

CABINET – 8 MARCH 2023 MEMBER QUESTIONS

Cllr Peggy Mullock

As we move towards the end of winter, many residents continue to be concerned about their energy bills and cost of living. Indeed, some households are yet to receive the £400 support from Central Government.

When can residents expect to receive this payment, and what wider support is available around energy bills and the Cost of living in Shropshire, particularly as we move into Spring?

Response:

We know that many residents are concerned about the cost of living, particularly around high energy costs.

1) Support from Central Government

There have been a number of schemes announced by HM Government which support residents with rising living costs. These include:

a) The Energy Price guarantee which capped the average household energy costs at £2500 from 1st October 2022-31st March 2023. From April 2023 the guarantee is due to rise by 20%, with an average household bill rising to £3000 per year. This increase will concern many residents; however, wholesale energy prices are predicted to fall in 2022, leading to lower domestic energy bills.

b) £400 support for households via the Energy Bills Support Scheme. The majority of households with a domestic energy supply have received monthly payments of £67 from October 2022-March 2023. The **Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding** opened for applications on the 27th February. This is a one-off £400 payment to households who did not receive the main Energy Bills Support Scheme from HM Government. Most households without a direct relationship to an electricity supplier will be able to apply for the payment. All applications for the funding are via a central Gov.UK portal. Applications are open from 27th February to 31st May 2023. An 'Assisted Digital' call centre will provide phone support to help households who require assistance filling in the online application.

c) Alternative Fuel Payment. This is a one-off £200 payment to households that use fuels other than mains gas to heat their homes. The majority of households will receive this credit on their electricity bill from February 2023. The **Alternative Fuel Payment Alternative Funding** is a scheme designed to support households that cannot be paid automatically by their electricity supplier. Applications for this scheme will open in March 2023 via a GOV.UK portal.

A note on the risk of scams: Residents will not be contacted directly by HM Government about applying for these schemes. The only way to apply is via the GOV.UK portal. Therefore, we ask that residents are alert to the potential for scams around these schemes.

d) Cost of Living payments. Further support has been announced for key groups with the increases in cost of living, including £900 for people claiming means tested benefits, £150 for people claiming disability benefits and £300 for pensioners. All of these payments will be paid automatically to eligible recipients.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-8-million-families-in-the-uk-to-receive-new-cost-of-living-payment-this-spring>

e) Support to improve energy efficiency. There is also support for people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and reduce costs through central government schemes, for more information locally contact Keep Shropshire Warm.

2) Local work to support residents with the Cost of Living

a) The Social Taskforce. Locally, we have been working with partners via Social Taskforce and various subgroups to support Shropshire residents. The Taskforce will continue to dedicate time through its subgroups to provide the most appropriate and current support for Shropshire residents including:

a. Proactive support for households. Since October 2022 over 25,000 residents have been contacted:

- i. Customer service advisers have made almost 10,000 outbound phone calls to check how residents are managing the cost of living and to make them aware of support that is available, from discounts and benefits to resources and support in the community.
- ii. Shropshire Council's proactive initiatives have also included over 15,000 contacts through email, welfare support and Shropshire Local face-to-face groups.

b. Allocation of the Household Support Fund. In 2022-23 Shropshire Council worked with partners to allocate the Household Support fund to households impacted by the Cost-of Living crisis. The fund provided vouchers to children entitled to free school meals in the school holidays, provided support with energy costs, and other essential living costs via the Welfare Support team and targeted payments were made to households identified as being vulnerable to the increased cost of living. Central government have announced a further round of funding of the Household Support Fund to run from April 23-March 24.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/842-million-available-to-help-families-in-need>

c. Cost of Living communications including digital and non-digital support resources to meet all our resident's accessibility needs.

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/category/cost-of-living/>

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/resources-for-partners/>

d. The Cost of Living website, which is a great resource to find up to date information, help and support across the whole of Shropshire in one place.

