

CABINET 06 JULY 2022
Member Questions

Question from:	Ruth Houghton
Subject:	Cost of Living Crisis
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Simon P Jones

The current cost of living crisis looks set to continue for some time as inflation increases and the cost of home energy becomes an even greater cost for everyone in our community including young families, older people and those that are vulnerable or have a disability.

What steps is Shropshire Council taking to support those most affected by the rising costs of food, petrol and diesel, electricity and gas? In particular in rural areas many homes are reliant on oil or solid fuel for heating, this of course is not subject to a cap. Is there any additional help available for people living in rural communities who experience higher food costs if they shop locally, are subject to home heating costs rising without any price cap and who need to run a vehicle due to the lack of public transport?

Thank you for your question.

Shropshire Council recognises the impact of the current cost of living crisis on everyone in our community. It also recognises, along with its partners, the current reality of hidden inequalities across rural Shropshire where costs of living and particularly the rising costs of transport and fuel are having a disproportionate impact on people who are living in a low wage economy.

In response to the increases in the cost of living we have established a Social Taskforce which brings together organisations across Shropshire who are dealing with the impacts every day; this will enable a joint response to support residents struggling with the cost-of-living increases. Shropshire Council chairs these meetings, which take place monthly and is supported by a poverty and hardship group led by the Voluntary Sector (Citizens Advice and Age UK) and communications subgroup. The Task Force has developed a joint action plan to ensure that the most vulnerable in our community are supported. This includes action on training, developing our workforce, increasing capacity to support residents, combined and targeted communications.

The group have recently pulled together an open letter to ministers on the impact of the Crisis on Shropshire as one of the Countries most rural communities. We would like to make a strong case for national policy change regarding support for the cost of living, for households who are impacted, and for an increase in support for those of pension age. However, we specifically appeal that Shropshire be eligible for any future investment of funds due to high levels of need and rural, often more hidden inequalities, for poor health outcomes in these communities and rising impact on our care system. Programmes that support our children and older people living in low-income households and levelling up must address rural disadvantage to give us the tools to support our residents in crisis.

Further to the work being undertaken by the taskforce, Shropshire Council's Affordable Warmth & Energy Efficiency team have been successful in drawing down funding via several successful bids to government affordable warmth schemes. The total value of these schemes is more than £6m, to be delivered before the end of March 2023. The team are also leading a consortium of four local Registered Social Housing Providers and Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing in doing works under the first wave of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Together these schemes are delivering measures essential to improve the energy efficiency of homes and reduce the energy bills of

hundreds of homeowners and tenants across the county. The measures are based on a “whole House” approach and include all types of insulation including Solid wall (internal &/or external), cavity wall, loft, underfloor and flat roof insulation, as well as first time Double Glazing, insulated external doors, low carbon heating systems and Solar PV and battery storage. The whole house approach aims to reduce the energy demand and then move to low carbon heating.

In delivering these schemes the team work closely with local charities including Marches Energy Agency (MEA) and Citizens Advice and Age UK. This enables households to get further help with income maximisation and debt advice as an added extra to the initial scheme. MEA also run the Keep Shropshire Warm (KSW) advice service for Shropshire Council. The service provides free, non-scripted advice to homeowners and private tenants on reducing the bills, dealing with fuel debt and all things energy. MEA add value to the schemes by offering home visits and free low-cost measures to several clients every year funded by other sources. KSW acts as the referral point for the other schemes and at the same time are assessing claims and distributing grants under the Housing Support fund for AWEE. For this we have supplied 2 funding pots of £100,000 each. One is distributed to those in need of help with fuel vouchers debts and the other provides a much needed, fund for enabling works to allow the measures in the bigger schemes to go ahead.

The Council is also working with partners to ensure the Household Support Fund (approx. £2m of funding) provided by Government is appropriately spent, ensuring the best value for money and enabling assistance across the county for residents of Shropshire. Headline aspects of this fund are below:

- Payment of £15 per child for free school meals;
- Uniform grants for Ukrainian guests;
- Support for fuel through the purchase of oil, gas, logs, coal or payment towards electricity and gas credit/debit along with a debt fund via Marches Energy Agency, Keep Shropshire Warm and Energy Efficiency Enabling Grants.
- Support for Essentials linked to Energy and Water through a targeted payment to existing pensioners in receipt of council tax support and single working parents.
- Support for housing costs administered alongside existing discretionary housing payments (DHP);
- Discretionary Council Tax Support;
- Support for vulnerable families through the Welfare Support Team

Finally, the council has updated its website to include significant information for individuals struggling with the cost-of-living rise - [Cost of living help | Shropshire Council](#)

Question from:	Rob Wilson
Subject:	Fix My Street
Portfolio Holder:	Dean Carroll

I welcome the adoption of Fix My Street by Shropshire Council which is much better than its predecessor MyShropshire. How many road defects are currently outstanding on Fix My Street in Shropshire, including surface issues and potholes? Does this include reports that have been closed because they are in the future work programme? And why when a report is closed on Fix My Street because it's in the future work programme is an estimated date for completion not given?

There is currently No.772 outstanding Road Carriageway and Pothole Surface Defects on Fix My Street. This does not include defects that have been closed because they are on a future programme. At present responses are automated as the service has not yet increased capacity to allow more detailed feedback. It is hoped to automate feedback about future programmes, however Fix My Street does not currently have this functionality but is something the Council are working with My Society to actively develop.

Question from:	Ruth Houghton	
Subject:	20 mph Speed Limit - Schools	
Portfolio Holder:	Dean Carroll	

How many schools in Shropshire are now benefitting from a 20mph speed limit on roads outside their gates and what is the planned roll out programme for those schools not yet included in the 20 mph speed limit programme.

In September 2020, Shropshire Council approved the development of a programme for introducing 20mph speed restrictions outside schools, where existing highway conditions suggest it would be appropriate to do so. The last review in 2021 suggested that 22 schools in Shropshire already had mandatory 20mph speed restrictions in place.

A programme of data collection and feasibility work associated with the introduction of mandatory 20mph speed restrictions commenced in May 2021 with a view to formulating a provision programme of capital work to commence in 2022/23. A significant programme of data collection has been carried out at all state funded maintained schools and academies that do not currently have a mandatory 20mph speed limit to specifically understand traffic behaviour at the start and end of the school day and to determine an appropriate level of intervention. There is no single generic approach for the introduction of a mandatory 20mph speed restriction, and site-specific characteristics determine the level of intervention that may be required and the degree of benefit that may be achieved. In some circumstances this may be physical traffic calming to slow vehicle speeds, and in others, current conditions may suggest that a 20mph speed restriction is unnecessary and would deliver minimal benefits.

Officers are currently waiting for a date for the approach taken for the feasibility work, option assignment and the prioritisation of schemes to be reviewed by the Communities Overview Scrutiny Committee before publicising the proposed forward programme of scheme design and delivery.