

CABINET 2 NOVEMBER 2020

MEMBER QUESTION TIME

Question received from Councillor Ed Bird

I have had many residents contacting me, concerned at planned developments in Shifnal, both for housing and employment.

Under the new Shropshire Council local plan, could the council provide any guarantees that any land allocated for employment in Shifnal would be used for that purpose and not housing. At this stage have there been any employers coming forward and are the council able to provide those details?

Response : Cllr Rob Macey, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic

This new employment area, to be known as the 'M54 Corridor: Shifnal East' is being brought forward for consideration alongside a range of new housing sites in Shifnal. These housing sites will satisfy the local need for new homes, providing the right mix of housing, in the right locations in the town. Together with Shifnal East, these housing sites will deliver a sustainable pattern of development in Shifnal, giving new and existing residents the opportunities to secure new homes and new jobs in the town.

The proposed allocation at Shifnal East has attracted interest in the provision of new business premises. This interest has been expressed by existing companies wishing to relocate into Shropshire from the sub-regional area around the M54 corridor and from outside the West Midlands region. This interest was expressed at an early stage of the Local Plan review process and has been sustained to the present day.

The strategy for Shifnal, lying in the Green Belt, also looks forward beyond the 2038 end date of the Draft Local Plan. This extended forward planning in the Green Belt, also safeguards additional land around the town, where future housing could be delivered, in the period to 2058. This focus on meeting the longer-term housing needs ensures the proposed new employment area will be protected and will deliver the new jobs needed by local communities in and around Shifnal.

In the period to 2038, the Pre-Submission Local Plan will ensure this protection is delivered through Policy SP11. This policy will protect strategic and local employment sites, allocated in the Local Plan, from development for other uses, such as the provision of new housing.

2. Question received from Councillor David Turner

I welcome the Cabinet's consideration the DfT National Pavement Parking consultation and have four questions for the portfolio holder.

1. I can see that reference has been made to the cost of footway repairs as a result of pavement parking, but has any figure been placed on the cost of damage to verges?

It is recognised that parking on verges causes considerable damage and rutting. However, costs are less easy to evidence due to them often falling outside of the councils maintenance policy and as such damage is often not repaired if it does not constitute a hazard.

2. I see that the details of claims incurred by injury to pedestrians who may trip on damaged pavements has been listed, but has the doubtless considerable cost of the Council handling claims (both successful and unsuccessful) for such accidents been quantified?

There is a cost to handling these claims however costs vary on a case by case basis depending on the complexity of the case and therefore it is difficult to place a precise figure on those costs.

3. In considering the unintended consequences of the proposed regulations, such as vehicles parked on narrow streets such as we have in the centre of Much Wenlock, and particularly on Bridge Road, Benthall, has access for the emergency services, especially fire appliances, been considered?

This is a consultation on a potential change in legislation. Were the changes to be implemented then the council would have to consider the suitability of individual locations on a case by case basis.

4. If and when the proposed regulations are enacted can we anticipate some joined-up thinking by Shropshire Council as regards residents' parking schemes and promotion of under-utilised off street car parks?

Notwithstanding the new regulations, the council will be reviewing its Parking Strategy to ensure that it meets the needs of the county.

3. Question from Ruth Houghton

What planning is being undertaken at Shropshire Council to ensure that there are no food, fuel or energy supply disruptions to residents and businesses in Shropshire post Brexit on January 1st?

RESPONSE: Councillor David Minnery, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Support

The Council's Emergency Planning Team keep existing plans under review and amend these as necessary in the light of changes both locally and nationally. Brexit planning is nationally led and we share the national guidance with relevant parties. We also have plans in place to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our community are identified and supported in an emergency.

4. Question from Councillor Andy Boddington

Monitoring of Covid-19 regulation compliance by businesses

Some of the government funding provided to councils in recent months was to support the employment, or redeployment of staff, to monitor whether business premises are complying with Covid-19 restrictions. This question seeks information on the resources and role for council staff – labelled “Covid Marshals in the media – in the Shropshire unitary area. I have specific questions but I would welcome a more expansive briefing on the role of staff monitoring Covid-19 compliance:

1) What is the specific role of staff engaged in monitoring compliance of businesses with the current Covid-19 restrictions?

RESPONSE: Councillor Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder Adult Social Care and Climate Change

Within Shropshire, Council staff have been engaging throughout the pandemic with businesses to educate and support compliance with COVID guidelines.

