

**CABINET 29 APRIL 2020
MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

Questions and Responses

1. **Question from Councillor Andy Boddington**

What plans is the council putting in place to support the retail economy of Shropshire, including in the rural market towns, after lockdown ends?

Currently the Council is dealing with 1,430 grant applications to support the retail, hospitality and leisure sector across Shropshire. We have currently given just over £37 million in support to businesses in this sector with grants of £10,000 and £25,000 depending on their rateable value. This is a huge task which involves staff from across finance, business rates and economic growth to give much needed support, advice and reassurance during these very difficult and financially challenging times that businesses are facing. Our focus has to be on getting this much needed grant funding to those businesses in the short term. This will help to sustain and provide some resilience to businesses in our towns across the county.

We have been working with partners including the Marches LEP, Federation of Small Business, Business Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce, Central Government and other stakeholders to explore what additional support may be available to help businesses, retailers and the leisure sector through this very difficult time. The Marches LEP Board of which Shropshire Council is part, has recently agreed to allocate funding to support businesses and tourism, recognising the impact on this sector and its importance for Shropshire and the wider Marches area. More details will be provided on this soon. As well as grant funding for businesses, we are keen to provide a particular focus on those towns affected by flooding as well as the current crisis – Ludlow, Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury.

We recognise the innovation and resilience of the business community and a recent example of this is a particular initiative led by Shrewsbury BID and My Shrewsbury to create 'Support Shrewsbury', a digital platform offering a single website where businesses can sell products, experiences and gift vouchers to customers – providing much needed cashflow into the business (supportshrewsbury.co.uk.) In another of our towns, Oswestry BID have set up a suppliers and services page within their website to support businesses to promote the services and products that are available to support other businesses and communities during this difficult period, examples include grocery deliveries, shop supplies, takeaways and home deliveries, well-being and book delivery services, DIY and home supplies, care and essential services and trader support. More information can be found here.

We have local economic growth strategies out for consultation until the 22nd May, and these provide a platform for the key market towns. Whilst these are likely to need to change and flex as we emerge from this crisis, they provide a mechanism and framework to work together, and support our businesses.

Whilst we have started to use the data, impacts and trends to pull together ideas for the recovery phase after the lockdown starts to be lifted and we will share this over the coming weeks, we must continue to focus on pushing out the financial support to help deal with the immediate impacts for those eligible businesses.

2. Two Questions from Councillor David Vasmer

i. What support has Shropshire Council been able to give to Care Homes and what plans does the Council have if the safe care of residents becomes compromised as a result of care staff being forced to self-isolate?

General support: Significant work is going on in Shropshire to ensure the support and wellbeing of all our care homes, their residents and their staff. We are working closely with System partners and Shropshire Partners in Care to ensure that up to date information goes out so that we can be sure every care home (and indeed all the domiciliary care providers) are kept up to date with all national guidance and local information and news.

In addition we are making welfare calls to every single provider, and we have a team dedicated to care homes. These welfare calls are for the regular support of care homes and to ensure that they have sufficient staffing and resources, and also just to check that they are coping with the current crisis, and that we are aware of any significant issues and risks that we can then assist with. Where there is an outbreak in a care home Public Health lead on the welfare calls to make sure that they have support from the right experts at the right time. Shropshire Partners in Care is also regularly contacting providers across the market and any issues are reported to the local authority so that we can also ensure help is getting to where it is most needed.

We are also checking in with care homes around their status as to whether they are adhering to safe practice in the restriction of visitors and a care homes closure report is submitted daily to the Local Health Resilience Partnership.

Providers can send questions in to us and call us at any time and we are responding to queries through commissioning, contracts, Public Health and FPOC and social work teams as well as the adult social care business team. We respond to every enquiry individually and on a daily basis we also compile and update frequently asked questions for the care market across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and these are hosted on Shropshire partners in care site and linked to both councils websites. This includes lots of information to help providers especially around areas such as personal protective equipment and access to food and infection control advice; for your information the link is included below.

<https://www.spic.co.uk/resource-category/covid-19-guidance/>

System support: We also have a system wide care market task and finish group dedicated to the support of the market in general. This group involves officers from both authorities and from the CCG's and includes experts on infection prevention and control so that we can ensure the entire market get support around this vital

area- they also escalate any significant issues up through the system to Silver and Gold command to make sure that everyone who needs to be made or be aware of key risks and decisions is informed and involved.

