

COUNCIL 12 May 2022
Public Questions

Question from:	Peter Phillips
Subject:	Landlines Switch Off
Portfolio Holder:	Rob Gittins

- WHAT steps has the Council taken to identify such residents, as required by the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (CSDPA ?) THE ACT states that councils have a duty to assess the needs of disabled people for help with the cost of a phone and any necessary special equipment the event of a phone becoming unavailable.

In the event of a power cut in any specific part of Shropshire, the Council and Adult Social Care will work with the Distribution Network Operators (DNO) to establish those areas affected and review its own database to identify those individuals who are already known to Adult Social Care within the identified geographical area and who are considered as being at increased vulnerability because of the power cut. These individuals will be communicated and supported through a co-ordinated approach which will include face to face wherever a phone call is not possible.

With regard to the specific question in relation to the ‘Chronically Sick and disabled Persons Act (CSDPA) 1970’, this was repealed at the point that the Care Act 2014 was introduced. The provision of a telephone and any special equipment to enable it’s use was referred to in the CSDPA 1970; however, technology has understandably moved on considerably during the last 50 years and the provisions within the Care Act (CA) 2014 are focussed on meeting individuals needs and wellbeing outcomes which has essentially increased and widened the scope for how various items of technology and digital equipment can be supplied to individuals who live in their own homes and in accordance with the CA 2014 eligibility criteria. Adult Social Care do keep a record of where such equipment has been provided to individuals and can refer to this if needed. This also includes the very small number of individuals where telephone equipment and access to a landline has been provided historically under the CSDPA 1970.

- People without Broadband - how will they be ‘switched on?’

People who currently have no broadband will be contacted by the Communication Provider (CP) that provides their landline telephone connection to arrange the migration away from their current analogue connection to a digital one. When, how and with what equipment this migration takes place will be specific to each CP. The CP for most landline-only customers will be BT plc, which is replacing its analogue telephone service with a product called Digital Voice. For FAQs relating to BT’s Digital Voice, please see: <https://www.bt.com/help/landline/digital-voice-migration>. For example:

- *Question: When will my new equipment arrive?*
- *Answer: If you need new equipment it will arrive before your switch over day. We’ll let you know the delivery date.*

It is important to note that the CP marketplace is aware that some customers will be outside of areas that can be migrated to fibre. To accommodate these customers we understand that a product has been developed by BT Openreach which will allow customers to still make calls across the legacy copper network.

- What about pay phones?

Payphones or public call boxes/kiosks are provided by BT plc, which has a Universal Service Obligation (USO) administered by Ofcom, to provide a reasonable number of working phone boxes where they're most needed. If BT want to remove the one and only call box from a site (by site Ofcom means, 'a 400-metre walking distance surrounding a call box') they are required to follow an agreed process, see page 3 of:

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0035/47879/removing_callboxes.pdf

Where the Openreach analogue network serving an existing call box is upgraded to digital, Shropshire Council expects the technology in the call box to be upgraded with no loss of service.

- What steps have been taken to identify people who are digitally excluded?

Communication Providers are expected to identify which of their customers are vulnerable, including those who are digitally excluded, i.e. they don't have a broadband connection and will need an alternative migration solution.

As part of the Council's strategic planning process, 'digital accessibility' is a proposed work stream that will review 'digital inequality'. A range of different datasets will be used to baseline and inform this project work.

- At some stage, developers/residents will have to be told they cannot have a copper connexion. Who decides? When? how is the decision to be implemented?

Most of the landlines in the UK, including the Shropshire Council area, are owned and managed by Openreach. Openreach will issue a 'Stop Sell' notice for each telephone exchange area once 75% of premises can access a fibre optic broadband network. This means that people in those areas won't be able to order new landline-based products (telephone & broadband) if a fibre optic one is available. The first telephone exchange in Shropshire expected to be subject to a Stop Sell is Ludlow (from August 2022).

Please also see our response to 'People without Broadband - how will they be 'switched on?'

- What is the position of small suppliers, e.g: SWS?

