

Member Questions and Responses for PMSC 10th June 2010

1. Question from Councillor Ruth Houghton

As there has not been a Health Overview and Social Care Scrutiny meeting for some time may I use this opportunity to ask the following question.

Carers working across the social care sector in Shropshire have been critical key workers during the current Coronavirus situation. The care sector has also experienced difficulty in recruiting staff. What opportunities and prospects are there for Shropshire Council to fund and deliver the real living wage of £9.30 per hour, adequate and enlightened pension provision and associated attractive employment terms and conditions to all carers working within the Shropshire social care network?

Response:

Shropshire's rates recognise the elements of UK Home Care Association [UKHCA] rates for care workers contact and travel time, NI and pension contribution. They also recommend 1% sick pay and mileage costs as per model identified by UK Home Care Association [UKHCA] (due to rurality of the county). Using this calculation, the minimum rate of pay to meet these costs works out at £14.85 per hour. The current top rate for Domiciliary Care in Shropshire is £19.20 with the minimum rate being increased to £16.50 and is therefore considered sufficient to meet the increased costs generated by the 6.2% National Living Wage [NLW] increase and still allow for a variety of running costs according to different business sizes. In addition, on April 1st, 2020 the new standard Personal Assistant rate will increase from £8.62 to £9.30 an hour.

In regards the annual inflationary uplift for domiciliary care a great deal of preparation and consideration has gone into the offer that was made to the market this year. It is important to note that Shropshire Councils' rates for domiciliary care have been, and continue to be, higher than other authorities in the region. In addition to this when setting the rates for this year we took into consideration the limited resources that the Council has for Adult Social Care. Shropshire Partners in Care have received funding from Skills for Care to support the market with a program focusing on recruitment and retention including, training workshops and recruitment events. We continue to engage closely with providers supporting them with these and other challenges. We are carrying out weekly welfare and support calls to both domiciliary care and care home providers who are reporting a renewed interest in care as a care and an upturn in recruitment and hold regular provider forums, the next one is taking place virtually on the 18th June 2020.

2. Question from Councillor David Vasmer

Since the Council Meeting in December when a timetable was agreed to generate an Action Plan on Climate Change what progress has been made given the understandable interruption that Covid-19 has caused? Has a proposed Partnership Advisory Group been set up?

Response:

Steady progress has been made towards the objective of publishing a corporate Climate Strategy and Action Plan, although there have been some delays due to the need to prioritise staff resources to meet the challenges posed by flooding and Covid 19. Officers now plan to present a draft document for consideration by Cabinet in September.

However, the Council has firmly adopted the principle of: “Don’t stop acting just because you’re planning” and action has therefore continued across a range of other initiatives, including guidance on a range of Committee reports, and corporate construction, transport and renewable energy projects. Officers are also working closely with representatives of the Green Shropshire Exchange and other local environmental groups to identify potential actions to improve carbon performance across the whole of Shropshire and to develop proposals for a Climate Action Partnership which will also include Telford & Wrekin. As part of this joint work, Shropshire Council has just commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy to carry out stakeholder mapping which will inform the structure and participation in a Shropshire-wide stakeholder partnership.

3. Question from Councillor Viv Parry

Roadside verges: This spring, we have all been treated to a delightful display of wildflowers on our roadside verges. But in the last ten days, they have been mown into oblivion. The verges are now nothing other than parched grass. Most of the wildflowers had not had time to reseed for next year. Why do we do this?

As a driver, I know that safety is vital. We must mow the edges of roads and the corners to ensure that drivers can see and drive safely. Every year, verges and areas that don’t need to be mowed for safety reasons are mowed. This council seems to be carry on regardless. We need our wildflowers.

Mowing costs this council money at a time when we are always trying to balance our budget. Why can’t we mow less? And promote biodiversity at the same time.

Can officers bring forward a policy for reducing the mowing of roadside verges and any other areas the council mows? At the same time, can the council tell everyone why we are not mowing these areas? That we are helping to save our planet?

Response:

The question rightly raises the importance of Shropshire's 5,000km's of diverse and valued verges. I regret the points raised are not site specific, therefore I am unable to provide site specific responses. It is however widely known we have been consulting with other authorities, looking at best practice such as the Wildlife Trust's excellent advice document, "Managing road verges" alongside exploring operational options for a much more refined approach to verge maintenance balancing safety, wildlife and nature. The competitive environment created by nature and the dominance of problem species means it is not as simple as mowing is automatically a bad thing.

Shropshire can look forward to a more diverse verge network in the future, building on the work we have already done such as the reinstatement of the ditching and culvert maintaining program, which has transformed miles of ditches already this year restoring a long-lost wildlife habitat. So far this year we have already reinstated approximately 30km of rural highway ditches in south Shropshire.

Shropshire can also look forward to a comprehensive paper on the subject within the current financial year.