Risk assessment– we already had a robust risk assessment process for care homes which helped us to identify general risks for care homes – we have used this robust process and enhanced it to cover both the standard care home management processes and then ensure all risks regarding Covid 19 are covered so that we can clearly identify and care homes who are particularly at risk and make sure that proactive support is put in place. This standard risk management matrix draws information from CQC, Concerns reported, complaints, financial risks, size of contract, whether there are any safeguarding or multiagency processes in place. We are cited on how many confirmed and suspected cases of Covid 19 are in a care home daily from information which comes from Public Health England and are now adding information from the National bed Tracker which will show us how many employee may be off work or self-isolation so we can add this into our risk management considerations. We then meet regularly with public health to ensure that we get the right support where it is needed and prioritise care homes who may be most at risk.

We are working closely with System partners, including Public Health England (PHE), NHS Colleagues and Shropshire Partners in Care to monitor and support our care homes, and to ensure that up to date information goes out so that we can be sure every care home (and indeed all the domiciliary care providers) are kept up to date with all national guidance and local information and news .

Outbreaks in care homes are required to be reported to PHE who support each home through the outbreak, in partnership with Shropshire Council and the local NHS partners. This includes offering guidance on infection control, testing for staff and residents and PPE.

ii) Given the changes to people's lives that will result from the Coronavirus Pandemic and the likelihood of a severe recession, can the Leader justify pressing on with the North West Relief Road when a much smaller investment in traffic reduction measures, extra cycling provision and better buses will reduce congestion in Shrewsbury, and make a more significant contribution to the attractiveness of Shrewsbury as a tourist destination?

Alternatives (at a lower cost) to building a relief road have already been considered, including improvements to bus services, improvements to Park and Ride, improvements to the walking and cycling networks and demand management, such as road pricing. However, the results showed that these means alone would not produce the benefits equal to those which could be achieved by building the NWRR. These options are fully explored and measured in terms of effectiveness within the Outline Business case (2017). This is available at <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/8939/shrewsbury-nwrr-obc-34-web-version.pdf>

The funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) is only available to construct a North West Relief Road. The funding is not transferable to any other projects in

Shropshire. Funding through the Local Transport Plan and other sources will continue to be available to Shropshire for other transport projects.

There are already works planned and in delivery in the town centre in order to increase the attractiveness of Shrewsbury as a tourist destination. The Shrewsbury North West Relief Road will complement the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package (SITP) which has or will introduce:

- Enhancements to the public realm, such as Pride Hill, Roushill & Mardol
- Enhancements to pedestrian and cycle links to increase accessibility to the town centre
- Improved pedestrian wayfinding within and around the 'river loop' to generate a highly accessible and connected town centre for pedestrians

Together the NWRR and SITP will also support the delivery of the Big Town Plan by removing and working around the opportunities presented by the removal of significant levels of traffic from the town.

3Two Questions from Councillor Julian Dean

- i. At a recent Place overview committee there was an agreement that an offer from WSP to provide expertise on climate issues and transport would be pursued. Meanwhile I am concerned that there is no sign of development towards LTP4, which should provide an opportunity to shape appropriate transport development, despite plans for new housing and employment development areas being pursued through the local plan review. When can we expect to see a draft LTP4; will this make use of WSP climate related expertise; and will this be timed such that it supports sustainable and active transport solutions for additional housing and employment?**

The development of the next Local Transport Plan for Shropshire (LTP4) is due to be recommended shortly following the changes in the local and national context that were required to be incorporated. The re-scoping process will include enhancing links to economic growth and to the local plan review and the local economic plans for each area, as well as incorporating Shropshire Council's aspirations in relation to tackling carbon emissions and climate change, and the exploration of transport hubs and developmental Train strategy, the movement strategy for Shrewsbury, review of the Park and Ride services, The bids that are being submitted to the Department of Transport for the better deal for Buses that we will be submitted in the next month and the impact on Cross boarder working with the announcement of funding for the Pant/Llanymynech bypass. The development of LTP4 will continue to be commissioned to Shropshire Council's term engineering consultants, WSP, and as such appropriate climate related expertise will be sought and used. From the point that the next stage of the commission commences, it is anticipated that the LTP will take just over one year to complete, due to fixed timescales associated with some required elements and meeting the fast moving agenda in Shropshire's transport ambitions.

