successful, RDPE cannot support certain aspects of the project like insurance for the moped fleet and discussion is ongoing on where additional funding for these elements – approximately £20,000 p.a.-

can be found. Some of this funding will be sought from the Council's Worklessness Commissioning Group.

QUESTION 6

MR P F PHILLIPS will ask the following question:

"Will you confirm the value and excitement being offered by the Building Schools for the Future Programme? This in due course will refurbish our secondary schools or indeed in some cases build new ones. Would you confirm by your pleasure that at Partnerships for Schools on the 5th November it was confirmed that the programme is still in place. Shropshire is one of the last tranches of the programme - exciting developments at Much Wenlock are our pilot - so will you undertake to press the Government to at least confirm and keep to the programme and if possible bring Shropshire into the nearer rather than the more distant future?"

MRS C M A MOTLEY the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People will reply:-

I very much welcome the funding made available through the One School Pathfinder Project to enable the building of a new secondary school at Much Wenlock. With regard to the Building Schools for the Future fund, The Director of CYPS wrote to the DCSF on 4 November 2009 urgently requesting clarity on the timeline for determining when BSF funding would be available to Shropshire, in the light of the need for this Council to align capital investment such as BSF, PCP and 14-19 to enable us to place 21st century schools at the heart of our sustainable community strategy.

In a letter dated 19th November, Partnerships for Schools responded on behalf of DCSF and stated that they were unable to set out a timeline for the entry of Shropshire into the BSF programme, and that Shropshire, in common with other local authorities low down on the prioritisation list, would not be invited to join the programme this financial year. Partnership for Schools reiterated ministers' commitment to seeing all local authorities joining the programme 'as soon as is practicable', and stated that they were currently considering how to support local authorities' preparation for entry to the programme.'