

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

COUNCIL 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

Question from Michael Hinds

Please explain on what basis the Leader of the Council selects the councillors to be chairs of overview and scrutiny committees.

Response from Councillor Lezley Picton, Leader and Portfolio Holder For Policy And Strategy, Improvement And Communications

The process for choosing the Chair of each Scrutiny Committee is like any other committee in that nominations are put forward by the members of the committee itself and they then vote on those nominations to elect a chair. To be absolutely clear the Leader does not elect chairs of Committees.

As the Administration we, as a group, determine who, from our group, sits on each committee and nominations for Chair will be discussed. If I were to list the qualities I would expect to see in a Chair I would be looking for someone with experience, tenacity, good communication skills and someone who has the respect of fellow members. I am clear that the role of scrutiny is to hold the executive to account and I expect the chairs to ensure that their committees ask constructively challenging questions of Cabinet.

Our current Scrutiny Chairs have vast experience across many different roles within the Council. The recent changes to the format of Scrutiny has also resulted in opposition members taking up the roles of Vice Chair and again, these members have been chosen for their experience and knowledge in exactly the same way as Chairs are chosen.

Question from Frank Oldaker

On the webpage for Shropshire Council's Key Dates for the North West Relief Road, following a planned date of - "Early summer 2023 - Planning Committee Due" it says "June – Commence advanced works / Utility Diversions"

I appreciate the programme has slipped but could you please say what this work comprises and what budget has been allocated for this work which will be 'at risk' given that the Department for Transport will not have signed off the Business Case for the road at that point?

Response from Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways

In advance of any major scheme, a review of affected utilities (gas, electricity, water and telecoms etc) is undertaken, and wherever possible these are diverted prior to the start of the main construction works. Mapping and programming for such works is currently underway although no instruction to proceed has yet been given due to the delay in planning determination. There are no committed budget allocations for the utility diversion programme at this point, as engagement to establish potential costs continues with the utility companies. Preparatory costs incurred to date sit within the agreed delegated budget for the preparation of the NWRR and OLR

schemes up to Full Business Case (FBC), and the outturn costs for the diversion works themselves will be captured as part of the overall scheme costings within the published FBC in due course.

Question from David Carrant

On 17th September 2023 the Welsh Government will implement a 20 mph default national speed limit on the majority of residential roads and streets in Wales.

This move will adopt the advice and recommendations of UK and Welsh public health organisations and the World Health Organization and will replace the current default speed limit of 30 mph. This decision follows the example of local authorities in the UK with a total population of over 20 million who have adopted the same policy.

When will Shropshire Council accept public health advice and implement a default 20 mph speed limit on residential roads and streets throughout the county of Shropshire?"

On behalf of: Shropshire Wide 20 mph Campaign Supported by South Shropshire Climate Action and the following towns / areas: Shrewsbury, Shifnal, Oswestry, Ludlow, Bridgnorth, Cleobury Mortimer, Bishop's Castle, Broseley, Ruyton XI Town, Much Wenlock, Bayston Hill

Response from Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways

In Shropshire, the approach to implementing 20mph speed restrictions is based upon supporting the delivery of appropriate and achievable traffic management interventions in locations where the potential benefits are greatest and reflects current English Department for Transport guidance. On this basis, 20mph speed restrictions can generally be considered in the following locations:

- Outside schools or where there are high numbers of vulnerable road users;
- On urban residential streets in specific cases (where wide community support can be demonstrated, where there is evidence that streets are being used by people on foot and on bicycles and where the characteristics of the street are suitable) and,
- On town centre streets / pedestrian dominated areas.

The current approach recognises that there is no single generic approach for the introduction of a mandatory 20mph speed restriction, and that site-specific characteristics determine the level of intervention that may be required and the degree of benefit that may be achieved. In some circumstances, an intervention may require physical traffic calming to slow vehicle speeds, and in others, highway conditions may suggest that a 20mph speed restriction is unnecessary and would deliver minimal benefits to the current situation.

In September 2020, Shropshire Council approved the development of a county-wide programme for introducing 20mph speed restrictions outside schools, where existing highway conditions suggest it would be appropriate to do. This is now in delivery. That notwithstanding, further proposals around a wider 20mph approach are due to be reviewed by Members in due course. Best practice from neighbouring authorities and national policy leaders is currently being assessed with a view to potentially revising the current council 20mph policy position, and delivery of future schemes, where there is a mandate and a demonstrable benefit to communities.

