

COUNCIL 15 JULY 2021

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question from Councillor Kevin Pardy

Whilst participating in a Highways' TEAMS Presentation in June, I asked why after requesting important remedial work to be carried out on Heathgates Roundabout, work had not been carried out.

The reply from a senior Highways officer was that there wasn't the money to finance repairs. The repairs required consist of repairing of potholes and possible resurfacing and also white lining including directional arrows.

This roundabout is possibly the busiest within the confines of the town and is unusual in that when exiting Sundorne Road it is the outside lane that is used to travel straight on into Ditherington, the vast majority of roundabouts use the inside lane. This differential causes considerable confusion for a number of drivers particularly those who are unfamiliar with the area but these problems are now compounded by the fact there are no longer any visible road markings. This roundabout is now very difficult to negotiate, indeed dangerous. I've received many concerns from constituents and have personal experience of having to make way for a driver in the wrong lane.

Why is it that, such an important roundabout has been dismissed for repairs and that highways officers are not concerned enough about safety to ensure that the roundabout is treated as a priority?

When will this roundabout due for repair?

Response from Cllr Steve Charmley – Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure, Highways and Built Housing

It is recognised that Heathgates Roundabout is in need of substantial repair which by the nature of the site will cost a substantial proportion of the maintenance budget to repair. As Cllr Pardy has acknowledged, this is one of the busiest junctions in the county and therefore any works on it is likely to lead to significant disruption. This route has also been identified as an accident cluster site and therefore is being reviewed for an improvement scheme to reduce accidents and the service is therefore exploring the potential to undertake improvement works at the same time as resurfacing to both reduce costs and disruption to road users. In the meantime the highways team will endeavour to repair those potholes that are considered to create a significant hazard to road users as and when we become aware of them.

Question from Councillor Duncan Kerr

“In the performance report to a recent Cabinet meeting and during the training for members it was reported that in the last year Shropshire has experienced a 30% increase in the number of Children who are looked after. We are living in unusual times and nationally there are many factors affecting this situation, some Council are seeing a reduction as the number of referrals (particularly from schools) has declined (by 20% in Wales for example), other are seeing an increase from both family stress and delays in the court systems delaying the termination of Care Orders. However I think officers and members will both be concerned to understand the reason for this increase. In Shropshire it seems that there has been an increase in Police Protection under section 46 of the Children Act. Taking a child into care, or keeping them in care longer than they need to be, is one of the most important decisions a local authority can take. In spite of the best efforts of Councils and their staff we know that the prospects for children who are in the care system is not good, and the costs can also be considerable.

In the light of this situation can I ask the portfolio-holder whether it is time for a full and thorough review with some external professional assistance to:

1. Assess the underlying causes for children being made subject to a Child Protection Plan and where this is identified as neglect, identify the contributing parental factors associated with this neglect and the proportion of cases coming through the Domestic Abuse Triage.
2. Reviewing all the cases to establish whether early intervention and assistance programmes operated by the Council and its partners were accessed by these families if so how they could be adapted to make them more effective, and if not, what barriers may have existed to engagement.
3. What intervention models are used by Shropshire and its partners to manage families on the edge of care and what is the evidence base for them.”

Response from Councillor Kirstie Hurst-Knight - Portfolio Holder for Children & Education

We do not intend to undertake a formal review at this point in time.

At the suggestion of the Director of Childrens Services, an external report, by an Independent Individual was commissioned in late 2019 in relation to Neglect through the Shropshire Safeguarding & Community Safety Partnership (SSCP). This report concurred with our analysis of the issues influencing neglect being an area of concern in Shropshire. Neglect is a Business Plan priority for the partnership through the SSCP. Every Local Authority has an area of abuse that causes more concern, Shropshire's is neglect.

Data coming through Compass is regularly analysed and understood, including Domestic Abuse Triage.

A number of audit and reviews have been undertaken throughout the pandemic to ensure that we have an understanding of the reasons that have influenced the increase. Early on in the pandemic a robust joint audit asked two questions:

1. Were families being visited/seen prior to the escalation during the period of Covid and if not, would this have made a difference
2. Were assessments and plans updated to reflect new information?

There is evidence that Covid has had some impact on Early Help support for families. This picture is the case across the country. During early lockdown the Early Help Team, together with many of the universal early help support service did not make physical visits to families, and this might potentially have prevented some escalation of family's needs. The audit showed that many children and families had not engaged with Early Help services, and most children coming into care had not Early Help interventions either universal or targeted. In all likelihood this was due to the pandemic, and services not being available. A number of children's needs escalated very quickly and so were not previously known to services but the injury or issues mean that they needed to be brought into the Care of the local authority quickly. This rapid escalation has continued throughout the pandemic period.

However, the majority of cases where Early Help have been involved and contacts have been raised with Compass have been as a result of one off incidents which the Early Help team would have no influence in preventing.

In 14 out of 15 cases audited the Early Help offer has been consistent and appropriate with evidence of both physical and virtual visits since June 2020.

The audit did highlight the level of complexity that both Early Help and Children's Social Care are now dealing with.

The increase is as a result of a number of factors that present a complex picture.

Initially during the first lockdown many support services went to telephone and virtual support, following Government Guidance. Children not being in school, family stress, changes in people's financial circumstances, early intervention services system wide not being as accessible, families not having their support network through family and friends available to them.

There is a national pattern of increase in children looked after and child protection, this pattern is also reflected across the West Midlands.