- ii. The Centre for Public Scrutiny recommend that scrutiny functions remain critical but have a new role during the Covid 19 emergency. They mention in**

particular the need for continued scrutiny regarding social care - especially given the easements provide by government; the effectiveness of the various levels of collaborative working to face the emergency; and protecting vulnerable children. What plans are there for a slimmed down but still rigorous and public scrutiny processes?

Response from Cllr Claire Wild, Chair of Performance Management Scrutiny Committee :

Following the changes to legislation enabling meetings to take place virtually, proposals are being developed for Overview and Scrutiny at Shropshire Council taking account of the suggestions made by the Centre for Public Scrutiny on how Overview and Scrutiny could operate as the Council works remotely. It is expected that the number of meetings will be reduced as part of the slimming down to assist with managing demands on officer time and partner time. There will be the opportunity to complete work already underway by existing task and finish groups, as well as topics previously identified in work programmes, and the opportunity to identify topics in light of Covid 19. The proposals are being brought forward for consideration and following this they will be implemented..

4 Two questions from Councillor Roger Evans

i) I note in a recent press release sent out by Shropshire Council it states that of the £91m received by the council £42m or 46% has been distributed to 5,600 business. Given the small team of 6 looking after this, my and I am sure all of us would wish to congratulate them on this achievement. However there remains £49m in our bank account still to be given out to businesses, many of whom are in desperate straits especially as the month end approaches. Are their plans to increase the number of staff working in this area so that all those entitled to receive grants can receive them in the next few days.

As at 28 April we have received 7,080 applications and paid out to 4,544, which is over 64%. The value of grant remaining is potentially misleading. Based on the applications received, the maximum amount of grant still to be paid out is £34.5m not the £49m quoted in the question (and that £34.5m assumes that all Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grants are paid at £25,000, when in reality some will be at £10,000). Any surplus or shortfall in the grant will be reconciled at a future point.

Nevertheless, the question is still valid in that although 4,544 business have been paid (which, out of 314 local authorities, places us within the top 20 in the country), 36% (or 2,536 businesses) have not yet received their grant. The majority of these businesses have been contacted to provide outstanding information (and payment is dependent on receiving and validating that information), some will not be eligible (and will be contacted to confirm this over the next few weeks) and the focus is on the remainder, who are eligible and have provided all necessary information.

Our objective remains to pay out these grants as soon as we possibly can, with the majority outstanding dealt with before the end of this week. Additional resources have been made available to manage the process.

ii) Schools remain closed except for certain categories of children. They also of course remained open over the Easter Break. Our thanks go to all those staff who gave up their holidays to look after these children and so enabled their parents to continue working and caring for those in need.

However extra unplanned costs have and are being incurred by schools, many of which were already planning to spend all their budget providing the education our children need. Is Shropshire Council planning to help those schools who are likely to overspend their budget, or will they be forced into making some staff redundant.

The government has confirmed that schools will continue to receive their core funding allocation for the 2020 to 2021 financial year (April 2020 to March 2021 for maintained schools and until August 2021 for academies). This will happen regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure and will ensure schools can continue to pay staff and meet other regular financial commitments.

Local authorities will continue to receive their high need budgets and will continue to pay top-up and other high needs funding to schools. This will ensure that the employment and payment of staff supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can continue.

The government has also identified areas in which they understand schools may face additional costs as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, namely

- increased/additional premises related costs associated with keeping schools open during Easter and/or summer half-term
- support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school where these are not covered by the FSM national voucher scheme
- additional cleaning required due to confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases.

The following limits have been set for schools claiming these additional costs:

Mainstream schools	
250 pupils or fewer	£25,000
251 to 500 pupils	£30,000
501 to 1,000 pupils	£50,000
Over 1,000 pupils	£75,000
Special schools and alternative provision	
All schools	£50,000

The one area that schools have identified as an issue is in respect of what is referred to as 'private income', which includes income from paid school meals, lettings, breakfast and after school clubs. With these services either reduced or ceased, schools could face a shortfall in income over the financial year. Schools are being directed towards the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) for furloughed staff. They are however expected to exhaust all the options to meet costs from existing budgets or redeployment before seeking support from this scheme.

