

CABINET 1 DECEMBER 2021

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Councillor David Vasmer

I have been told that children aged between 12 and 15 are not being offered their first jab in Shrewsbury and are being forced to travel to Oswestry or Telford. Is the lead member for Children and Education aware of this situation and is she making representations to the NHS so that children are offered their jab locally?

Response from Kirstie Hurst-Knight/Simon Jones

I can confirm that all secondary schools in Shropshire have been visited at least on one occasion by the School Immunisation Team to deliver the 12-15 vaccination programme to children who have chosen to have the vaccine at school. There will be additional visits to some schools sites as required.

However, there may be students who were/will be unable to receive a vaccine on the day of a school clinic, perhaps due to absence or if a child had COVID-19 up to 28 days prior to the session. For children still requiring a COVID-19 vaccine, please advise parents of children, or the children aged 12 to 15 years old themselves, wanting to receive a vaccination that the following options are available to them in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin:

For those who are home schooled, or were unable to be vaccinated in school setting or would prefer to be vaccinated out of schools settings the following options are available:

- Appointments booked online via the National Booking System using the following link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or call NHS 119 to book an appointment.
- Walk-in and Pop-up Clinics (no appointment required, limited vaccine availability): [COVID-19 Vaccination Walk-in and Pop-up Clinics \(stwics.org.uk\)](https://www.stwics.org.uk) Parents are asked to accompany children aged 12-15 to clinics to ensure parental consent is sought and to keep checking for days and clinic times clinics.

Options are available across the County including Shrewsbury at Coral House and the Darwin Centre on selected weekends. Full details are available on the above or at [/stwics.org.uk/our-priorities/covid-19-vaccination-programme/walk-in-clinic-times](http://stwics.org.uk/our-priorities/covid-19-vaccination-programme/walk-in-clinic-times)

A full response will all the clinics on will also be made available on the website

Councillor Alex Wagner

The three Park and Ride stations in Shrewsbury at Oxon, Meole Brace, and Harlescott are each situated in areas which are within walking or cycling distance of many residents, and provide a more reliable service than other local buses in many instances.

Despite this, the current fare regime means that those who drive over are charged £2 for a return, whilst those who walk over have to pay double this, with a single costing £2. This encourages residents to make unnecessary short distance car journeys, often under half a mile, adding to traffic and environmental concerns.

Would the cabinet member support changing this policy to put walkers on a level playing field?

Response from Cecilia Motley

Under current local bus legislation subsidised bus services are unable to operate in direct competition with local bus services that are commercially operated at the bus companies own risk, the walk on fare for Park and Ride was therefore created to deter passengers from doing this, where there was a commercial bus service in operation.

However, we don't believe that this is how bus services should operate going forwards and whilst this legislation restricts us at the moment, we are seeking to address this through the Governments recently published National Bus Strategy, where a far more integrated approach will be taken with regards to public transport allowing for multi operator ticketing and freedoms for passengers to move easily from one service to another, also we are implementing our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan , to further integrate transport and active travel.

Central to transforming public transport within the Town is our proposal for the Park & Ride service to become Shrewsbury Connect, which will enable the connection opportunities that you have highlighted in your question, along with many other improvements to the service.

The catalyst for these improvements is our ambitious £98 million Bus Service Improvement Plan funding bid that we recently submitted to the Department of Transport, aiming to transform public transport across Shropshire”

Councillor Rob Wilson

Will the Council include mode share targets, including interim milestones, in LTP4? In addition, ensuring that measures are in place for the measurement, analysis and scrutiny of such milestones and targets, so that the effectiveness of LTP4 can be judged in an open and transparent way? For example annually.

Response from Dean Carroll

In answer to Councillor

Wilson’s question, following an agreed recommendation as presented in the LTP4 report to November’s Place Scrutiny Committee that post Cabinet approval of the LTP 4 plan a Board will be formed, Chaired by the Portfolio Holder, that will include members from Scrutiny Committee and officers. The Board will meet on a quarterly basis , and produce a draft quarterly and then annual report on the progress of LTP4, its issues and future intentions. The draft annual report will then be presented to Scrutiny , prior to be formally issued as a public document to clearly and transparently inform of progress of the local transport plan, as Scrutiny endorsed .Other supportive plans such as the Local Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Plan will all be integrated plans that will support this intent as a wider coherent approach to transport.

Councillor David Vasmer

I am seriously concerned that either by default or intention Opposition Councillors are being prevented from being able to examine the Council’s budget proposals for next year.

The Finance Strategy Task & Finish Group has met just twice At its second meeting (22nd September) there was a discussion with Karen Bradshaw and the Director of Finance. No proposals were presented and no notes have been produced. Normally, like minutes, you would expect them to be circulated in advance of the next meeting.

The next meeting was finally scheduled for 2 November and then re-scheduled for 22 November. This has now been cancelled. No papers have been received for this meeting.

