

Place Overview Committee

04 August 2021

Member Questions and Responses

From: Councillor Julia Buckley

Despite our Highways Director, Mark Barrow raising the following concerns in his annual appraisal of Kier's performance (08.04.21):

"6.9. Shropshire Council has recognised that some service expectations and outcomes are best met, managed and delivered locally, recognising and understanding the local need. The contract offer which Kier bid for placed little priority on this local service approach which often matters more to stakeholders. This has not been visible, prioritised or been seen to matter which has undoubtedly contributed to the perspective of the service and understandable frustrations."

It has been revealed that Kier proposes to close 2 depots – in Hodnet and Bridgnorth – to centralise the highways repairs service.

1. Which elected members were briefed on Kier's proposal and agreed to close and sell both Eastern depots, rather than ensuring geographic equity – ie. Retaining one in the East and one in the West?

Cllr Davenport and Cllr Charmley in their roles of Cabinet Members with responsibility for Highways have been regularly briefed as part of their attendance at the monthly Strategic Contract Board meetings with Kier.

2. I have been given verbal assurances by Mark Barrow and Steve Smith that *"there will be no detrimental impact on service delivery in the Bridgnorth area"*. Can the Equalities Impact Assessment report be shared with members please, to provide the objective evidence leading to any assertions regarding service impact?

Whilst the council have worked with Kier in developing this proposal to reflect co-located operations from the 3 largest depots, Kier have had to accelerate the proposals to meet contingency concerns that have arisen through the Covid period and are still causing operational issues and therefore deem changes to be necessary to meet health and safety and employee well-being concerns. An EIA has not therefore been developed at this stage. A Business Case to support the proposals was however produced by Kier and shared at the Strategic Contract Board meetings. It is hoped that this can be shared this week once commercially sensitive information has been redacted.

From: Councillor Rob Wilson

On Friday 30th July 2021 the Department for Transport allocated funds to Local Authorities for Active Travel measures under the Capability Fund. At present

Shropshire has not been awarded any funds because, and I quote: "Further assurances are required before funding is confirmed."

- What reasons have the Department for Transport given Shropshire Council for the lack of a funding award?

The Department for Transport have simply requested evidence of continued political commitment to Active Travel given the change in Council leadership since the original council response but hope to award funding by September upon receipt of this.

- What assurances does Shropshire Council have to provide, and by when?

The deadline for response is the 6th August and the Leader of the Council has already responded providing the commitment requested.

At Cabinet on Wednesday 21st July 2021 the Cabinet Member for Highways, when accepting that the Big Town Plan partnership would need to help with submitting the "mini-Holland" bid Shrewsbury, gave reassurances that Shropshire will be in a position to bid for Active Travel funding in the future. Whilst I am pleased that Shropshire Council now has an Active Travel officer in post, this is only a solitary temporary appointment, other Local Authorities have permanent teams. I welcome that it is finally developing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), however some Local Authorities have had these in place for 5 years. It is clear that Shropshire is lagging badly behind. The Department for Transport has warned Local Authorities that do not make significant progress on Active Travel, that their overall Highways Funding is at risk.

- How does Shropshire Council propose to catch up and even overtake these more progressive Local Authorities?

Whilst the Council currently only has a single dedicated officer for Active Travel the service also has the considerable support of WSP who are experts in the field of Active Travel. The service are currently considering the ongoing needs for resourcing Active Travel as work moves from strategy development to delivery of that Strategy and Plan. The Council is developing its Local Transport Plan, of which the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan will form a key part and it is therefore felt that Shropshire's strategies will better meet contemporary needs compared to others.

- Will it create a dedicated Active Travel Fund for Shropshire so that the LCWIP is another unfunded promise to the people of Shropshire?

As with any investment the Council will consider how the finite funding is best spent to meet the needs of the whole County. Once the LCWIP has been adopted funding will need to be considered against other needs at that time. An LTP and LCWIP which meets contemporary needs will however place the authority in a strong position for bidding for external funds as they are made available.