Small alternative network (altnet) broadband suppliers, like Secure Web Services (SWS), do not provide services to customers using Openreach's copper landline network.

SWS provides a broadband connection to its customers using 'fixed wireless access' and 'fibre to the premises' network technologies. SWS are able to provide Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony services as an alternative. This is a commercial decision. Each altnet supplier will make an independent decision on deploying a VoIP solution. There is no obligations on these suppliers to provide telephony services.

- How are contacts with the emergency services to be guaranteed?

Ofcom states (<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2021/upgrading-landlines-to-digital-technology>): "Unlike traditional telephones, a telephone connected to a broadband router will not work in a power cut, as the router gets its power from the mains. If you rely on a landline telephone (for example, you don't have a mobile telephone, you're unable to use a mobile

telephone or you don't have mobile signal inside your home) your telephone service provider must make sure you are able to contact the emergency services during a power cut. This could be in the form of battery back-up so your landline telephone will continue to work, or giving you a basic mobile telephone to use in this situation."

Agreements between the Mobile Network Operators ensures that 'roaming' for emergency calls is available. This means where a member of the public has no signal from their mobile provider they can use the most immediate and available network to make an emergency call.

- What consultation has there been?

Openreach ran a consultation on the 'digital switchover' in 2018, see:

<https://www.openreach.com/news/openreach-to-consult-communication-provider-customers-on-switch-to-digital-phone-services-by-2025/>

- BT says it will provide backup battery packs for vulnerable people against power cuts...how will they be re-charged?

Battery backup is designed to enable people to continue to use their telephone service during a power cut, but it is only meant as a short-term solution until such time as the mains power connection is restored.

Ofcom guidance issued in 2018 stated that, "Providers should have at least one solution available that enables access to emergency organisations for a minimum of one hour in the event of a power outage in the premises" (Source:

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/123118/guidance-emergency-access-power-cut.pdf.

- Have plans been made to improve mobile phone coverage?

On 9 March 2020 the Government announced that it had entered into an agreement with the four Mobile Network Operators to provide grant funding to deliver a 'Shared Rural Network'. Under the terms of this agreement, each mobile operator has committed to providing good quality data and voice coverage to 88% of the landmass by 30 June 2024, and 90% by 30 June 2026*, subject to certain conditions (including the provision of funding for elements of the programme).

* In July 2021, the definition of 'Subsequent Coverage Deadline' was changed from June 2026 to January 2027 (Source: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/spectrum/information/cellular-coverage>)

- Have needs of off-grid premises been assessed?

Premises that are off-grid for fibre broadband services are being considered by the government. Last year the government issued a call for evidence on the subject of very hard-to-reach premises. In February 2022 the government issued their response to this, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-broadband-for-very-hard-to-reach-premises/outcome/improving-broadband-for-very-hard-to-reach-premises-government-response#government-response-1>. Based on the evidence that was gathered, the government will

set out a series of policy proposals later in 2022 setting out how it intends to address connectivity challenges to these premises.

Finally to note Shropshire Council submitted a comprehensive submission to Ofcom in 2018 on the issue of "protecting access to emergency services in power cuts at customer premises".

The submission and extract will be shared with Mr Phillips. The evidence demonstrates not only the Council's commitment to supporting the people that we define as vulnerable and to emphasising the importance of Communication Providers like BT playing their part, but also our approach to continuing to take every opportunity that presents itself to articulate that commitment, both to central Government and to agencies such as Ofcom. Of note, we have again over the past month engaged with both DCMS and the LGA on the subject of 'digital switchover'.

Question from:	Mike Streetly
Subject:	NWRR
Portfolio Holder:	Dean Carroll

I note the recent 30% cut in the council's Capital budget with the council's finance director saying "Due to pressures in the revenue budget, it is not possible to continue with schemes that would add a significant further financial pressure through additional borrowing costs". However, the proposed NWRR is still retained and will consume nearly a fifth of the capital budget over the next four years.

I note that there is £52M for the NWRR in the capital budget for FY 22/23/24. Could you please provide the capital spend to date (including any spend from the revenue budget) and the total estimated spend on capital and revenue budgets to completion?

