

CABINET 7 JUNE 2021
MEMBER QUESTION TIME

1. From Cllr Rob Wilson (will be joining the meeting via Teams)

Is the new administration still committed to the Prime Minister's Gear Change policy on walking and cycling, including the application of Local Transport Note 1/20 in Shropshire, and the aim stated by Grant Shapps that 50% of journeys in towns, as well as cities, should be walked or cycled by 2030?

The council remains committed to the LTN 1/20 and have recently appointed a dedicated Active Travel Manager to ensure that this approach is embedded in everything that we do. A Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan is now being developed and this will form a fundamental part of our upcoming Local Transport Plan and both of these documents will be being brought forward for adoption by the Council over the coming year.

2. From Cllr David Vasmer (waiting to hear whether attending or joining via Teams)

Belvidere School has announced that from September it will be withdrawing from pupils the option of studying for music and art GCSE. This represents a significant loss of educational opportunity for many pupils and a significant loss for Shrewsbury if potential musicians and artists do not receive the support that will enable them to contribute to the artistic life of our town. Could the Council make its views known to the Head Teacher and Governors and reassure Members that where it has influence over schools, it will encourage the provision of support for pupils interested in music and art.

Narrowing of the curriculum can mean that children miss out on opportunities to study subjects and gain knowledge that could be valuable in later stages of education beyond GCSE, or in their adult lives. Furthermore, it can also have a disproportionately negative effect on disadvantaged pupils.

Although academies are free to develop their own curriculum, under Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework, the judgement on the quality of education provided by a school starts from the basis that schools should offer a broad, rich curriculum, which includes the variety of subjects and disciplines available to study at GCSE

Shropshire Council works to ensure that all children and young people in Shropshire are educated and cared for to the highest standards, which includes academies. As it has been half term we have not been able to make contact with Belvidere School. How Belvidere School ensures the breadth of opportunity for students at KS4 and

whether the Multi Academy Trust within which they operate can offer collaborative arrangements will be explored further by the attached school improvement adviser and as part of the annual monitoring visit to the school which is scheduled for next half term.

3. From Cllr Andy Boddington (joining the meeting via Teams)

Recycling

One of the pledges of the returning administration was to replace open topped tubs with wheelie bins for dry recyclables, excluding paper and card. The council leader has pledged to increase recycling rates.

- 1) What is the most up to date statistic on recycling in the unitary area? Could this response be split between dry recyclables (glass, plastic, metals); paper and card; and green composting?

The latest audited figures are for 2019/20 where the rate was 54.6%. The estimated split across all sources of household waste (i.e. kerbside collections, HRC's and Bulk collections) is Composting 29%, Paper & Card 6.5%, Other(including paper, glass, and plastics) 19.1%

- 2) Similar rural areas to ours such as South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse recycle 63 to 64 per cent of their waste. Shropshire's recycling rate stagnated at around 57 per cent in the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20. What plans does the council have to boost recycling rates to match the level achieved by the best performing councils in England?

Although we will always try to improve our performance the comparison with the best performing Councils should be put in the context of our relative standing with other Councils in England where Shropshire currently ranks 43rd out of 341 Local Authorities, in the top 13%.

In the short term, the provision of bins for recycling will give residents greater capacity to divert recyclable waste from the residual bin and also reduce the amount lost due to wind-blown littering. Future plans will be largely driven by changes to the national Resources and Waste Strategy proposed as part of the Environment Bill currently moving through the parliamentary process. The Bill contains plans for a Deposit Return Scheme, Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging waste, and a new set of requirements for household and business waste collections. All three elements will have a significant impact on household waste management, changing the weight and nature of waste collected from the kerbside, how it is funded, and a new set of minimum requirements for waste collection services. The Bill will become law within the next 12 months and once

the requirements are clear we will look at the obligations and opportunities it presents in conjunction with Veolia.

3) A December 2017 Council, I asked about introducing wheelie bins for dry recyclables. Part of the response was:

“The introduction of wheeled bins for recycling was discussed with Veolia before the rollout of the new recycling service in 2016. However, the cost of around £600,000 p.a. could not be justified due to other budget pressures.”

What is the current estimated cost of introducing wheelie bins and the recurrent costs in emptying them?

The exact cost has not been reviewed for some time but the council is currently working with its contractor, Veolia, to identify what the cost and any savings that may be available from introducing wheelie bins could be and a proposal will be brought forward to Cabinet later in the year.

4) A common complaint is that the blue bags for paper and card are wearing out. They are prone to letting in rainwater. If a recycling collection has a particularly wet load, I understand that the paper and card can be consigned to landfill. What plans does the council have to review and upgrade the blue bag system?

Veolia are currently in discussions with their supplier to evaluate alternative designs for the blue bag.

4. From Cllr Andy Boddington (joining the meeting via Teams)

The new council leader has pledged to improve communication. The ability to question elected representatives and to challenge the administration of the day is central to the democratic functioning of local government.

The current arrangements, which have changed incrementally over the last few years, don't serve us well; for example, leading to long answers being read out at meetings. There is an informal limit on the number of questions at any meeting governed by a need to keep the meeting to time. This does not always reflect the importance of the questions and the urgency of answers required.

1) What plans does the cabinet have to ensure that an appropriate committee reviews the current system of members' and public questions with a view to the cabinet giving future advice to council on any changes?

2) Could any review consider the possibility of written questions and answers to complement oral questions and answers?

3) If there is to be a review, what is the indicative timetable?

Thank you Councillor Boddington for your question. I am indeed keen to improve communication at the Council but want to add that formal questions are just one aspect of that process. In terms of “challenging the administration”, I have asked that the Scrutiny function be looked at so that its effectiveness is strengthened.

Turning to your specific questions

1. I had already decided that the system of member and public questions should be reviewed. I will ask the Chief Executive to ensure that this happens and for a report to be taken in due course to the Constitution Working Group (made up, of course, of the Group Leaders) which in turn will come up with proposals for Council to consider.
2. The suggestion to include the option of written questions and answers to complement oral questions and answers is certainly one possibility I would like to see considered but I want the review to look at all options to improve the current arrangements.
3. I don't particularly want to circumscribe the process as I would prefer it to be done properly but I would hope that some initial proposals could be drawn up by officers by early July