4. Question from Councillor Heather Kidd

How many homes in total have been infected across the County since the Covid-19 outbreak, how many are infected today and how many individuals in total have been infected?

Response:

Reporting on care homes is not collated in a way to specifically answer the question, however, the response below seeks to answer the question

ONS data showing the number of care homes reporting a suspected or confirmed outbreak of COVID-19 to Public Health England (PHE), together with the cumulative proportion of all care homes that have reported an outbreak) 2 or more suspected cases) are including each week from the 2nd March 2020 to 3rd June 2020 shows that 41 out of our 120 care homes have reported an outbreak (34.2%).

We are aware of one additional care home confirmed as an outbreak after this date in an additional setting. We are currently we are supporting 7 ongoing situations.

Reporting does not provide a cumulative count of cases but at a point in time data will be reported by care homes directly to Care Quality Commission [CQC].

In addition all care homes in Shropshire are working through a programme of testing all staff and residents, symptomatic and asymptomatic, these results are now starting to come in and will provide us with a fuller picture of those residents and staff who will be identified and we will have a fuller picture at this point in time within homes.

5. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

There is much talk about putting in place "Recovery Plans" and note a press release was issued recently by the Leader of Shropshire Council concerning the setting up of two groups of Conservative Councillors to look into this. Despite efforts to work cross party, no members from the second largest group of councillors appear to have been included. The press report also included the statement others were to be invited, who will they be and what sectors will be from. We are now in the recovery phase with many businesses opening on June 15th. What help is SC going to provide for them both in the immediate and the longer term.

Response:

The Council has made an extensive effort since the outbreak of Covid-19 to ensure a broad spectrum of business support and engagement. This has included the promotion and distribution of Government cash grants and advice and support to many of Shropshire's businesses through both the Marches Growth Hub and teams within the Council including Economic Growth and Regulatory Services. The Council has been working closely with key stakeholders and business organisations throughout this period with representatives from a cross section of sectors including the Shropshire Business Board, Marches LEP, Federation of Small Business, Chamber of Commerce, and NFU among others.

As lockdown measures have eased and a timeline became clear about the re-opening of non-essential retail businesses on 15th June, in addition to continuing the responses and management of further grants through the extended funds (over 700 applications in the first week), officers have also been preparing plans for the re-opening of these businesses and our market towns. This work has been across departments with a multi-team approach to offer support and advice to businesses and working with town councils and business organisations including the Business Improvement Districts to help with the immediate measures for re-opening.

A digital guide is being prepared that will be published at the weekend to offer businesses a simple clear resource for information and advice in one place, letters have been sent out to businesses with lots of information about where to go for support for their re-opening including our internal Regulatory Services team and we continue to meet regularly with business organisations to ensure that we are aware of business issues and concerns and get key messages out via these channels.

The development of our economic and social recovery plans will be key to the longer-term work to support businesses and our communities. Lots of data has started to be gathered to begin to inform this from a number of sources as it will be key for us to form a clear picture of the impacts based on evidence. We feed this through the Marches LEP directly into Central Government as well.

We will continue to involve business representation and key partners in this work going forward. The Council is leading two informal working groups set up to address the Coronavirus induced economic recession. The Economic Taskforce will address economic impacts and the Social Taskforce to help mitigate the social impacts on our citizens and communities. The membership has been drawn from across a variety of public, private and third sector organisations. The Economic Taskforce will look at how to support local businesses and the local economy through the recession while the Social Taskforce will look at such issues including universal credit and housing. Both taskforces meet for the first-time next week. The Economic Taskforce involves a number of the partners listed above and specifically;

- Chair of Shropshire Business Board
- Chief Executive of Marches LEP
- Chief Executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce
- Department of Work and Pensions representative
- Local Federation of Small Business representative
- Education representatives including University Centre Shrewsbury and a College rep
- Sector representatives including visitor economy, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, professional services and voluntary sector

6. **Question from Councillor Roger Evans**

Local Outbreak Control Plan. How and what is Shropshire Council doing to tackle these and ensure our residents feel safe at home. Various reports I have seen state this is being looked after by Local Authorities. Are they correct and how is SC taking this forward to ensure all staff and residents receive the help that is needed. This will of course include supply of PPE, training, testing and the associated tracing of contacts.

Response:

Every upper tier local authority is required to have a local outbreak plan by the end of June 2020. These plans will centre on 7 themes which includes, testing and management of complex situations or outbreaks. Shropshire Council is currently drafting their outbreak control plan. As part of this plan, enhanced governance arrangements are being put into place, including a member led, local outbreak engagement group, terms of reference are being drafted.

In terms of response to outbreaks, Shropshire Council has established a COVID-19 Health Protection Cell who are working hand in hand with Public Health England to respond to any local suspected or confirmed outbreaks within Shropshire.