The Cabinet is of course due to consider and recommend a budget for next year on 15th December and it will then go out for consultation. The papers for this meeting should be published around the 7th or 8th December but that will be the first time we have seen any budgetary proposals, apart from Shire Services, before a debate at Cabinet just a week later.

At the moment we have no information about what the Council plans to do in order to balance its 22/23 budget (apart from Shire Services) while the Q2 financial monitoring report on how this year's budget is looking has been listed for discussion by Performance Management Scrutiny Committee AFTER it has been debated and, in all likelihood, approved by Cabinet.

One of the reasons for the Finance Strategy Task & Finish Group not meeting is the failure to replace a Scrutiny Support Officer leaving one officer to support all the Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committees which is an impossible task.

Under the current Council leadership there appears to be a campaign to silence Opposition Councillors by withholding financial information and denying officer support for their attempts to hold the Leader and her lead members to account.

1. When will the current vacancy for a Scrutiny Support Officer which has lasted for nearly two years be filled?
2. In the absence of any meetings why were members of the Finance Strategy Task & Finish Group not kept updated with plans for next year's budget?
3. Why was the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee considering the Council's financial performance at the end of Quarter 2 scheduled to take place AFTER its consideration by Cabinet?

Response – Cllr Gwilym Butler

- 1) When will the current vacancy for a Scrutiny Support Officer which has lasted for nearly two years be filled?

RESPONSE: In reference to another question on the agenda, the Leader agrees it is a good time to undertake a review of the support provided to members to enable them to be as effective as possible in their role as councillors.

- 2) In the absence of any meetings why were members of the Finance Strategy Task & Finish Group not kept updated with plans for next year's budget?

RESPONSE: An overview of the plan for the budget process was provided to the Finance Strategy Task and Finish Group on 22 September. This included a detailed timetable proposing the T&F Group would scrutinise the budget in early November before Cabinet approval on 1 December, although a reserve date of 15 December was provided. That reserve date being necessary, the T&F Group was rescheduled for 22 November. Due to leave and Member diary clashes, this T&F Group meeting was subsequently cancelled. This was the plan for next year's budget and Members were kept fully updated on this. The cancelled T&F Group has been rescheduled for 20 December, but again, this has been fully communicated to Members.

- 3) Why was the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee considering the Council's financial performance at the end of Quarter 2 scheduled to take place AFTER its consideration by Cabinet?

RESPONSE: The Financial Monitoring Reports are produced each quarter throughout the Financial Year for Cabinet approval. Performance Management Scrutiny Committee (PMSC) have taken the opportunity to consider these reports for many years. I am not aware of any occasions where PMSC have reviewed these factual, quarterly reports in advance of Cabinet. It is therefore normal practice for PMSC to consider the Quarter 2 monitoring report after its consideration by Cabinet.

Councillor Roger Evans

I note the 3rd meeting of the Finance Task and Finish Group has now been cancelled. This important group failed of course to have any meetings last year. This year the failure was noted and the need to hold regular meetings was agreed. The membership was refreshed and included in its terms of reference that it needed to meet monthly. These terms of reference were agreed at its first meeting which was finally held in July and which included a list of the different topics that would be discussed in turn at each of the 8 proposed meetings.

This Task and Finish Group have at present met just twice. Once in July and the last one in September, some 10 weeks ago. The next scheduled one is on 7th January still some 6 weeks away. This will mean it will be 16 weeks between meetings, or just short of 4 months.

The agreed Terms of Reference included the following statements

Timescale The committee will meet monthly after the elections in May 2021, from June 2021 until January 2022. Meetings will dovetail financial reporting.

It also included these two statements

The Local Government Act 2000 states that it is the responsibility of the Full Council, on the recommendation of the executive, to approve the budget and related council tax demand. The Act makes it clear that the role of scrutiny in the financial process is to hold the executive to account and to ensure that its decisions are in the best interests of the community. Some scrutiny of budget setting and other financial planning processes is therefore essential.

The Local Government Act 2003 provides the central legislation surrounding a council's financial planning and budgeting arrangements. Sections 28 and 29 of the Act require members to be involved in budget monitoring throughout the year. Although it is not specified whether this is primarily an executive or scrutiny function, scrutiny provides the ideal vehicle for such involvement.

At present given the resources that are being given, provided to enable Scrutiny to adequately function the above is not possible.

It has also been noted that many other Task and Finish groups who were charged with looking into items have also not met for some time.

Does the Council Leader and Cabinet agree with and are satisfied with the Scrutiny that at present is being carried out by this Council.

Response to be read by Deputy Leader on behalf of the Leader

Whilst the Leader doesn't accept the basic premise that scrutiny isn't working, she does agree that the time is probably ripe to undertake a review of the support provided to members to enable them to be as effective as possible in their role as opposition councillors. This will include some input from the LGA. The Leader has asked the Chief Executive to put together a plan to deliver this work which she will undertake to share with Group Leaders before Christmas