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/>

e. Cost of Living briefing sessions in October 2022 and February 2023 to support frontline staff and volunteers in their essential roles in the Cost of Living crisis. Over 600 participants have attended these sessions, with 93% reporting that they feel more confident to support people with cost of living issues. The training sessions are available on the Shropshire Council YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv5qrfjQ4Zk>

f. Warm Welcome. Shropshire Council has worked with organisations across Shropshire to open warm spaces to residents over the winter.

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/a-warm-welcome-in-shropshire/>

b) Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF). Funded by DfE (Department for Education) HAF provides children and young people aged 4-16, who are eligible for benefits related free school meals, free access to holiday clubs during the three main school holidays (Easter, Summer & Christmas). Participants have the opportunity to take part in enriching and physical activity, are provided with a nutritious meal and given information to support them and their wider family, such as nutritional education. In 2022

Shropshire Council worked with organisations across the county to run holiday programmes to:

- Easter holidays – 1,233 FSM eligible Children and Young People
- Summer holidays – 2,285 FSM eligible Children and Young People
- Winter holidays – 933 FSM eligible Children and Young People

The HAF programme will continue to fund holiday clubs across the county in school holidays. <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/schools-and-education/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-haf/>

Cllr Bernie Bentick

Background:

1. A Report in the Journal of The Royal Society of Chemistry revealed that insufficient capacity was the Water Companies' reason for 80% of all CSO spills, with exceptional weather accounting for 1.3% and blockages for less than 1%.
2. In 2021, there were 1559 recorded spills for 23,293 hours (970 days) into the River Severn locally, either directly or via its tributaries.
3. The Shropshire Water Cycle Study 2020, commissioned by Shropshire Council stated:
 - The Shropshire Water Cycle Study scored Shrewsbury RED on a RAG score for overall sewerage network, with 2510 anticipated new houses and 7304 new employees at that time (Page 161)
 - Significant wastewater infrastructure upgrades would be required for all of the Strategic Sites and for a number of settlements in Shropshire, including Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth, Shifnal, Ludlow and Albrighton.
 - Early engagement with Severn Trent Water and Welsh Water is required, and further modelling of the network may be required at the planning application stage (Pages 162 and 163).
4. Shropshire Council aims to deliver 30,800 new dwellings between 2016, when deterioration in our local watercourses became noticeable, and 2038, with no demonstrable improvement in local sewerage system to date.

Question:

Would Shropshire Council's Cabinet please supply the result of its engagement with Severn Trent Water Company and details of the recommended significant wastewater upgrades, including any reports, recommendations, actions and timescales, following the Shropshire Water Cycle Study 2020?

Response:

As part of the preparation of the draft Local Plan, the Council has engaged positively with Severn Trent Water in order to define potential capacity constraints with existing Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW), an importantly where future capacity upgrades are required to support new proposed development to 2038. The results of this collaborative process are captured in the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) between Shropshire Council and Severn Trent Water, and which has been submitted as evidence to the current Examination into the Local Plan Review. You can access this here...[duty-to-cooperate-statement-of-common-ground-severn-trent-water-ev026.pdf \(shropshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/1000000/2023/04/duty-to-cooperate-statement-of-common-ground-severn-trent-water-ev026.pdf).

The outcome of this work shows that upgrades will be required to the wastewater collection network in order to serve the proposed growth in a number of settlements. Sewerage Undertakers have a duty under Section 94 of the Water Industry Act 1991 to provide sewerage and treat wastewater arising from new domestic development. Except where strategic upgrades are required to serve very large or multiple developments, infrastructure upgrades are usually only implemented following an application for a connection, adoption, or requisition from a developer. Early developer engagement with water companies at the planning application stage is therefore essential to ensure that sewerage capacity can be provided without delaying development.

The WCS concludes that whilst the proposed growth in Shropshire can be accommodated at a number of WwTW, some treatment works could require upgrades to ensure growth can occur without causing the flow permits to be exceeded. Under this circumstance Severn Trent Water have agreed that they are obligated to comply with permits to discharge, and if these permits are breached as a consequence of growth within the sewerage catchment then it is their responsibility to remedy the situation using their own resources.

Table 4.1 included within the SoCG shows all the proposed recommendations and agreed actions resulting from this work