

COUNCIL 19th DECEMBER 2019

MEMBER QUESTIONS REPORT

1. Question from Councillor Hannah Fraser

Schools are required to pay funds from their budget towards the Apprenticeship Levy. It was intended that schools would benefit from being able to apply into the resulting fund to train staff via apprenticeships. However, schools are reporting that applying to the fund has hidden costs and the process is time consuming and difficult to navigate. Could Council please confirm how much money schools have paid into the apprenticeship Levy since it started, how many apprenticeships have been set up in schools, and how many of these are for teacher training?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

COUNCILLOR ED BIRD, PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

Question: How much money have schools paid into the Apprenticeship Levy?

The table below shows the money which schools have paid into the apprenticeship levy (April 17 - November 19).

The total is £589,949. The breakdown is:

	2017/18 £	2018/19 £	2019/20 Year to date £	Total £
Primary Schools	176,398	162,311	85,254	423,964
Secondary Schools	75,106	64,145	26,734	165,985
TOTAL (Schools)	251,504	226,457	111,988	589,949

Question: How many apprenticeships have been set up in schools?

Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017, Upskill Shropshire has received **109 applications** for apprenticeships from maintained schools.

Number of Applications from Primary Schools	106
Number of Applications from Secondary Schools	3

Number of applications received by year:

Year	Number of applications
2017	25
2018	39
2019	45
Total	109

Application spilt for School Apprentices – new recruits/professional development:

Apprentices - new recruits	53
Apprentices – professional development	56

38 (43%) schools have engaged with Upskill Shropshire to start apprentices within their organisation. Table 1 below outlines apprenticeships in Shropshire maintained schools, the amount of money committed (before any withdrawals) from Shropshire Council's Apprenticeship Levy pot.

As of 5/12/2019, there have been 56 apprenticeship starts within Shropshire Maintained Schools.

Question: How many of these are for teacher training?

Starts/Completed/Withdrawn on Teaching/Education related apprenticeships:
Table 1 below maps starts/completed/withdrawn apprentices across the various education apprenticeships.

Table 1

Type of Apprenticeship	Level	Number of Learners Applications	Completed	Started	Waiting to start	Withdrawn
Children and Young People's Workforce	2	1		1		
Children and Young People's Workforce: Early Years Educator	3	4	1	2	1	
Early Years Educator	3	2			2	
Learning Mentor	3	1			1	
Supporting Teaching and Learning	2	28	4	16	3	5
Supporting Teaching and Learning	3	21		12		9
Supporting Teaching and Learning: School Sport and Physical Education	3	4		4		
Teacher	6	4		1		3
Teaching Assistant	3	11		7	2	2
Total		76	5	43	11	17

Teacher Level 6 Apprenticeship

There has been a lack of information and guidance nationally regarding the Teacher Level 6, and several issues have been faced by Shropshire Council regarding this apprenticeship; these issues have been reported via the Council's Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Account Manager. In late November 2019, Apprenticeship Levy guidance for schools was issued and this provides guidance regarding Teacher Level 6.

Since the introduction of the degree level apprenticeship, 4 people have applied for the Teacher Level 6 apprenticeship and all have been eligible. Of these:

1 learner has nearly completed their Teacher Level 6 apprenticeship.

1 learner has postponed due to external factors.

2 learners have withdrawn. For one learner, the withdrawal was because the apprenticeship training provider's delivery model was unsuitable for them due to personal circumstances. For the second learner, the model of delivery was too onerous and was unfeasible for the school as they would need to ensure that there was cover.

If a school has a learner taking up the Teacher Level apprenticeship, they are able to access Schools Direct Funding. This is additional grant funding to support schools who have a learner taking up the postgraduate teacher apprenticeship.

In 2020, Upskill Shropshire will be hosting a number of information sessions to support schools who are looking to start new recruits and current staff on Teacher level 6, Teaching Assistant Level 3, Learning Mentor Level 3 and Early Years Educator Level 3.

Further information:

Upskill Board

The Upskill Shropshire Board meets on a quarterly basis. The Board is attended by representatives from across the different service areas of the Council (Children's, Adults, HR, Communications, Economic Growth, Finance) so there is a wide-ranging strategic approach to apprenticeships within Shropshire Council. Union and Schools representatives are both invited to attend the Board Meetings and have a seat around the table. The Upskill Board is a platform to discuss any barriers and issues, national and local developments, communications, performance monitoring and financial analysis, risks and opportunities.

