

## **MEMBER QUESTIONS**

### **Question from Councillor Tom Biggins**

At full Council in February 2022, I asked the following question:

“In the planning permission for the development of the new Talbot Manor estate, located off Alport Road in Whitchurch, there was a condition that a new mini-roundabout at the junction of Claypit Street and London Road would be constructed. Building is now at an advanced stage on the estate.

Residents are asking when will the mini-roundabout be constructed?”

No date was provided then. 15 months have passed, and the developer and Shropshire Council have at last completed the Section 278 agreement after persistent requests from myself that have latterly resulted in a planning enforcement case being opened but still no date has been forthcoming when the work will be done. I would therefore like to ask the same question again.

If the developer had not agreed to this planning condition in the first instance the planning consent would not have been granted.

At present the programmed resurfacing of London Road is being held up as it would be a waste of valuable resources to resurface the road and then dig it all up again to install the mini roundabout.

In the days between this question being lodged (20th April 2023) and Full Council on the 11th May can the Council please confirm a date from the developer when this planning condition will finally be discharged.

### **Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services**

There is technically no breach of planning control as the details of the roundabout have been agreed, but there was no date for the implementation of the works within the condition. It is fair to say that the condition was necessary to make the development acceptable, but there is nothing outstanding to enforce from a planning perspective. However, the council and the developer are committed to completing the roundabout in a timely fashion.

In terms of the Section 278 agreement, initially the Council had difficulties getting pricing from their contractor in order to complete the Agreement to then apply the necessary bond valuation and the Council's 10% fees. This has now been done and the agreement is with the applicants Solicitor. We have been in contact with their engineer to liaise with our Area Coordination Officer to book the road space for the scheme. We cannot at this point in time confirm a date but we will continue to pursue the matter.

I give my commitment to continue to liaise with Council Officers, to ensure that this project is completed and I assure Cllr Biggins, that it will remain extremely high on my priority list until it is satisfied.

### **Question from Councillor Ruth Houghton**

There are just under 80,000 people living in Shropshire who are over the age of 65. 10,800 people who are aged over 85. Attendance Allowance is a non means tested benefit for people over state pension age who need help with personal care or supervision because of an illness or disability. It can also be claimed by older people who fund their own care in a care home. As a county with an ageing population this benefit, for those that are eligible, could make a real difference to many people, some of whom may be struggling due to the rising cost of living.

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm how many Older People in Shropshire are claiming this benefit and explain what actions the Council is undertaking to ensure that older people in our local communities, including in care homes, are aware of the benefit and confirm what support is available to help with submitting an application?

### **Response from Councillor Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Public Health, and Communities**

Response:

- All clients referred to us who have a care need have a financial assessment.
- If they are not getting Attendance Allowance, we signpost them to the Attendance Allowance Unit helpline.
- Shropshire does not administer applications for Attendance Allowance and so we do not hold this information, this is done by the Department of Work and Pensions and so they are the body that would have the appropriate tools and data to provide these numbers. Their website is: [DWP benefits statistics: February 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dwp-benefits-statistics)

### **Question from Councillor Heather Kidd**

What thoughts does the Council have around the abolition of the Marches LEP? The answer should have reference to the following:

- Is there a threat that unspent funding will stay with Government in these difficult financial times?
- Funding in this LEP is of course allocated to Telford and Wrekin, Herefordshire and Shropshire. Will that funding be allocated on a fair shares basis?
- Will existing funding allocations be honoured and what threats might challenge those promises if neighbouring authorities decide to take back moneys allocated to them originally?

Notes:

The government is “minded” to withdraw support from local enterprise partnerships (LEP’s) and transfer their responsibilities to local authorities from 2024. Chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced a consultation as part of the Budget

## **Response from Councillor Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Resources**

The Government has announced that it is 'minded' to withdraw its support and has asked LEP's and councils who are 'accountable bodies' to respond on this via a questionnaire. The deadline has been moved back to mid-May. Council should be clear that that withdrawal of Government support is not the same as being instructed to wind-down LEP activity – the LEP has independent status, so it must and will take its own independent decisions based on the views of its Board and Membership, and the Council, as accountable body, will support the agreed future direction.

To the specific points

- We are unaware of any 'threat' relating to unspent funding, and arrangements are likely to be different for different LEP areas.
- Significant LEP funding has been allocated to other bodies, not just the three represented local authorities. The winding up of a range of current arrangements, should that be required, will involve those councils and others. Arrangements would be expected to follow current areas of investment/borrowing and contracts and other agreements around these.
- Funding allocations and contractual obligations remain unchanged. Liaison with partner Councils has been established, seeking equity and minimisation of any detriment as a result of the Government announcement.

## **Question from Councillor Julian Dean**

In December 2022 Council approved the establishment of a Shropshire Economic Partnership Board, 'to assume the role of the Partnership Board for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), providing oversight for the delivery of this government funding in Shropshire'.

The first allocations of the £12.4m Shropshire award should now be complete, as the window for applications closed at the end of January, with the expectation that 50% of money would be accounted for by the end of March.

Who sits on the SEPB, and are minutes of their meetings published?

What allocations were made under the council scheme listed as the UKSPF Feasibility Fund, and how were allocations decided?

What proportion of the fund was spent and have expenses been submitted and accounted for?

Has there been any impact assessments of these allocations?

What reporting is planned to members and residents regarding the use of this fund?

## **Response from Councillor Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Growth, Regeneration and Housing**

In December 2022 Council approved the establishment of a Shropshire Economic Partnership Board, 'to assume the role of the Partnership Board for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), providing oversight for the delivery of this government funding in Shropshire'.

The first allocations of the £12.4m Shropshire award should now be complete, as the window for applications closed at the end of January, with the expectation that 50% of money would be accounted for by the end of March.

