

## Resign Call for Shropshire's Highways Cabinet Member

Shropshire Councillors are calling for the resignation of the Cllr Steve Davenport who is the Cabinet Member responsible for a failing Highways Department unable to deal with the County's growing pothole problem.

Councillors from the Opposition Liberal Democrat Group on Shropshire Council will submit a question to the next Cabinet meeting on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February demanding that Councillor Steve Davenport resign.

"We've had enough," said Liberal Democrat Group Leader, Cllr Roger Evans. "Councillors in my Group have raised issues at many meetings but the assurances they are given rarely result in any improvements. Someone has to take responsibility for this failure."

"During the whole of 2019 Liberal Democrat Councillors were raising issues about the growing number of potholes and the general failure of Shropshire Highways and its contractors Kier and WSP to deal with the problem. Despite these assurances, many from Cllr Davenport himself, the Council felt the need to appoint a consultant to tell them what was going wrong. Clearly whatever action Cllr Davenport had taken over the past year was not working. He should resign."

When asked at last year's July Council Meeting for an update by Cllr Chris Mellings, Cllr Davenport said that "the performance of both Kier and WSP is actively managed by officers and that I take a personal interest in that process." He said that there had been challenges but Cllr Davenport concluded that "meaningful progress is being made and our focus is on providing as good a service as is possible across the whole of Shropshire."

In September 2019, Cllr David Vasmer put a motion to a full Council meeting demanding that Shropshire review its £21m contract with Kier – it does most of Shropshire Highways work on the ground.

In October a whistle-blower contacted Cllr David Vasmer accusing Shropshire of not authorising payments to Kier properly. At a meeting of Place Overview in November, Cllr Vasmer and Cllr Roger Evans asked a series of questions but received assurances that there was nothing to worry about.

At the December Council Meeting Cllr Davenport finally acknowledged that there had been problems with the Kier contract which he said were being tackled. He said "we do have concerns over the quality of some work undertaken by Kier and we are working with them to address this"

"Cllr Davenport at this stage was still unaware of the level of dissatisfaction with the Highways Department," commented Councillor Vasmer. "It was only the Chief Executive's intervention in the New Year that resulted in any real action being taken, despite repeated assurances

"In a recent email to all Councillors, this is what Cllr Davenport admitted 'We/I had to make drastic changes to improve....this service, I totally support Clive's ( the Chief Executive's)

intervention here as he (is) leading from the front, I have no power as a cabinet member to make changes that had to be made.' By his own admission his interventions have failed, he is powerless and should resign."

## Appendix

### July Council Meeting

Question from Councillor Chris Mellings:

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways please give Council an update on the performance to date of the highways contract with Kier? What issues have been

identified & what action is being taken to improve performance?

When will scrutiny have the opportunity to consider the contract's performance?"

Response from the Portfolio Holder for: Highways and Car Parks

STEVE DAVENPORT, PORTFOLIO HOLDER

I can reassure Cllr Mellings that the performance of both Kier and WSP is actively

managed by officers and that I take a close personal interest in that process. I'm

going to ask Cllr Mellings to be slightly patient for a full answer as the performance of

both contracts is due to be examined in detail by Scrutiny Committee in Autumn this

year. I can reassure Cllr Mellings that all the relevant information will be forthcoming

as part of that process. Scrutiny Committee will be given reports for each contract

relating to the full 2018/19 financial year and representatives of both organisations

along with relevant Council officers will be present.

In terms of our own services performance the Highways and Transport restructure is

nearing completion of the recruitment of permanent staff into the positions we

determined essential to deliver the level of service we all want and expect.

Additional further support staff have been temporarily appointed to provide capacity

to further support the service (in particular where there have been periods of long term

sickness). This has provided much needed capacity especially in areas of performance, data and contract management and inspections.

Officers are working with Kier with a specific focus on how we can jointly improve

services and divert resources within the existing contract to where they are needed.

Some of this work has already been undertaken, examples are:

- We have diverted existing resources to increase the budget for Street Scene

services this financial year

- We are negotiating a revised staffing structure with Kier aimed at providing

additional supervisory staff,

- We are trialling new working practices (recently completed in Whitchurch with local Members' being supportive) which we will now be rolling out across the County.

We are working with Kier both at a local and national level, and with other Councils whom work with Kier with the joint aim of maximising the impact of both our services and outcomes as far as possible within our available resources. I accept that we have had our challenges, but I would like to reassure all members that meaningful progress is being made and our focus is on providing as good a service as is possible across the whole of Shropshire.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Mellings asked if the contract with Keir would be terminated in the event that performance did not improve.

The Portfolio Holder responded that that the company's performance would be considered by the Place Overview Scrutiny Committee on 5th September 2019. Contract termination would not be considered until the company had been given a period of time to improve its performance.