

PUBLIC QUESTIONS
COUNCIL 13 JANUARY 2022

Question 1 from Mr Ed Shirley

My question relates to the Councils Corporate Complaints Procedure, para 17. "Paragraph 17 provides information to the customer of the process for advancing a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman if the customer is not satisfied with the handling of a complaint by the Council. However, in the event that such a complaint affects all or most of the people in the Councils area, the Local Government Act 1974 section 26(7) states that the Ombudsman cannot investigate such a complaint.

You are therefore asked: a) to state the name and contact details of the body, or bodies that are empowered to investigate this type of complaint, and b) give assurances that paragraph 17 will be amended to incorporate this information."

Response from Cllr Rob Gittins, Portfolio Holder for Digital, Data and Insight

The Council's Corporate Complaints policy sets out how to make a complaint and defines which complaints fall within the scope of the policy. For those complaints that fall within the scope of the policy the normal referral, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with a complaint, is to escalate the complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The contact details for the LGSCO are set out in the Council's Corporate Complaints policy and a complainant is at liberty to make contact with the LGSCO at any time in the complaints process to seek advice. The LGSCO website sets out the type of complaints that they can and cannot consider.

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint/what-we-can-and-cannot-look-at>

If a matter is one where it falls outside the scope of the Council's Corporate Complaints policy or one which the LGSCO deem is outside their jurisdiction then the complainant will need to seek their own legal advice as to the best course of action to take in their particular circumstances. In the circumstances therefore and in light of this response, it is not proposed to amend the current Council Corporate Complaints policy.

Question 2 from Mr Stephen Mulloy to the Leader

The focus of this council's economic recovery is based on investing Millions of pounds into Shrewsbury town centre where of course you have a pecuniary interest in a number of commercial properties, but I am told that you are not involved in any discussions on that issue.

Also, at the 'What's Next for Shropshire' workshop held on the 3rd November last year you were asked "**What one thing would make a significant difference in delivering strategic locations in Shropshire**" to which you replied "**Providing significant key worker housing**".

Most, if not all, of the strategic locations in Shropshire are being allowed to undersupply on the provision of affordable housing on the basis of viability assessments that many believe do not really stand up to scrutiny.

So, how can you be an effective leader when you cannot lawfully be involved in discussions on the development of Shrewsbury town centre, and how can the public have confidence in you when you will not supply enough affordable housing for key workers or even challenge the pernicious rise in viability assessments which you may be familiar with from your own business activities?

Response from Cllr Lezley Picton, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Policy and Strategy, Improvement and Communications

Whilst it is true to say that the Council intends to invest in Shrewsbury, it is also investing (or intends to invest) significantly elsewhere in the County including Oswestry, Ludlow, Bishop's Castle, Bridgnorth, Shifnal, Whitchurch etc.

Whilst it is also true that at the November workshop, I did refer to a priority of providing key worker housing that is only because I was asked for one example when in fact, I could give hundreds of projects/proposals/investments which I think are pressing and significant.

You have asked both myself and the Deputy Leader of the Council about an alleged undersupply of affordable housing as a result of viability assessments. Whilst Cllr Potter will address this issue as part of your question to him I am happy to add that my record demonstrates that I am a strong advocate of affordable housing and have been vocal in my disappointment at the proposed reductions in affordable housing by developers and the officers will tell you that I am keen we hold as firm a line as is practically possible in this matter.

The work of Shropshire Council extends way beyond Shrewsbury Town Centre and key worker housing and yes, I contend that despite being unable to take part in certain discussions about the Town Centre because of a conflict of interest (whether perceived or otherwise) I am still able to act as an effective Leader of the Council.

Question 3 from Mr Stephen Mulloy to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Planning

As someone who has benefitted from the discounted purchase of a council farm, you have probably not shared the difficulties that many in our communities experience in trying to get on the property ladder.

You are overseeing the constant undersupply of affordable housing based on what many consider to be questionable viability assessments and in one recent case a developer's own viability assessment concluded they could pay £442,000 in affordable housing contributions but the council's 'independent' viability consultant effectively overruled this and concluded that they could only pay £82,000 (see attached).