With all of these measures in place the risks of schools overspending in the current year are significantly reduced, while there is no expectation that schools will have to make staff redundant as a direct consequence of COVID-19. Council education

finance officers will work closely with schools to carefully monitor the position as the sector comes out of lockdown and are happy to engage with Members who have concerns about specific maintained schools.

5. Two questions from Councillor Ruth Houghton

i. How many deaths have there been from Covid 19 in Shropshire Care homes? And of this number how many of these are in A) nursing homes B) residential homes?

ii. How many deaths due to Covid 19 in care homes have been amongst A) older people over 65 years and B) younger adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or mental health needs?

With regard to publishing local authority figures for deaths from COVID in care homes into a public domain, we are following national guidance and best practice on this. Figures on care homes are released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Care Quality Commission (CQC) whose responsibility it is collate all the data on all deaths and validate data. By signposting and referring to nationally produced data, to ensure we have an accurate reflection of all current deaths in Shropshire including those in care homes and community settings.

This is available as of the 28th April at a Local Authority level.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/datasets/deathregistrationsandoccurrencesbylocalauthorityandhealthboard>

This data confirms the deaths (numbers) by local authority and cause of death, for deaths that occurred up to 17th April but were registered up to 25th April, England and Wales including deaths involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) was 15 in a care home setting with 60 total COVID deaths recorded across all settings. A further breakdown by age is not provided.

In addition, CQC data published on the 28th April, for the number of deaths involving COVID-19 occurring in care homes, by Local Authority and day of notification between the 10 - 24 April 2020, shows 21 provisional deaths counted in Shropshire Care homes from a total of 68 deaths recorded.

For specific queries on local data please contact the ONS press office who continue to handle enquiries and will update media if / when we get more detailed breakdowns.

6 Question from Councillor Chris Mellings

What progress has been made in implementing the Highways Improvement Plan presented to Members in March? What is the additional cost to the Council of implementing the Plan?

The Highways Improvement Plan is progressing in line with the target dates set and a full update is scheduled to be provided to the June Place Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Since March, a number of crucial improvements have already been delivered including a huge reduction in the number of potholes repaired on our Network during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst working under social distancing guidance, over 40 different gangs are now fixing potholes across Shropshire. As well as undertaking more traditional repairs, we have also introduced new and innovative ways of repairing our roads improving both the quality and number being repaired each day whilst also reducing the costs of the pothole repairs. This has included undertaking larger patch repairs using recycled materials thereby increasing the quality of the repairs whilst minimising environmental waste. Since 1 April, over 3,500 potholes and other defects have already been repaired on our roads making visible improvements to the condition of our roads and attracting compliments from residents.

The new Highway Service restructure is continuing at pace and is on target. The restructure is being developed together with staff representatives in a Staff Forum, a Team Leaders Forum and the Management Team who meet weekly alongside both HR and Finance colleagues. The first three stages of the development have now been completed and work is now being undertaken in working groups to develop the roles required to deliver the new Service in line with the recommendations within the Improvement Plan. The recruitment process and interviews for a new Assistant Director for Infrastructure to lead the service have taken place in April. An appointment is expected to be made in the next few days.

7.Question from Councillor Heather Kidd

How many of the Care homes across Shropshire have reported Covid-19 cases? A break down including dates and numbers per home would be helpful. I understand that naming homes and the geography may be more difficult but reported for north, central and south would be useful.

In line with other areas in the UK, hospital and Care Home cases remain an area of concern locally. Covid-19 is a notifiable disease and as such any cases or suspected cases in care homes or other community settings, are required to be reported to Public Health England. PHE lead a response in care homes supported by the Council and local NHS. All homes with cases and outbreaks will continue to be supported by the relevant lead organisation(s).

PHE will be publishing the total outbreaks numbers by Local Authority imminently, the link to this data will be provided as soon as it becomes available. An outbreak is defined as 2 or more suspected cases in the same setting (within a 14-day period). This will be published at a local authority level only due to confidentiality and the potential to identify individuals. PHE do not provide a breakdown of reported cases and numbers per home for this reason.

We can confirm PHE are currently supporting 17 outbreaks in care homes within Shropshire local authority area (as at 28th April 2020).