A proportion of the increase in Looked After Children relates to the delays in progressing court proceedings to conclude care plans that enable children to exit the care system. These are being worked through with the Local Family Justice Board, CAFCASS and the Courts.

There has been an increase in the complexity of concerns in families and the increase in Police Protection has related to them being the agency through lockdowns that are responding to incidents and accessing family homes.

The Service Manager for Compass is working with Police Colleagues to review Pathways and Practice Protocols in relation to Police Protection to ensure it is always used as a last and proportionate resort to safeguard children.

The Government has instigated a national review of the Care System, looking at all aspects of the system, this is underway, is being led by Josh McAllister and his initial

report was published last week. The next report is due in the Autumn with a Final report in Spring 2022.

Throughout the last 17 months, Targeted Early Help has worked in close collaboration with children's social care to further improve the opportunities to support families. Early Help (including partners) aims to support families with low level early help provision. This has been challenging given that some front line partners worked on the NHS front line supporting covid patients, and supporting vaccination programmes, and of course access to school was restricted and children were home schooled adding to the pressure that families faced.

Early help family workers offered face to face visits in the home following the first lockdown, and adhering to covid secure guidance, ensuring that support was available to those complex families who could have been at risk of entering the care system. Targeted Early Help managers worked closely with social care managers to ensure that families were properly supported when stepping out or down from children's social care.

Intervention Models

This year a new model of Early Help will be implemented – with funds diverted to greatly improve the number of families that can be supported earlier – increasing capacity, skills and knowledge, reach and range of Early Help provision, across Shropshire. With a focus on supporting parents and families who are at greater risk of neglecting children.

In Shropshire the system wide model is Restorative Practice and this is also being rolled out across schools. There is a research base that underpins the impact of the model.

We are developing Stepping Stones, a spend to save initiative, based on the North Yorkshire model 'No Wrong Door' . There is a full evaluation report to that project online. This aims to support families before children need to become looked after and supports them returning home, after work with the whole family, if it is safe to do so. This model uses restorative practice, systemic practice, various parenting models, direct work with parents to address their own issues.

For understanding risk we use Martin Calders model of Risk and Resilience, there is research that supports this model.

For Looked After Children we use the Secure Base Model to promote attachment and build resilience. Again there is a research base to this model.

Various Partner agencies such as Youth Offending Team, Shropshire Recovery Services, We are With You, use their own research based models of intervention to work in their areas of specialism.

Question from Councillor Ruth Houghton

There are a number of sites across South and South West Shropshire where temporary traffic lights have been in place for more than 12 months. In fact in the Bishop's Castle division temporary lights were on the A488 for nearly 11 months with

little visible sign of any work having been undertaken before they were removed. In Chirbury and Clun divisions landslips occurred on the same day in February 2020 and both sites still have temporary traffic lights some 18 months on.

How many sites in Shropshire currently have temporary traffic lights where they have been in place for more than 6 months or longer ? and what has been the total cost of temporary traffic lights in place for over 6 months during the 2020/21 financial year? Obviously members of the public want to know why traffic lights are in situ and when the necessary work will be completed enabling them to be removed, given this level of interest what arrangements are in place for the regular review and monitoring of sites where long term temporary traffic lights are in use?

Response from Cllr Steve Charmley – Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure, Highways and Built Housing

The team are continuing to work on a detailed response which will be circulated prior to the meeting.

Question from Councillor Roger Evans

I note the recent result in a recent by-election when the Government's controversial overhaul of England's planning system later this year was widely condemned.

I brought a motion on this subject to council in July last year. The previous Cabinet member did not support it and instead brought an officer report to Cabinet in October. This was endorsed by cabinet and submitted as the council's response to the consultation document. This of course had no input from members or Parish Councils.

Many consider and agree there are some good parts in the proposal but also there are many bad and antidemocratic proposals contained in it.

Amongst them is the proposal contained in Pillar One to provide "a simplified approach to identify land suitable for development" This would include any land designated as "Growth Areas" within the Local Plan to automatically be granted outline planning permission when the Local Plan is adopted.

This would make it much much harder for local communities to object to any developments put forward on these areas.

In answer to this at Question 5, the previous cabinet member and cabinet said "YES" they supported this "simplified" proposal. Does the present cabinet member agree and support this antidemocratic proposal please?

Response from Councillor Ed Potter – Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Planning

Cabinet agreed in October 2020 to submit the Council's response to the Government's Planning White Paper consultation. This response, is now being considered by Government. Whilst we do not have a firm timetable from the Government regarding the implementation of changes, it is recognised the issue of reform to the Planning system was included in the recent Queen's speech.

The Council's full response to the Planning White Paper can be viewed here <http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/documents/s25557/Appendix%20A%20final.pdf>

In summary, the White Paper proposes some significant changes to the Planning system, including to the manner in which Council's prepares their Local Plans, and to their content. One of the key proposals is a simplification into how land is categorised in a Local Plan, with all land falling into one of the following categories: Growth, Renewal or Protect.

In responding to this, the Council was supportive of the principle of maintaining a Plan-led approach to development. The Council also agreed that the principle of appropriately simplifying the Local Plan process, increasing the use of technology within Local Planning, representing material to ensure more consistency and transparency. The Council was also broadly supportive of the concept of classifying land into categories, which was recognised to be not dissimilar from the current approach. However, the Council also made comments raising concerns that the proposed approach had scope to be over-simplistic, with real potential for confusion and overlap between the categories, and indeed made some specific suggestions of how to improve the categorisation. It is considered that the Council's response to Government on this matter remains appropriate.