

CABINET 15 February 2023
MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question from:	Alex Wagner	
Subject:	Street Furniture	
Portfolio Holder:	Ian Nellins	Approved

Shrewsbury Town Centre is a fantastic place, full to the brim with heritage and history. Despite this, the streets often seem cluttered with unnecessary and often shabby street furniture and signage. Several residents have gotten in touch to complain about the poor quality of signage on the Wyle Cop in particular, with black poles seemingly just used as boards to post largely unuseful information. Another similar example can be found in the number of ugly, brightly-coloured signs signalling parking restrictions around Claremont Bank and Welsh Bridge – five of these signs are within around 10 metres of one another near St Austin’s Street car park.

In the interests of preserving the heritage of our Town Centre and creating a friendlier street scene, would Shropshire Council commit to reviewing their existing street furniture, cleaning up their shabbier signage, and considering adopting new policies on the visual impact of signage?

Highway authorities must comply with the Traffic Sign Regulations to ensure that signing is correct and appropriate. In locations where a number of streets converge in a small area there will be a higher concentration of regulatory signage. Without signs located correctly on each street, it is impossible to enforce parking restrictions, which leads to indiscriminate parking and other issues. A recent funding bid focuses on signing rationalisation and if successful would allow the council to review signage in towns and identify if there is scope for reduced signing in some locations.

Shropshire Council has been working closely with the Shrewsbury BID to identify priority issues (such as graffiti and benches that need re-painting) and have had teams working in the town centre to address these.

Question from:	Rosemary Dartnall	
Subject:	Street Lighting	
Portfolio Holder:	Richard Marshall	Approved

Clarification is required to some contradictory answers to previous streetlight questions.

It was stated there were 7.25% faults in 20,000 lights, equating to 1,450 faulty lamps. Supplementary information, 4/2/23 stated 306 total current faults including 240 (80%) overdue.

Probably long overdue, given the number of lights in my division out of action for 10, even 12 months: there are 11 within a 250m radius.

How many Shropshire lights are currently faulty?

how many of these exceed the 28-day repair target?

Why are such long-standing repairs left for many months on end?

Yet in all street light categories Shropshire Council was ~5% below the average. T&W have replaced 95% of their 24,400 lights with LED since 2018, delivering financial and CO₂ emissions savings. Clearly T&W have a geographical advantage, but does this alone explain why it has taken 10 years to update just 30% of Shropshire lighting to LED?

Can the portfolio holder please explain why this service has become so poor,

Why the decline was not noticed and rectified earlier?

Is he certain that the performance indicators and other monitoring of the Kier contract is fit for purpose?

Is he satisfied there is an effective working relationship between Highways officers, WSP and Kier staff concerned with streetlighting?

Currently, we have 1296 planned works and 530 fault jobs raised with the contractor and 104 faults raised with the DNO's (power boxes) covering all associated assets within street lighting. The planned works, cover work ranging from realignment of columns and signs to full column replacement as well as illuminated signs and bollard replacements. We are still undertaking some works within the 5 working days on residential roads, however, for clarification this is to investigate and repair where possible. Some works are raised straight away on a 28-day replacement for new lanterns to be fitted which saves the initial 5 days for investigating. Shropshire currently have 20,064 lamp columns recorded in the inventory. Kier this year alone on an ad-hoc basis have installed 1627 LED lanterns, undertaken 2000 planned works jobs and attended 400 emergencies across the county.

Of the 1180 planned works raised, 930 of those exceed their target date, of the 454 fault jobs raised, 388 exceed their target date. We are working extensively with contractors to prioritise jobs and improve the repair times with the additional resources brought in.

All SOX lamps (60% of our lighting stock) are no longer manufactured for environmental reasons, when faulty a new lantern is required which places the job under a 28 days SLA. Often the older lights were installed at the same time, which means they will fail at around the same period. So, it is not unusual to find several lamps out in a small area at the same time. The level of failures of the old SOX lights as they are at end of life, coupled with resource issues has compounded the issues. During Covid, production of the LED heads halted and this in turn has lengthened the delivery times of the LED heads, this problem is not in isolation to Shropshire Council but has been a worldwide supply issue.

When drawing comparisons with other authorities, that can often be extremely misleading as comparing an area like Shropshire with its size and rurality to a small urban council, figures can be extremely confused. Proudly, I can declare Shropshire Highways excels in many areas over other authorities and is often seen as an exemplar in our methodology.

Since 2014 we have been installing LED's of various types, LED lantern prices were some 375% more expensive than they are now. First generation LED's are already outdated and many councils that did a full roll out, are already having to replace the outdated LED's to the new technologically superior ones.

I am not going to shy away or attempt to sugar coat the fact that the service is behind and it has certainly not been at the levels of service that any of us wanted. With that said, as I explained the last time I answered your question around street lights, we have now more resources in the guise of 2 new sub-contractors working on the contract and the roll out of LED fitting has started in earnest. I can assure you, that we are monitoring these improvements and there are very rigorous KPI's in place to monitor how these changes are improving the service.