On the 9th September in his statement on COVID-19, Boris Johnson announced “*We will boost the enforcement capacity of local authorities by introducing COVID Secure Marshalls to help ensure social distancing in town and city centres*” Subsequently the Government has clarified the aim and role of the “marshals”, that is to ensure that there is a “stronger enforcement of the rules” and has announced there will be £30 million allocated to local councils to enforce restrictions.

Shropshire Council has both utilised current staff and redeployed other staff to support reassurance through the Community Reassurance Roles and for monitoring and evidence collection in a number of ways including, Out of Hours officers, regulatory services and other staff. These roles support both the public and businesses. While these roles have not been specifically labelled as “Covid Marshals” they are undertaking the functions as outlined by Government. In addition, we are looking to redeploy additional staff into these roles from across the Council and increasing monitoring and support.

2) When did the council begin monitoring the compliance of businesses with the current Covid-19 restrictions?

Through its Regulatory Services team and Trading Standards & Licensing team, Shropshire Council has been advising and supporting businesses, as well as

monitoring compliance with the rapidly changing Covid-19 restrictions continuously since they were introduced earlier this year. The Services have continued to provide advice on the COVID-19 business closure regulations as well as engaging with businesses to ensure workplaces are Covid secure.

3) What budget has been allocated to business compliance?

Shropshire has been allocated £145,151 from national Government for Covid Marshall roles including advice to residents and businesses. In addition, an element of the test and trace grant can be used to support prevention of outbreaks.

4) What actions, in summary and preferably in numbers, has the 'compliance team' taken?

A significant amount of work has taken place by the services behind the scenes to protect the health of people in Shropshire. The services have taken a lead role in protecting the public through a range of enforcement and advisory functions, adopting a proportionate and pragmatic approach to enforcing business restrictions and social distancing in the workplace. This work has included regulatory activity focussed on business restrictions, Covid secure workplaces, events, the development of the business toolkit and more recently the online feedback form for reporting the level of Covid-secure measures in place in local businesses.

Since the start of the pandemic these are the headline figures for Regulatory Services and Trading Standards & Licencing. Data reported here is up to 28/10/2020 12:00.

7156 businesses advised in relation to compliance with COVID guidance & legislation (this includes all letters and emails sent out to businesses). Out of this 593 business advised through non-mail merge means.

In relation to business closure requirements:

- 205 complaints received
- 259 requests for enquiries/advice received
- As a result of the combined complaints and requests for advice – 346 food businesses were given advice

In relation to social distance requirements:

- 29 advice given to public
- 56 businesses advised
- 74 complaints regarding social distancing

RSTSL officers completed 128 visits to businesses in relation to COVID complaints.

- 16 follow-up visits found to be compliant

- 48 H&S COVID visit
- 64 spot-check compliance visits

Trading Standards Team undertook 14 investigations in relation to:

- 7 Pricing
- 15 Business Closures
- 16 Others

Licensing issued 30 pavement licences under the new COVID regulations. 3 were refused, 3 are still pending.

Across the RSTSL service, we received 2677 individual customer queries referencing COVID-19 across a wide-range of areas including:

- Domestic Noise Complaints
- Smoke Nuisance Complaints
- PDPA Investigation
- Commercial Noise Complaints
- Dog Nuisance
- Public Health Accumulations
- Scams
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Taxi Complaints
- Licensing MI Operating Without a Licence

These were split across

- Commercial (1.5K), Residential (0.8K) and Street Records (0.2K)
- Coronavirus (2.18K), Social Distancing (0.42K), PPE (0.09K)

RSTSL back-office function provided following support to frontline work:

- 825 reports entered on system
- 9 mail merges comprising of 6497 letters to businesses
- Systems Support team completed 328 covid-19 specific tickets including development of online reporting, data gathering forms, systems configuration for COVID-19 related work

Moving between Covid-19 tiers

As I write this question, positive tests for Covid-19 are growing across the Shropshire unitary area and across the Telford and Wrekin area. Media reports suggest Telford and Wrekin is at the brink of moving into Tier 2.

1) Taking as given that there is no formal government threshold for moving between tiers, what is the council's threshold for making a commitment to move to Tier 2?

Locally Shropshire has been monitoring a range of indicators throughout the pandemic to understand the current picture within Shropshire and target local action. There are also a range of indicators used regionally and nationally to monitor changes to COVID-19 which are not based solely on numbers of cases, these include:

- o Cases per 100,000
- o Testing rates
- o Infection rates in the over 60s
- o Hospitalisation & ICU levels
- o Care home cases and outbreaks

Locally and regionally, rates are monitored daily.