The revised price for the new swimming pools in Shrewsbury has doubled compared to the initial budget and the council has put the scheme on hold as a result. Given the ongoing spend on the NWRR of thousands of pounds every week and the very high rates of inflation in the construction industry combined with the fact that any over run to the cost of the NWRR will be unaffordable given the financial situation outlined above, will the council immediately put the NWRR on hold pending a review of costs?

The council has not spent £28m on the North West Relief Road to date.

The project consists of two discrete elements in the Capital Programme, the Oxon Link Road (OLR) and the NWRR. Whilst these are linked for the purposes of the current Planning application and future construction, they are separated in financial terms for the requirements of the two external funding bodies. The OLR has a current budget of £12.9m in total, with £4.2 of this being externally funded by the Marches LEP and £8.7m being local match funding through developer contributions. The NWRR has secured funding from the DfT of £54.4m with a required local match of £19.8m to be found through developer contributions and capital receipts. In total therefore the budget available for NWRR is £87m and this reflects current estimations of cost. It should be noted that the DfT and LEP Capital awards are not able to be reallocated by the Council and unspent budget would need to be returned if the NWRR does not go ahead.

The Council has spent £18.111m on surveys and designs to date with just £3.189m of this coming from the Council's own agreed match allocation to date.

As we have stated previously, the North West Relief Road (including the Oxon Link Road) remain a key priority for the Council and will continue to ensure that the outcomes achieved reflect value from the investment at each stage of the project life.

Question from:	Christine Glover	
Subject:	Flooding	
Portfolio Holder:	Ian Nellins	

The flooding of one's home is a terrible, terrible experience. The emotional and mental anguish is beyond words. As someone who suffers flooding of my home, I am massively concerned about any building on areas of land prone to flooding. These developments can have a catastrophic effect on those of us who already suffer, particularly those of us upstream of Shrewsbury. It's important to understand the impact of new developments and not just on flood plains. It's my belief that our flooding issues are caused, not by the weather and nature alone, but by a combination of things, including the actions of human beings creating an artificial environment. With each new building development, 'millions of gallons of rainwater that would normally seep into the earth gradually, are cascading down gutters into drains and into rivers which means they'll become raging, vindictive monsters.' In addition to this, there is displacement of water caused by building new access roads. If this trend of new building developments continues, soon there will be nowhere for the extra water to go. If the problem of flooding is to be resolved, it's important to look at the roots of the problem and not just the symptoms. It's not enough to erect flood defences, because that just creates a problem elsewhere. My question to Council: Considering the flooding earlier this year and its consequences, would now be a good time to abandon the proposed Riverside Development plan, along with the disposal of Shirehall, the two being connected?

Shropshire Council, like you, shares the ambition for pace and progress in finding solutions to flooding across the Severn. With our partners, it is both our role and ambition to enable resilience of local communities across the catchment. For this reason, we established and jointly chair the River Severn Partnership with the Environment Agency.

The Partnership is in direct response to challenges in securing flood management investment as well as the increasing frequency and severity of flooding which requires accelerated delivery. We believe there is a justified case for water management measures across the Severn. However, as you may be aware, current investment in flood management via Defra's Flood Defence Grant in Aid is predominately targeted at protecting existing residential properties. This makes it complex to produce viable business cases for new flood risk management schemes. This is particularly the case when seeking options for rural communities where numbers of residential properties are small or indeed some of the flood affected urban areas, such as Shrewsbury, where the impacts are on businesses rather than homes.

The Partnership believes that a wider approach is needed which opens up new routes to funding and delivery. The link to future growth and development is key. The scale of investment need is far more than the public purse is able to provide and therefore the Partnership is exploring how it can provide multiple benefits for people and places from water management and create viable investment cases. It has already been successful in securing over £40million in additional Government investment through this approach, which is being used to deliver water

management measures on the Severn as well as a long term management plan. This plan will be adaptive to take account of future changes, such as some of those you mention.