1. Who sits on the SEPB, and are minutes of their meetings published?

The Shropshire Economic Partnership Board is made up of a broad range of businesses and organisations (a pdf attached gives the name of each member and their organisation) to ensure all important and key sectors are represented, their voices are heard and who are also happy to hold each other to account and question. The deputy chair is from a Shropshire-based business and was the ex-Chair of the Shropshire Business Board and many operate regionally, nationally and internationally and each want to make a positive contribution to the Shropshire economy and believe together they can have a greater impact. A list of Members can be found at appendix A

There are representatives from private companies, the voluntary sector, the education sector and public sector organisations including Shropshire Council, DLUHC (who provided the UKSPF funding), WMCA and Homes England

The intention is to publish the minutes of the SEPB meetings on the webpage being set up within the Shropshire Council website, the inaugural meeting notes are being finalised and a pdf version will be placed on this webpage.

2. What allocations were made under the council scheme listed as the UKSPF Feasibility Fund, and how were allocations decided?

The fund was heavily over-subscribed with requests received totalling over £600k against a maximum allocation of £150k. There were also three direct grant awards made to business support projects that could deliver in part by the end of 22/23 (these are listed at the end of the document). The assessments were undertaken by the shadow Delivery Groups that sit under the SEPB (due to timescales the awards had to be made in advance of the first sitting of the SEPB). Their recommendations in turn were signed off by James Walton. A list of allocations can be found at appendix B

3. What proportion of the fund was spent and have expenses been submitted and accounted for?

A total of £237,786 was spent on activity by the end of the 22/23 financial year. This included £25,608 for management and administration (note that a maximum of 4% M&A can be claimed over the lifetime of the programme).

4. Has there been any impact assessments of these allocations?

Impact assessments will only apply to significant capital schemes that are funded under the programme.

5. What reporting is planned to members and residents regarding the use of this fund?

Quarterly reports will be prepared and circulated to members. The first one will be circulated soon now that the figures are known from 22/23. Members of the public will be kept updated through press releases and information on the Shropshire Council website.

### **Question from Councillor Julia Buckley**

During the April cabinet meeting, portfolio holders and senior officers discussed the current Kier Highways Term Maintenance Contract, describing Kier's performance as "some aspects of the contract are performing well and offering good value for money"

On Shropshire's "Fixmystreet" portal, the average completion time for a repair is published as 36 days.

However, this does not reflect the experience of Bridgnorth residents since the closure of the Highways depot in our town in September 2021 by this administration.

Residents have noticed a much longer wait for basic road and footpath repairs. For example:

- Queensway Drive: Crumbled, broken tarmac footpath and ironwork trip hazard. Reported for repair in March 2022 (13 months and still waiting). Ref: 14107373
- Stoneway steps handrail. Broken. Reported January 2022. Ref: 14080304 (15 months and waiting)
- Wenlock road footpath pitted and broken. 2021. Ref: 14074565 and 14074258 (2 years now) updated Oct 2022, ref: 14098981
- Woodberry Close bent and rusty. Reported 13 September 2022. Ref. 14082022 (7 months)
- Meadow Close road sign bend, faded and rusty. Reported 5 May 2022. Ref: 14088652 (11 months)
- Sunken footpath flooded on Castle Hill Terrace. Reported 28 February 2022. Ref: 14083758 (14 months)
- Footpath tarmac erupted by tree root on Dunval Road. Reported 2 April 2022. Ref: 14086794 (1 year)

Could the cabinet member for Highways explain why Bridgnorth highways repairs appear to be subject to longer delays than the Shropshire average?

Is Bridgnorth not a priority for Shropshire Highways?

Or is the problem with our contractor?

Or is the data on fixmystreet not reliable?

**Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services**

Our data highlights that the average time to fix a FixMyStreet enquiry in Bridgnorth is 34 days. The average across Shropshire is 36 days, therefore any links to lower levels of service being experienced by Bridgnorth residents are not supported by the data. Operational performance across Shropshire has continued to improve significantly.

Some examples Cllr Buckley provided were reported during the initial launch phase of FixMyStreet. At that time the system was in its infancy and was unable to inform people immediately that this is either “not an actionable defect in accordance with our Policy but we would continue to monitor via routine inspection” or “was not a high priority and will added to a future programme of routine maintenance” which would have closed these enquires at a much earlier point.

I can assure both the local member and the residents of Bridgnorth, that they have as much priority as the rest of the county and this is evidenced with the amount of work carried out over the past 12 Months by our contractors and our own teams

**Question from Councillor Rob Wilson**

As I raised at the Full Council meeting on 30th April 2023, will the council consider aligning the LCWIP to the highways resurfacing programme?

If footways and cycleways are upgraded to the latest standards at the same time, it would allow the council to account for this as capital schemes, hence saving money on the revenue budget.

**Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services**

The Council actively seeks to coordinate highway schemes in similar locations wherever possible, to achieve good value for money and ensure that budgets are best utilised to achieve the maximum outcomes available. The highways teams have integrated other schemes into resurfacing schemes, where proposals wherever possible and practicable and when proposals are sufficiently developed in advance of planned resurfacing programmes. The Council's investment into a four-year programme of highway surfacing means that there is now greater visibility of planned maintenance work which will lead to even greater opportunities to coordinate work. As the detail of the LCWIP and associated funding streams develop, this will become even more commonplace.

It is important to note, The LTN1/20 guidance applies to highway improvements, new highway construction and new or improved cycle facilities and not to highway maintenance programmes. As part of developing highway maintenance options, we do consider whether there are opportunities to address wider safety and inclusive mobility needs as well as the needs of cyclists; the guidance in LTN1/20 is a valuable resource in assessing the opportunities available.