I am extremely satisfied with the working relationship with everyone involved in street lighting. Shropshire Highways, WSP and Kier work under the banner of Shropshire Highways Alliance Partnership and work together to try and mitigate and resolve as many ongoing issues as quickly as possible. I personally sit on the Alliance board and can attest to the honest and collaborative working demonstrated in these meetings.

An example of how the Highways alliance is working effectively is evidenced in the significant improvements demonstrated over the past 2 years with Highway repairs. Cllr Dartnell even commented at the last cabinet meeting how much this had improved. The service and I am fully committed to ensuring that those same levels of improvement are clearly seen across street light repairs also. As the Portfolio Holder, I am only dedicated to providing the best service possible to the residents of Shropshire across all services I am responsible for, political point scoring is not something that interests me and therefore I will always be as honest as I can. With that honesty, I will state that we are working very hard to rectify the situation, this is not however, an overnight quick fix but I am reassured by the progressive steps we are taking.

Question from:	Julia Buckley	
Subject:	Care Home Fee Uplift	
Portfolio Holder:	Cecilia Motley	Approved

This week's delayed annual agreement on the Cost of Care is a critical decision for Shropshire Care providers. In particular those non-profit providers who cannot cross-subsidise their activities such as supporting disabled adults.

Can the cabinet member confirm that this year's uplift will cover the 6.6% increase in the minimum wage as well as other inflationary cost increases? As a legal requirement for employers and in a sector with chronically under-paid staff, it is essential that our commissioned providers are enabled to pay social care staff an appropriate wage to work with dignity.

Furthermore, what mechanisms can we put in place to ring fence contractual uplifts to ensure it reaches the staff affected?

To confirm there is no delayed response to the annual fee review; the decision usually falls in line with the budget approval timeline, and we are currently drafting the letter to confirm the position for 2023/24 for annual fee reviews.

When the council reviewed the fees for 2023/24 it has taken into account several factors:

- Provider feedback and current challenges
- The cost of care exercise (although limited to care homes 65+ years and domiciliary care for 18+ years)
- Demand and capacity in the market
- Bench marking with other local authorities
- The councils budget.
- Delivering the Shropshire Plan 2022-2025

The NMW is part of the hourly rate or placement cost uplifted which covers the NMW set when we review the rates, we review and benchmark rates with our regional local authority neighbours and our rates benchmark comparably with others.

The council cannot mandate that Providers pass on uplifts to their staff, it is their legal duty to pay their staff at least the minimum; complying with employment law is also a contractual obligation and the council does monitor rates of pay.

In addition in 2023/24 we will also be doing the following:

- Work with Providers to increase the use of technology and digital solutions;
- Work with Providers to redesign the domiciliary care market to ensure growth, flexibility and coverage; and consideration of a future 'rural rate';
- Work with Providers to review the 'usual' rate for care home placements;

The council encourages any Provider who is struggling and concerned about their viability to speak to council officers.

Question from:	Rob Wilson	
Subject:	Shropshire Local Transport Plan	
Portfolio Holder:	Richard Marshall	Approved

At the Place Overview Committee on Monday 6th February 2023 it was clarified that development of the new Local Transport Plan, LTP4, stopped in March 2022. At the meeting the Executive Director of Place said that the new LTP will be a “transformational change from LTP3, it is a shift away from planning for vehicles into planning for places and people”. The new plan has to be in place by Spring 2024. LTP3 was published in Spring 2011.

Is the Council’s decision making on transport still based on LTP3? Are there interim measures in place to bridge the transformational gap between LTP3 and LTP4?

The provisional Shropshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) Strategy (2011-2026), LTP3, sets out a series of objectives that support three main goals: economy and growth, carbon reduction and environment, and healthy, safe and confident people and communities. These goals remain key overarching considerations in decision making within the

Highways and Transport service in addition to a range of specific metrics used for prioritising forward programmes of work within individual work streams.

In 2021, the Government announced plans to issue new guidance on Local Transport Plans. The launch of the new guidance by the Department for Transport has been subject to delay and is now expected to be released as a consultation draft early in 2023. The guidance is currently expected to focus on strategic priorities relating to levelling up the economy, reducing environmental impacts and improving transport for the user, which would include safety. There is a clear synergy between these priorities and the goals contained in the LTP3 Strategy.

It is anticipated that the new guidance will introduce a move away from predicting future traffic growth and providing for it, in favour of a vision-led approach whereby Local Transport Authorities can demonstrate how their transport systems can achieve better intended outcomes for people, goods, and places. Prior to the announcement of the pending guidance, Shropshire Council had already started to use an approach based on understanding the access needs of people and goods rather than focusing on specific transport modes in the development of the next Local Transport Plan for Shropshire. This adjustment in focus has been supported by the formation of a project steering group to enable cross-organisational thinking and the development of integrated policy that reflects the key role that transport systems have to play in maintaining sustainable communities and place-making. The Place DMT, with the inclusion of the Portfolio Holder, is the formal decision-making forum and accountable body for the development of the LTP which provides the necessary governance to enable any realignment of strategic focus to take place. This puts Shropshire Council in a strong position to respond to the new guidance when it emerges.