The Riverside development forms one of the important short term pathfinders under the Partnership. To effectively manage risks, Shropshire Council is working closely with the Environment Agency and via the Partnership to provide a two way approach for assessing and managing flood risk on the site. This allows us to take into account what we know now about flood risk and therefore how we design the development from the outset as well as developing a longer term adaptive plan that can take account of future changes, whether climate change, future investment in flood risk management such as the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme or any future developments. Flood risk management is a key consideration in the Riverside work. It is being addressed from the outset in collaboration with the key risk management authorities and provides an opportunity for us to jointly consider how we can embrace both the river and any associated nature based management measures as part of the scheme.

Question from:	Slawomir Fefjer	
Subject:	Active Travel Fund	
Portfolio Holder:	Ian Nellins	Approved
<p>Has Shropshire Council submitted a bid to Active Travel Fund tranche 3 and is it going to submit a bid to Active Travel Fund tranche 4?</p> <p>Shropshire Council did not submit a bid to the Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 due to a lack of staffing resources at the time. The intention is to submit a bid to future Active Travel Funds.</p>		

Question from:	Save Our Shirehall	
Subject:	Shirehall	
Portfolio Holder:	Dean Carroll	
<p>Does the Council recognise how much Shropshire's Council Tax payers will object to their Council spending a quoted £37 million on a new 'civic-hub' when £3 - 5 million on our Shirehall would afford legacy maintenance, energy improvements and cosmetic refreshment ? 2. As 'blended' office/home working unfolds, how can a Riverside 'civic-hub', with flood risk, accommodate the commuting and work-related travel and parking for some 800 Shropshire Council and tenant employees, compared to the County-wide accessibility and space available at the Shirehall? 3. What carbon impact audit and assessment will be made of a) the demolition of our Shirehall, b) its site re-development and c) a 'civic-hub' new build replacement?</p> <p><i>On the 24 February 2022, Full Council formally declared the Shirehall building surplus to requirements and delegated to officers the ability to agree and implement the disposal strategy and agree terms for sale subject to the final approval of full Council.</i></p> <p><i>The quoted figure of £3 - £5 million to afford legacy improvements is wholly unrealistic and would do very little to improve the Shirehall in terms of its energy performance or indeed critical</i></p>		

maintenance/improvements to provide any form of longevity in terms of future use. The original refurbishment scheme agreed by full council was in excess of £20m and that did not include the removal of asbestos.

Shirehall has failed technically, functionally and economically and of course it's green credentials are extremely poor. The current building fabric and energy output is extremely inefficient and performs significantly below industry standards for heat loss, wasted energy, comfort and daylight. This creates a poor user environment where people are often too hot or too cold with little control over their personal environment. Detailed work was undertaken in terms of feasibility for the refurbishment of the Shirehall and related to the key decisions taken at the Council meeting of 16 July 2020. In the report it advised that the Stage 2 financial business case as prepared by Rider Levett Bucknell (RLB) identified an estimated cost of £24.1m, this was on the basis of refurbishing the Shirehall, which was presented to full Council in December 2018. Due to inflation and comparable scope of works, this figure is likely now to be in excess of £30m. We would of course be very interested to see an estimate of cost which provides for a functional refurbishment of the Shirehall for the sum of £5 million, together with the projected operational carbon savings that such a refurbishment would be able to provide. Notwithstanding the detailed work undertaken previously, the total floor area of the Shirehall equates to circa 20,000m², the Council's predicted future requirement is currently set at less than a quarter of that floor space. Incorporating the future likely requirements of partners the forecast requirement for the planned Multi Agency Hub, in total, is just over half of the current floor space of the Shirehall.

The commitment to move to a town centre site, will provide excellent access to transport links with the bus station, train station and the park and ride service, together with both existing and future planned parking provision to match with the Council's climate change and movement strategy objectives. In terms of the increasing risks associated with flooding, the redevelopment of the riverside area provides the opportunity to address and mitigate the impacts of flooding as part of the next stage of design development.

No decisions have been taken in terms of demolition of the current Shirehall building and the future of the site will be tested through an appropriate marketing process. This will scope the appetite of any third parties who may wish to retain or convert the existing building as opposed to redeveloping the site.