Question from Ruth Cranley

I wish to ask and complain about the Council's lack of action in protecting cars parked on London Road. As a household, we have had 3 cars written off recently, which could have been avoided if adequate safety measures were in place:

1. The road is not designed to slow traffic down to a safe speed and there is inadequate signage to indicate that the road narrows from No 36 towards the Column.
2. There are no road markings at all to protect parked cars on London Road, especially outside 34-22. On all other roads in Shrewsbury with similar residents' parking, e.g. Abbey Foregate, there are box markings around the cars and lines to show that the road narrows, to guide approaching cars away from the parked cars. Why is this protection given on other roads and not on London Road?
3. There is a school opposite our houses, but no measures to slow traffic down. This puts children at risk.
4. Speeding traffic is not adequately monitored, nor the 7.5T weight limit enforced. Speeding cars and oversized lorries are a constant issue, greatly adding to the risk of accidents.

Please advise urgently when adequate safety measures will be put in place on London Road to prevent further accidents. It is a very busy road and a major route into the town, so surely it warrants having basic measures in place before more cars are needlessly damaged or someone is seriously injured or killed in this area.

Response from Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways

Shropshire Council have been made aware of the issue with parked cars being driven into along London Road and have been in regular contact with West Mercia Police on this matter. As such officers will be meeting with the local Shropshire Councillor and the police on site in the next month to discuss the issues and what measures are required to improve safety and reduce the number of accidents.

We are pleased that the police undertake regular enforcement on the speed limit on the road and are routinely issuing penalties for speeding drivers.

Following the site meeting, council officers will work with the police on implementing safety measures. Any recommendations will be added into the programme of work for the county and work undertaken when funding is available.

In addition to working with the police there has been a recent consultation carried out on opening up the Shirehall overflow car park for parking by the general public. Please see the following link - <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/shirehall-overflow-car-park-pay-display/>

As part of the proposals for this car park, the residents along this section of London Road will have the opportunity to purchase a permit to park their cars in the car park.

Question from Jamie Russell

Should planning permission for the North West Relief Road be granted, can Shropshire Council please confirm whether any trees or hedgerows will be cut down prior to approval of the Full Business Case by the Department for Transport?

Response from Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways

The future construction of the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road is dependent on Planning Permission being granted. As such, works could commence on receipt of this, and this could include preparatory and habitat creation elements of the programme. In order to secure the full funding allocation for the construction of the road however, the Council will submit a Full Business Case (FBC) to DfT once Planning Permission is granted. In the current programming of the project, the FBC and DfT's approval of this is due to be undertaken prior to the award of the main construction contract. As such it is possible that minor local works around utility diversions may be pursued in advance under Shropshire Council existing match funding commitment, but the main construction phase and any associated landscaping will take place following FBC approval.

Question from Wynn Davies

It has been reported that the Council considered issuing a "Section 114 Notice". Are the Council's finances so bad that this was a serious suggestion? Could the portfolio holder for finance explain why this situation has arisen when his party has been in charge of the Council for many years

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

It is no secret that the Council is facing unprecedented financial pressures and has a plan to deliver spending reductions of £51.4m in 2023/24. Many options were considered by Cabinet as part of the approach to setting the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the budget for the year. Quite properly, and as advised by officers, we looked at the risk around financial pressures increasing and what the options would

be under those circumstances. These considerations will continue to be reviewed in the coming months, which is what all well-run councils should be doing at the present time.

At the request of Cabinet, information was provided on the process and impact of a Section 114 notice. This was not because the finances were “so bad”, as you put it, nor because there was any expectation that our Section 151 Officer might consider such an approach. Rather, it was because we wanted to understand what a Section 114 notice really meant, and what such a decision could mean for the staff and for residents. We now have that clear understanding – it would be a bad option, and a last resort for that reason. We note the number of Section 114 notices and other, less formal but nevertheless worrying, financial anxieties being raised by other councils, and we wish them well on what may be a long and hard journey of recovery. It may be that some of the innovative approaches helping to secure Shropshire’s future can be shared with Councils facing significant financial challenges.

We have agreed an overarching strategic plan, The Shropshire Plan’, and we are focused on maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council. We have aligned our Medium-Term Financial Strategy to The Shropshire Plan, to create a modern, efficient and sustainable council – the legacy we will leave for future generations. We have already made good progress on delivering the budget and we expect the first year of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy to be largely delivered by the end of the financial year.