

CABINET
14 DECEMBER 2020
MEMBER QUESTIONS

Questions from Councillor Ruth Houghton

1. What local employment opportunities have disappeared because of the Covid epidemic for young people? And what plan does Shropshire Council have to alleviate this problem ie what job creation schemes are being developed locally?

It is not possible to quantify employment opportunities, but the information we have from the DWP is that within the age group 18-24 the number of Universal Credit Claimants has risen from 809 in January this year to 1,957 in October. The Council has been supporting and signposting small and voluntary organisations to access much needed funding such as ESF Community Grants offering grants of £5,000 – £20,000 for local initiatives that will help move unemployed young people towards employment, training or education. There are other ESF funded programmes that can support young people get into employment or training e.g. Landau IN2 programme which we signpost to young people.

We have been working in partnership with the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce to proactively support the Kickstart scheme designed to help those aged 16-24 who are claiming Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. To date over 130 chamber members have offered new apprenticeship opportunities. The ‘Enable Service’ within Adults Services have been working to support young people with disabilities into work and are currently developing programmes aimed at NEET’s. Furthermore we are looking to support employment initiatives aimed at young people within of our package of support measures within the Additional Restrictions Grant recently allocated by Government.

2. I understand that Shropshire Council have formed “A Shropshire Covid Recovery Economic Task Force” . Can the membership of this be confirmed and an update provided on its plans for the next 3 and 6 months and have confirmation of when a full report will be made available to Councillors.

The Council has been working extremely closely with the business community, Business Improvement Districts, the Marches LEP, Government departments, partners and stakeholders to understand the immediate requirements to support businesses, and provide as much support as we can to help businesses and residents across Shropshire. The Economic taskforce brings these parties together

and is made up of representatives from Shropshire Councillors and Officers, Business Representative Organisations including Shropshire Business Board, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Oswestry Business Improvement District, Shrewsbury Business Improvement District, Learning & Skills organisations including University Centre Shrewsbury, Ludlow & North Shropshire Colleges, Government Agencies - Department of Work & Pensions, Homes England and Key Sectors representations from the Visitor Economy, Construction, Agriculture & Farming, Manufacturing, Professional Services, Voluntary & Community Sector, and financial institutions.

A report is on the forward plan to come to January Cabinet on the Economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework. This will set out the immediate response to date and the short, medium and long term framework and approach.

3. As a result of Covid, the related rise in unemployment may lead to a rise in citizens being unable to pay rent/mortgage and a subsequent housing crisis, what plans do Shropshire Council have in place to anticipate and mitigate this problem?

As Council will be aware, Central Government has made changes to rented evictions meaning all notices now need to be 6 months. This has enabled the Housing team to work directly with social housing providers and private landlords to maintain and resolve any issues. The Housing team have contacted all social housing providers and are in the process of contacting estate agents in the county to advise of the assistance available in the hope of avoiding notices being served in the first place. However, if notice is served due to arrears relating to Covid 19 then the Council does have access to assistance to cover the arrears and there is also support available to claim benefits (especially in cases where an individual has not done this before) in order to ensure the accommodation is suitable long term. In regard to Mortgaged property evictions, the Council's Housing team are notified of any mortgage action being undertaken by lenders and will contact clients where possible to discuss options. Further to this, there is work ongoing with voluntary sector partners to set up and manage a court desk specifically regarding mortgage evictions with the aim of resolving the action being taken. The Housing team will also signpost where necessary to other departments and agencies who can assist ongoing.