

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

AGENDA ITEM 5

QUESTION 1

MRS JOYCE BRAND will ask the following question:

Would the Leader of the Council explain why the Scrutiny Committee failed to consider the question of the closure of the Monkmoor Walk-in Centre in Shrewsbury and therefore, by default, facilitated the CCG's decision to hand to a private company access to Accident and Emergency at the Royal Shrewsbury. Has Shropshire Council issued any statement that questions the decision to close one A&E department in Shropshire bearing in mind the most recently published research on the dangers involved or has the Council reached the decision that, given Telford and Wrekin's support for their A&E at the Princess Royal they are satisfied to see the loss of the A&E in Shrewsbury.

MR K BARROW, Leader, will reply as follows:

Shropshire's Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee did consider the proposal by Shropshire CCG to re-locate the Walk In Centre from Monkmoor to the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital (RSH).

It is incorrect to say that Walk In Centre is closing as the services that it currently provides for the people of Shropshire will still be available at the RSH site. The current provider of health services for the Walk In Centre will remain unchanged when it opens at the RSH. The Walk In Centre will provide the same services that it does now and the Accident and Emergency (A/E) Department will carry out its current specialist role. Where patients do not need specialist A/E services and can be safely and appropriately treated they will be triage from the A/E department to the Walk In Centre. Such an approach is in line with national best practice guidance.

Shropshire Council has contributed to the clinically led review of acute health services known as Future Fit. The Council continues to contribute to the various Future Fit working groups and consultation events. As the Future Fit Review is on-going, and no proposal has been made to close the A/E Department in Shrewsbury, Shropshire Council has not commented on this speculation.

Shropshire Council will comment on the short listed proposals that are made by the Clinical Commissioning Groups when they are published. At that time we will be assessing the case made for each of the proposals and then advocating for the option that we believe best meets the needs of all our population and the widely dispersed communities that we serve.

QUESTION 2

MR PATRICK COSGROVE will ask the following question:

Can Mr Barrow confirm that all is well in discussions with the Marches LEP about securing some or all of the matched funding for the £11.38m grant from BDUK to continue broadband roll-out, and that none of the grant will be handed back to central government? Additionally, when/if the matched funding is found, will Shropshire Council deploy that £23m in such a way that residents and businesses with the slowest broadband connection speeds will take priority over those whose present speeds are quite acceptable for the foreseeable future?

MR K BARROW, Leader, will reply as follows:

On 10 December 2014, Cabinet endorsed the commencement of a procurement exercise to extend the coverage of fibre broadband in the Shropshire Council area. This is regardless of the Council's ability to secure the necessary full match funding prior to procurement. The agreement is based on Shropshire Council's commitment to continue to seek and secure match funding.

Match funding may become available from the EU and Marches LEP funding sources in future, although the details of any allocations are currently unclear and will remain uncertain until perhaps early 2015. We have however submitted a formal bid for £7.5m from Local Growth Deal 2 and remain optimistic following co-ordinated lobbying through our local MP's.

If and when the Council enters into a Phase 2 contract, it is our intention that the per premise cost of providing fibre based broadband (value for money) remains the over-riding factor determining which premises are provided with access to better broadband. This means that the number of premises provided with access to fibre based broadband for the money available will be maximised. This will remain a key driver and requirement to meet the Government's commitment to provide 95% of the UK with Superfast broadband by 2017.

QUESTION 3

MS VANESSA VOYSEY will ask the following question:

Brandon Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Communities and Local Government, wrote to the Leaders of all Local Authorities on 21st February 2014 making it clear that "the Government's intention was that part of the funding provided to local authorities in respect of the localised council tax support should be passed down to parish and town councils."

Despite this, Shropshire Council's Cabinet decided at its meeting on 10th December to cease doing so, meaning that local Town and Parish Councils

will be faced with the prospect of either having to put their Council Tax up by around 9% or make major cuts in their budgets over the course of the next 6 weeks. I would like to know:

- i. What consultation has there been about this decision?
- ii. Why does Shropshire Council feel that it is entitled to retain money which central government intended to be passed on to Town and Parish Councils?
- iii. Can this decision be called in for scrutiny, and if so will the Council re-examine the issue?

MR MIKE OWEN Portfolio Holder for Resources, Finance and Support will reply as follows;

- i. *What consultation has there been about this decision?*

The following recommendation was agreed by Cabinet on 10 December 2014: "Agreed to remove any allocation of council tax support grant to Town and Parish Councils for 2015/16 and future year's council tax reduction scheme". Council on 18 December will consider the "Setting the Council Tax Taxbase for 2015/16" report, which was also agreed by Cabinet on 10 December. Following approval of this report, all Town and Parish Councils will be formally notified of the implications on their taxbase and therefore are able to consider their precept requirements. Council will not formally approve the removal of Council Tax Support Grant until it meets on 26 February 2015 to set the Council's Budget for 2015/16. Following Cabinet approval of the refreshed Business Plan and Financial Strategy on 10 December, the consultation period on the proposed budget is now able to commence.

- ii. *Why does Shropshire Council feel that it is entitled to retain money which central government intended to be passed on to Town and Parish Councils?*

Central government has not ring-fenced, nor separately identified, any element of the Council's Revenue Support Grant for the purposes of paying a grant to Town and Parish Councils for Council Tax Support.

- iii. *Can this decision be called in for scrutiny, and if so will the Council re-examine the issue?*

The Council's budget is subject to Scrutiny and this issue can certainly be considered as part of this process.