Upskill Application Process:

Guidance regarding the application process and downloadable application forms and business case forms are available on the Shropshire Learning Gateway.

The process for an application for apprenticeship training is as follows:

1. Skills need or need for new recruitment identified. Appropriate apprenticeship (relevant to their role) via SLG or Institute for Apprenticeships website.
2. A learner seeking professional development would gain approval from their Manager/Head and complete the Upskill Application and return to upskill@shropshire.gov.uk If new recruitment or professional development,

Head/Manager completes the Upskill Business Case to upskill@shropshire.gov.uk.

3. Upskill Shropshire will review the Business Case and if all information is included they will send to the Schools HR Business Partner to review and approve. If all the information isn't provided, the business case/application form will be returned to the school to provide additional details.
4. Once the Business Case is approved and the applicant is deemed eligible for the apprenticeship training, Upskill Shropshire procure a provider from their Framework of Apprenticeship Training Providers. Schools are advised to allow up to 12 weeks (max) to complete this process.
5. When an Apprenticeship Training Provider is found, the Head will be informed of successful procurement. Learner details are passed to the provider for enrolment and they will contact the learner to start.

There are two options for new recruits, depending on whether the school would like support from the provider, with the recruitment activity. For schools it is recommended that a business case is submitted and, when approved and a provider has been identified, that the school and provider discuss the recruitment and the provider takes a lead on this. The school may want to undertake the final interviews either with or without the provider; all apprenticeship recruitment services are tailored to the employer. The school /service area is still responsible for all recruitment checks.

- There are 87 maintained schools within the Local Authority area. 43% of Shropshire maintained schools have engaged with the Apprenticeship Levy. Those schools that have engaged have either employed apprentices into roles or have used the Levy for professional development of current staff.

Table 2 below shows the apprenticeships which applications have been received from Shropshire schools.

Table 2

Type of Apprenticeship	Level	Number of Learners Applications	Cost Per Apprenticeship (£)	Total cost for Apprenticeships (£)
Accounting	2	1	2,000	2,000
Business Administration	2	11	2,000	22,000
Business Administrator Standard	3	3	5,000	15,000
Business and Administration	3	2	2,500	5,000
Children and Young People's Workforce	2	1	2,000	2,000
Children and Young People's Workforce: Early Years Educator	3	4	2,500	10,000
Early Years Educator	3	2	6,000	12,000
Infrastructure Technician	3	1	15,000	15,000
IT, Software, Web and	2	2	4,000	8,000

Telecoms Professional				
Learning Mentor	3	1	5,000	5,000
Schools Business Professional	4	4	6,000	24,000
Supporting Teaching and Learning	2	28	2,000	56,000
Supporting Teaching and Learning	3	21	2,500	52,500
Supporting Teaching and Learning: School Sport and Physical Education	3	4	2,500	10,000
Teacher	6	4	9,000	36,000
Teaching Assistant	3	11	5,000	55,000
	Total amount committed for apprenticeships from the Levy.			329,500*

****This total is subject to learners withdrawing from apprenticeships/schools not recruiting to apprenticeship vacancies.***

- 4 applications were withdrawn at application stage prior to recruitment of new apprentices
- 11 apprentices are waiting to start their apprenticeships (some of these are new recruitment applications so may not have been appointed yet).
- 9 learners have completed their apprenticeships
- 56 learners have started their apprenticeships.

Over the past 12 months officers have attended the Headteacher Forums and offered individual face to face opportunities to discuss apprenticeships. Officers have informed schools of the processes, the benefits and the wide range of apprenticeships which schools can access within education, IT, catering, site and facilities management, school business manager and degree level apprenticeships including Management degrees.

The government have very recently issued guidance for Schools:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843991/Guide_to_apprenticeships_for_schools.pdf

This guidance states the various apprenticeships available for schools and matches them to job roles.

Hidden costs

Schools have mentioned hidden costs which they might incur when employing an apprentice.

Schools would need to pay the wages of any apprentice which they may employ. There are restrictions, as stated in the ESFA Apprenticeship Levy Funding Rules around what can or cannot be funded by the apprenticeship levy.

If an apprentice needs to travel to their place of learning they will either need to fund the cost of this themselves or the school may decide to support them with these

costs. This is likely to happen with Teacher Level 6 or other degree level apprenticeships as these are delivered at University campuses. This would be discussed with the school prior to the learner starting the apprenticeship.