Will you look into this as it has the appearance of someone running with the fox and hunting with the hounds?

Response from Cllr Ed Potter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration and Planning

I need to correct Mr Mulloy's assertion in relation to the acquisition of a small holding as that relates to my parents before I became a councillor and does not apply to myself.

I can reassure everyone that provision of affordable housing is a priority for this Council. The draft Local Plan envisages around 7,700 new affordable homes over its lifespan. In addition to ensure much needed provision for communities across the County Cornovii Developments Ltd, as the Councils wholly owned developer, will also be bringing forward both affordable and specialist housing in areas where commercial developers have no proposals to develop.

Question 4 from Mr Paul Wiseman

It has come to my attention that this year's Shropshire Leadership Conference tickets are £150 each.

This event has been run since 2019 by the council's HR team but it appears that this year it is being run by one of your colleagues on the Marches LEP board but promoted by SC and the LEP.

Can I ask how much tickets have cost in previous years, how much Shropshire Festivals are charging to run the event, and what happens to any profits from the event?

Response from Councillor Gwilym Butler Portfolio Holder for Resources

The event is being run by Shropshire Council, Shropshire Festivals aren't running it for us. We've brought them on as a partner to help us deliver the event due to knowledge and experience in delivering such events to our local community and businesses. The Leadership conference was first hosted in 2019, ticket price was £80 + VAT. In 2020 we facilitated a virtual mini conference charging £40 a ticket. This year conference is £150 cost is inclusive of VAT, so tickets are actually £125. This conference brings together a host of influential speakers to inspire our attendees from partner organisations and local businesses.

Any profit from the event come back into the Council to support the delivery of services.

Question 5 from Mrs Beverley Jones

Can the portfolio holder for Highways confirm there are no published changes to the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy of 2018?

In that policy and operational plan, its stated aim is to "minimise accidents and damage caused by snow and ice".

The Council's webpage states that "when ice or snow is predicted, pre-salting is carried out on the defined network and includes all A & B roads, localised high-risk sites and important access routes; major town centre shopping areas and heavily used footways and cycle routes". Specifically, "if temperatures are to remain below zero after 8am then the defined cycleway/footway network on routes to school should be precautionary treated if resources are available".

Could you please explain then, why on 5th and 7th January 2022, no school route footpaths were gritted in Bridgnorth?

As a hill town the paths present a steep gradient, which your winter policy identifies as a key risk determinant in allocating resources. As no school routes were gritted, several children and their adult carers fell on the ice and were treated for broken bones, sprains and concussion at our local hospital. This is the first time that Highways did not employ a contractor to grit the school route footpaths, following the closure of Bridgnorth highways depot. I know I speak for hundreds of Bridgnorth residents when I express my deep concern about this reduced service.

Response from Cllr Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure

Shropshire Council has a publicly available winter maintenance policy, in relation to the decision making and the operational activities it carries out. There is some misinterpretation regarding our winter maintenance policy and operational plan. The policy does not include the treatment of footways, other than during periods of prolonged sub-zero temperatures. I confirm that all our actions and decisions have been carried out in line with our current policy and there has been no change to the policy or level of service since 2018.

Question 6 from Mr Alan Jolley

Please can you provide me with the specific details of the consultation process, and the level of information that will be shared by the Council with the key supporters of Friends of Acton Scott Working Farm

Response from Cllr Cecilia Motley Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture, Leisure and Tourism, Transport

Consultation on the future of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm will begin later in January. There will be an information pack outlining the background to the current situation, visitor trends and outline accounts for the past five years.

Community engagement will include an online survey, which will be open for at least 6 weeks and available to all through the Shropshire Council website, plus some smaller community meetings with interested parties, where new ideas and operating models can come forward and be discussed. Invitations to these meetings will be sent to those who have expressed an interest in being proactively involved.

The pack and survey will be made available in all libraries. The result of this engagement will be provided in a report to the Acton Scott Estate, who will need to consider how they wish to take the site forward. Following this, a report will be provided to Cabinet so that the Council's position can be confirmed.