Shropshire Council has a very clear process for managing during the pandemic. This is set out in the Shropshire Outbreak Control Plan https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/local_outbreak_plan. The plan includes the governance framework for all activity linked to the pandemic. Given the high levels of vulnerability within Shropshire and the evolving government thresholds, we have agreed with cabinet members, directors and MPs that we would move swiftly in Shropshire to protect our vulnerable population. At that time Shropshire Council will work through the agreed national governance framework to address a move to Tier 2, moving through bronze, silver and gold national groups. The Council has made a commitment to prevent and contain the virus where possible and acts within government guidance.

2) Where within the council is the locus for deciding to support a change of tier? Will councillors be involved in any decision?

The local situation is monitored daily by the Public Health Team. This includes monitoring the rate of infection per 100,000. The data is communicated routinely to directors and cabinet and weekly to Members, the data summary includes a text summary of risk and actions. The information described is used to inform Directors and Members, particularly to inform of the direction of travel. Councillors are involved in discussions and decisions through the Local COVID Engagement Board and the

Local Health Protection Board. Ultimately the decision to move Shropshire Council between Tiers will be made using the process described nationally. Currently this process is not the top priority as we are in a national lockdown however we believe that a return to the regional tiered approach is likely as an exit strategy from this and our existing work in this field will be essential in transitioning back out of national lockdown.

3) What is the government decision-making process for allowing, or mandating, a change of tier? Does Shropshire Council have the final say? If not, where does that decision lie?

Until the announcement over the weekend placed England into a nationwide lockdown Shropshire was on the watchlist based on a case rate in excess of 135 per 100,000. The Council has been working with the Department of Health and Public Health England to move through the decision-making process for changing tier. This process will continue to evolve as we move through the pandemic and exit national lockdown. Currently, councils on the watch list are discussed nationally with Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) and Public Health England (PHE) at DHSC Bronze and then if appropriate go forward to Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) Silver and then to Gold that week led by the Secretary of State. The legislation process is now streamlined through the tiered system. Moving Tier is very much a political process involving local MPs and Leaders as well as the Council Leaders and DPH.

4) Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin councils are siblings. Often with different views of the world. Sometimes squabbling. But our economies and social geographies are closely related. What discussions are taking, or have taken, place with Telford and Wrekin Council about a joint approach to managing any change in tier?

Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Councils have and continue to work closely together throughout the pandemic. Where it makes sense based on need and trends, processes are aligned, where there are differences these may take a different timescale or approach, however we continue to work closely together. Discussions had included moving together into tiers but only where this was based on evidence and numbers within each area. Ultimately our primary concern is taking the right decisions for Shropshire.

5 Question from Councillor David Vasmer

How much surplus has been made on parking enforcement by Shropshire?

As a result how much has been spent on

- local public transport schemes
- highway or road improvement projects
- improvement measures to reduce environmental pollution

Some housing estates in Shrewsbury were designed before cars were commonly owned by most families with the result that there is a dire shortage of parking spaces and this contributes towards pavement parking, particularly where streets are narrow. Vennington Walk in my division is a classic example of this problem where there are a number of houses with no access to a roadway outside their homes and the nearest roadway is very narrow. Could funds from any surplus made on parking enforcement be also made available to increase parking provision where there is a serious problem as well as improving public transport and facilities for cyclists and pedestrians?

RESPONSE: Councillor Steve Davenport, Portfolio Holder Highways and Transport

Income from parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) matched the costs incurred in serving and investigating those notices in 2019/20 as shown in a recent report income was £575K and expenditure was £579K. If a surplus should arise the council is legally constrained in the way it should use such a surplus.

In 19/20 parking income in 19/20 was less than the costs incurred to subsidise public transport in the county.

Parking income and income from PCN's are lower than for 2019/20 due to the impact of Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions.

6. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

Will the Leader join with myself and others in writing to Boris Johnson stating

- How disappointed we are that Government refused to issue meal vouchers to those children and young adults entitled to free school meals during the half term just ended.
- We urge and expect Government to issue meal vouchers to those children and young adults who are entitled to FSM whilst this Pandemic is with us.

RESPONSE: Councillor Peter Nutting, Leader

All children entitled to free school meals will be looked after well by the Council over the Christmas holidays.