

Economy & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee

1st September 2026

Public Questions and Responses

Question from Ms Victoria Kinnersley:

When responsibility for grass verge maintenance was transferred from STAR to Shropshire Council, what contractual and service-planning obligations did the Council assume, what due diligence was undertaken to ensure it had the necessary equipment, staffing and resources to fulfil those obligations, and why has the Council subsequently acknowledged that it does not have the capacity to deliver the service?

Given that the transfer appears to have taken place without the necessary equipment and personnel being in place, can the Committee establish:

- whether the Council was contractually obliged to provide a grass verge maintenance service from the date of transfer;
- what business case, risk assessment and resource planning were undertaken before agreeing to bring the service back in-house;
- who was responsible for ensuring that the required machinery, staffing and operational arrangements were in place;
- why these resources were not secured before the transfer took effect;
- what financial or contractual consequences arise from the Council failing to deliver the service as expected; and
- what remedial action is now being taken, and by when residents can reasonably expect the service to be restored to an acceptable standard?

In particular, how does the Council justify allowing residents in Albrighton and other areas of the County to be left with overgrown, unsightly and potentially hazardous verges as a consequence of a failure to adequately plan and resource the transfer of this responsibility?

Response:

When responsibility for grass verge maintenance was transferred from STAR to Shropshire Council, what contractual and service-planning obligations did the Council assume, what due diligence was undertaken to ensure it had the necessary equipment, staffing and resources to fulfil those obligations, and why has the Council subsequently acknowledged that it does not have the capacity to deliver the service?

The Council recognises the concern raised and the importance of ensuring that any change in grounds maintenance responsibility is properly planned, resourced and communicated. In this case, the position was more complex because no agreement

had been reached on the areas, scope, service standard, timing or funding of any transfer, and officers were engaging with STAR Housing on the understanding that the matter remained at an early review and due diligence stage.

Street Scene and Highways were working through the information available to them at the pace that resource capacity allowed, while also managing wider operational pressures including the TUPE transfer of grounds maintenance staff from idverde to Kier and the finalisation of existing countywide schedules, staffing and equipment arrangements.

The position also represented an unsighted budget pressure that the Council had not been made aware of and could not reasonably have budgeted for in advance. The short notice and absence of agreed operational detail meant there was limited opportunity for the Council or Kier to plan an immediate intervention before STAR Housing changed its servicing arrangements.

Given that the transfer appears to have taken place without the necessary equipment and personnel being in place, can the Committee establish:

- whether the Council was contractually obliged to provide a grass verge maintenance service from the date of transfer;

The Council recognised the request from STAR Housing in late 2025 and engaged in early discussions to understand the locations that STAR Housing had identified as potentially being the responsibility of highways or Street Scene, rather than areas associated with communal housing activities.

At that stage, the Council's engagement was undertaken on the basis that no final decision had been reached on the transfer of responsibility. Officers therefore approached the matter proactively and constructively, seeking to review the information provided, clarify the status of the identified sites, and understand any operational implications before any formal service-planning decisions were made.

- what business case, risk assessment and resource planning were undertaken before agreeing to bring the service back in-house;

None of the points set out under this question were completed at that stage because it was not clear to Highways or Street Scene that STAR Housing had already intended not to continue cutting the areas it had identified. Officers were under the impression that the review was at an early stage and that the information provided by STAR Housing was part of an initial discussion to clarify responsibility, rather than confirmation that operational activity would cease.

The Council has since become aware that the matter had been ongoing with STAR Housing prior to the Council being formally informed. At the same time, Street Scene was working with Kier on the TUPE transfer of staff from idverde and was not aware of this action by STAR Housing. Resources, staffing and equipment had already been finalised to optimise existing grounds

maintenance schedules, and the additional locations had not been built into those operational plans.