If an apprentice is out of the classroom in face to face training, a school may need to ensure that there is suitable supervision within the classroom which could incur costs for paying supply staff. The school could work with their training providers to ensure that apprentices working within the same classroom are not out of the school environment on the same day.

2. Question from Councillor Hannah Fraser

A development of 650 houses at the top of Preston Street was given planning approval by this Planning Authority in early 2018, and construction is now going ahead. Despite the assurances of the developers during the planning process, residents are suffering with site working and site deliveries by heavy goods vehicles at unsociable hours, and mud on the roads. The developers appear to be in contravention of very clear planning conditions. Meetings have been held between residents, developers and the Council and more assurances have been given, yet problems for residents continue. Can the Council please explain why no enforcement action has been taken against the developer to ensure that the conditions of the planning permission, including adherence to a Construction Environment Management Plan, are fulfilled? Can the Council also confirm how many stop notices have been issued against housing developers in Shropshire in the last 2 years?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services

COUNCILLOR GWILYM BUTLER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

Following the grant of planning permission for the construction of 650 houses on this site allocated for development in the Local Plan, the developers have taken part in a series of meetings with Council officers and local residents' representatives. This has provided a forum for issues associated with the construction to be raised.

A formal planning enforcement query has been received recently and this will be considered in accordance with the Council's Planning Enforcement Protocol. It is the receipt of this planning enforcement query that is the trigger for formal action to be considered. As part of this process the developer will be advised of any breaches of the planning permission and appropriate action by the Local Planning Authority to secure compliance in accordance with the protocol.

Within the last two years one stop notice has been issued.

3. Question from Councillor David Turner

At the July Council meeting I advanced questions asking about the chronic neglect of basic work in Much Wenlock, undertakings as to completion dates, and the contraction of the highways budget. I referred to a meeting on this topic in March with the Leader and senior officers

The answers I received July, inasmuch as they answered the questions I asked, indicated that during a road closure to replace a gas main it was intended that a dangerous footpath would be resurfaced, improvements to gullies undertaken, road markings refreshed, and a bollard replaced. Further, a longstanding traffic scheme, where the Traffic Regulation Order had run out of time, would be undertaken, and a timeline will be confirmed "asap". Suffice to say that neither of these have taken place and there is no indication, five months later, as to when these works, or a number of others listed in that question, will be undertaken.

Meanwhile, the B4378 is littered with dangerous potholes, filled from time to time with a dollop of tar; many other roads are in the same condition.

Only after relentless pressure by me are highways gullies in Much Wenlock being cleared and thus far this work has been limited to estate roads, whilst many of those in vulnerable streets around the town culvert remain blocked solid.

My questions are:

1. When will the work listed in my July Question, and other works on an item by item basis, realistically be completed?
2. As the "demand on the network assets is higher than the available resources and required work has to be constantly re-prioritised", what are the criteria and where is the visibility in order that Members can see what revenue and capital works are taking precedence over that in their Divisions?
3. If there is no realistic chance of keeping some well-used routes safe, has any consideration been given to simply closing them?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

COUNCILLOR STEVE DAVENPORT, PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

1. A dedicated gulley crew spent a full day on the Gulley drainage network in Much Wenlock on Sunday 8th December 2019.

The Wilmore Street resurfacing and bollard scheme will be completed in the current financial year 2019/20 and is permitted for Sunday 16th February 2020.

The removal of matting from the trash screen was completed on the 6th December 2019. Tourism signage will be completed on Sheinton Street before Christmas 2019.

2. The criteria for Highway investment prioritisation is set out in the Highways Asset Management plan which is a publicly available document which may broadly be summarised as follows;

“We consider the condition of all our roads within our Highways Asset Management strategy. We undertake carriageway condition assessments used a machine-based survey for classified roads and for minor roads, a coarse visual inspection is used. This approach is consistent with industry best practice for the local road network in England and provides the authority with a network-level view of the condition of these assets. The condition data is used to prioritise further scheme-level investigation so that we use our limited resources most effectively and the outcome of the investigation is used to form a forward programme of investment. It is recognised that this system provides a sufficiently robust process for managing the asset however, it is also recognised local concerns that need be considered alongside those identified from the main process. We are currently in the process of reviewing data and local information in order to inform our programme for 2020”.

The Highways capital programme for 2020/21 will be published prior to the commencement of the new financial year

3. Shropshire continues to make the best of the resources and funding it has and furthermore has successfully bid for additional Highways funding currently in excess of £90Million. We will continue to take strategic asset management decisions based upon agreed criteria whilst sensitising investment locally wherever possible. No consideration has been given to closing well used routes.

