

Place Overview Committee

17 September 2021

Member Questions and Responses

From: Councillor Rob Wilson

What representations have been made by Cabinet Members or Shropshire Council officers to the Department for Transport, the Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury and Atcham or Government Ministers, in support of Shrewsbury's bid for mini-Holland funding since the submission of the Expression of Interest on 9th August?

Response:

The EOI was submitted by Mark Barrow, Executive Director Place, with letters of support from Cllr Lezley Picton, Cllr Cecilia Motley, Shrewsbury Town Council and local Shrewsbury Town Councillors, on behalf of Shrewsbury Town Council/Shrewsbury BID.

If the EOI is successful a full bid/business case will be developed.

It is not normal practice for either officer or members to lobby for an EOI.

From: Councillor Julia Buckley

1. At last week's Performance Management Committee, members received a report on quarterly KPI progress. Despite 3 PLACE related KPIs showing an increase in carbon output (i. drop in recycling rates; ii. Increase in urban roads needing repair; iii. Increase in rural roads needing repair) it was stated that this report had "no environmental implications". They also do not yet appear in the Shropshire Climate Change Report. It is worrying that these environmental implications for increased carbon by PLACE related work appear not to be assessed by officers or reported to members.

One implication is that our authority is nominated for a National Highways Award on environmental sustainability due to the carbon reduction in one road repair material used in 2021; but there is no consideration of a concurrent decision to double the travel distances of heavy vehicles responding to road repairs and winter gritting in the rural East of the county. **Could this jeopardise our entry into the awards?**

Response:

No – the council and its partners have been shortlisted for its innovative £1million programme of carbon neutral maintenance which is the first of its kind in the country. The award considers purely that scheme and no other elements of service activity.

2. In the April 2021 annual progress report on the Kier contract to PLACE committee there was no mention of Kier's proposal to close two rural highway depots. In section 6 on "Asset Condition" none of the depots receive a mention; and section 4.1 states "there are no financial implications". Yet the Highways Strategic Operational Board had already decided in December 2020 to close 2 rural highways depots without any reporting to members for their approval. It seems highly irregular that this vital information was omitted from the annual report to scrutiny members on the PLACE committee. Without scrutiny of contractors delivering highways activity it prevents member oversight and accountability.

Does this breach the legal terms of the Kier contract and governance process with Shropshire Council?

Response:

No - As has been explained to all Bridgnorth members the decision to temporarily relocate services was a necessity to ensure continuing service provision over the winter, not to do so would have put at risk the councils ability to deliver full services in those areas, particularly gritting over winter. There are no contractual implications to this decision. I would remind that this is not a permanent decision and the service will develop a paper to provide a business case for a formal decision on whether to invest in Bridgnorth and/or Hodnet depots to allow services to be delivered from those depots in the future or to close the depots permanently depending on what provides the greatest value to the council and the communities they serve to ensure that there is full visibility of the decision on the future of those depots.