As the areas had not been formally agreed, no additional schedules had been produced. STAR Housing also retained the staff previously engaged in completing this work, leaving Kier without the additional resources or equipment required and without a clear, agreed understanding of the volume of work to be absorbed. The sites identified equate to approximately 53,000m² of additional grass cutting, which is estimated to represent around 14 days of additional operational work.

- who was responsible for ensuring that the required machinery, staffing and operational arrangements were in place;

No agreement was reached that responsibility for these areas should transfer to the Council in the way or timescale proposed. The Council's position is that the process was not reasonable, particularly given the short notice, the absence of agreed schedules, and the lack of a properly developed transition plan for resources, equipment and service continuity.

While the Council has engaged constructively to review the position, the circumstances do not support a view that operational responsibility should simply have transferred to the Council without the necessary due diligence, planning and resource arrangements being in place. STAR Housing is currently delivering the service at a cost higher than the amount quoted by Kier for establishing a new team, which further demonstrates that the matter required proper consideration before any transfer of responsibility could reasonably take effect.

A further consideration is the need to establish whether the current approach represents value for money for housing residents. The Council also considers that there remains a question about the level of service frequency being applied by STAR Housing, particularly where this appears to be higher than the grass cutting frequency and standard delivered across the wider county. This reinforces the need for a clear, evidence based review before any long-term responsibility, cost or service standard is agreed.

- why these resources were not secured before the transfer took effect;

These resources were not secured before the proposed transfer took effect because no agreement had been reached on the areas, the scope of work, the service standard or the timing of any transfer. As outlined above, the Council understood the matter to be at an early review stage and was engaging with STAR Housing to clarify responsibility, not to implement an immediate operational change.

Given the short notice and the Council's understanding of the position at that time, the additional sites were not included in the agreed grounds maintenance schedules, staffing arrangements or equipment planning. Street Scene and Kier had already finalised resources to deliver the existing countywide

programme, and there was no clear or agreed operational basis on which to secure additional capacity before the matter had been fully assessed.

- what financial or contractual consequences arise from the Council failing to deliver the service as expected; and

The Council was under no contractual arrangement to deliver the additional areas that STAR Housing had stopped servicing. As set out above, no agreement had been reached on the transfer of responsibility, scope, service standard or implementation date, and therefore the Council did not accept a contractual obligation to provide the additional grass cutting service from the date STAR Housing ceased its arrangements.

The Council's delivery partner, Kier, priced the additional work at approximately £130,000 per annum to establish and resource the required additional capacity. Following discussions at a senior level, this option was not progressed, and no additional cost was incurred by the Council in respect of that proposed additional service.

- what remedial action is now being taken, and by when residents can reasonably expect the service to be restored to an acceptable standard?

STAR Housing has continued to utilise its existing staff and equipment to service the areas it had identified, at an estimated cost of approximately £13,000 per month. This cost is not being met by the Council's Street Scene or Highways services.

The Council considers that this reinforces the need to review whether the current arrangement represents value for money, particularly for housing residents, and whether the level of service being provided is proportionate when compared with the frequency and standard applied across the wider county. Any longer term position should be supported by clear evidence on cost, service standard, responsibility and affordability before further decisions are made.

In particular, how does the Council justify allowing residents in Albrighton and other areas of the County to be left with overgrown, unsightly and potentially hazardous verges as a consequence of a failure to adequately plan and resource the transfer of this responsibility?

The Council recognises the impact that overgrown or poorly maintained verges can have on residents, communities and the appearance of local areas. However, as set out above, the process and short notice did not provide the Council or Kier with sufficient time, agreed information or operational clarity to intervene and absorb the additional work into existing schedules without proper planning, resources and equipment being in place.

There is a clear lesson learned that decisions made in response to budget pressures need to be carefully thought through and discussed with all affected parties before operational changes are implemented. Key dependencies, including responsibility,

cost, workforce, equipment, service standards, resident impact and delivery capacity, should be clearly mapped, understood and mitigated before significant and potentially costly decisions are made that may affect residents.