4. Question from Councillor Andy Boddington

- 1) What percentage of the power consumed in Shirehall is generated by fossil fuels?
- 2) What policies does the council have to ensure that the Shropshire County Pension Fund disinvests from fossil fuel investments and on what timetable will that happen?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Services and Climate Change

COUNCILLOR DEAN CARROLL, PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

- 1)
 - Shirehall used 4,810,156 kWh of energy last year. Of this 41% was zero carbon electricity and 59% was mains gas;
 - In all, Shirehall used 1,966,303 kWh electricity last year, mostly for ICT and lighting. Of this, 1,879,495 kWh was supplied from the network on a zero carbon tariff (West Midlands Energy green tariff). In addition to this, 86,808 kWh of electricity has been generated on site from the Shirehall solar PV

array so far in 2019. This energy is used onsite to meet daytime lighting and ICT demand and to offset the remaining electricity consumption;

- Shirehall also used 2,843,853 kWh mains gas for space heating and hot water last year. This fuel has a relatively low carbon factor which generated a footprint of 523 tonnes CO₂e.
- 2) The Council has no policies in place to ensure the Shropshire County Pension Fund disinvests from fossil fuel companies. The Pension Fund takes Responsible Investment and ESG issues seriously, policies on this can be found within the annual report on www.shropshirecountypensionfund.co.uk and this subject has been covered in detail at Pension Fund AGM meetings over the years all of which can be found on the website.

5. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

- 1) Concerning payments made by Shropshire Council to contractors

How are payments to Kier and WSP authorised and are all payments linked to work completed and how is completion proven. Does this include checks to ensure that payments are properly authorised and have all payments requested by Kier been paid in full, or have some deductions been made; including any Low Service Delivery Deductions and any efficiency savings on the Kier Contract identified; have there been any months when the amount paid to Kier been abnormally high.

Since the start of the contract some 15 months ago have any advance payments in respect of Fixed Overheads been paid to Kier and conversely have any payments to Kier been authorised for work carried out many months later?

Do you have any concerns about the quality of work and the payments made to either Kier or WSP.

- 2) It has been reported that costs on the WSP contract are running well above the initial estimates. If this is correct how much in excess is this, and what is being done to bring this overspending down; when WSP issue their monthly Application for Payment, is a report prepared recommending payment? Have these reports highlighted the issue of increasing costs and made recommendations to bring these down? Regarding performance targets which WSP are supposed to achieve – how often is WSP's performance assessed against these targets?

Finally, In recent adverts WSP state that their office in Shrewsbury is "integrated with the Client due to our longstanding relationship and collaborative working practices." Do you consider this suggests that the relationship is too close?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

STEVE DAVENPORT, PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

- 1) All current payments to KIER and WSP should be initiated and evidenced through Shropshire Council's financial administration software system (CONFIRM), which then should be summarised and ratified by Shropshire Council's Service Manager.

All of our supervisors, managers and staff now initiate work through the CONFIRM system and, following a series of stages in the system, finally authorise payment upon receipt of evidence of completion. The evidence required varies, but may include photographs, site visits, joint site visits, time sheets, goods received notes, variation sheets, as built drawings and subcontractor invoices. Previously evidence to substantiate completed work was not all placed or available within the CONFIRM system, as identified in an audit report earlier this year, but as part of the ongoing improvement programme has received considerable and ongoing focus working towards full compliance. Deductions have been made based upon performance issues and sums have been withheld subject to receipt of the required evidence. Both low service deductions and efficiencies have been identified.

Monthly payments to Kier vary depending on work completed.

We do have concerns over the quality of some work undertaken by Kier and we are working with them to address this.

I am advised that management are addressing issues of payments to Kier.

- 2) Costs have increased in line with inflation on the WSP contract. Volume or turnover through the contract has increased in line with the increase in Government support funding for projects such as the £72 million, NWWR Project & the £3.4 million A529 Project alongside successful DFT funding such as our successful £7 million Challenge Fund bid, all of which led to greater investment in Shropshire. There are agreed contract and commercial processes in place for all payments made to WSP. There is a contractual requirement for WSP to provide monthly performance information and this has been received without exception.

The relationship between WSP and the Council is contractual and so the Council's robust approach to contract management should be applied.

The Chief Executive of the Council has asked for the audit of WSP to be brought forward and this should be completed early in the New Year.