



Committee and Date

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Councillor S Davenport, Chairman, Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

**ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2010-11**

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report presents an overview of the work of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee from October 2010 to the present.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee was one of five Scrutiny Committees established in October 2010, following the Overview and Scrutiny Fitness Check undertaken by Shropshire Council and the Improvement and Development Agency. Its remit includes:

- Review of the arrangements for ensuring a sustainable local economy
- Review of the arrangements to support resilient, competitive and flourishing local businesses, especially in tourism, food and drink and other areas of growth potential
- Review of arrangements for commissioning and delivery of training provision for a higher skilled workforce and access to better employment
- Review of arrangements which seek to ensure that Shropshire is widely recognised as a great place to live, work and visit

At its 18 May meeting, the Scrutiny Chairs' Group agreed that the following should be transferred to the remit of the Protecting and Enhancing the Environment Committee.

- Monitoring of the delivery of housing options which meet local needs, particularly in relation to the availability of affordable housing

3. What has been done?

This year the Committee has looked at a range of issues to see how they affect Shropshire residents

- Local Transport Plan (LTP) – the Committee reviewed and expressed its support for the objectives and priorities proposed for the new Plan. It also recommended that other Scrutiny Committees be given an opportunity to input into the LTP, and that there be more local focus on consultation at the Implementation Plan Stage, by means of the Local Joint Committees.
- Bus Strategy - the Committee established a Task and Finish Group on the Bus Strategy for Shropshire 2011 - 2016 with the ambition of ensuring the Strategy achieved the maximum possible quality service within the available budget.

Work concluded in May 2011 with a series of recommendations which included: comments on specific implications for services within the strategy; re-visiting proposals for withdrawal of subsidies for Sunday and evening services by looking for alternative ways to make the required savings; and development of a long term holistic strategy for all passenger transport, not driven by financial pressures.

The Task and Finish Group's report was considered by Cabinet on 11 May 2011. Referring to the proposed removal of the subsidy from all subsidised Sunday and evening services Cabinet felt that the very low usage meant the subsidy per passenger was extremely high and should be withdrawn immediately.

The Group also commented to Cabinet that all significant changes resulting from the budget strategy process should be subject to robust consultation and publicity and that all areas of the Council should consider how information could be provided in an appropriate way for adults with learning difficulties.

- Employment and Skills – the Committee considered setting up a Task and Finish Group on Employment and Skills opportunities in Shropshire. In the light of the establishment of an officer Employment and Skills Group it was felt that a Task and Finish Group was not necessary. Members did however discuss the purpose of the new Group and ask that its remit be expanded to include research and identification of the barriers to engagement in skills training for those who were not engaged, and identification of ways to increase engagement. The Committee has asked to be appraised of the progress of the Group at regular intervals and will be consulted on the draft Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan.
- Broadband in Shropshire - the Committee acknowledged that many businesses, communities and individuals in Shropshire were becoming increasingly frustrated that they could not receive a broadband service, or only a limited speed. The Committee requested detail of actions being taken

to improve access to Broadband in Shropshire and received a briefing from Ian Binks, Regional Manager of BT. It considered how broadband coverage and improved speeds could be expanded across the county. The Committee's recommendations stressed the need for a clear strategy and action plan to be drawn up as soon as possible, and recognised that there would be no single solution to improving access to broadband services.

- Shrewsbury Growth Point –The Committee has asked for two progress reports recognising that the Growth Point project involves one off grant funding and the importance of ensuring its use in the most effective manner possible. The Committee looked at the current spend of the Growth Point budget for the four key project areas together with outputs to date and future funding priorities and budget commitments to March 2012 and beyond. The Committee endorsed the future funding priorities and thanked officers for all the successes achieved to date, particularly those already experienced in the north of Shrewsbury.
- Economic Development - Policies, Priorities and Implementation. The work of the Council's Economic Development Team to help boost the local economy came under consideration and the Committee considered the Council's key economic priorities, how the economic development team was addressing them, and the key outcomes being achieved as a result of the team's work. The Committee also looked at the structure and remit of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. The Committee reviewed the extent to which the Economic Development Team was supporting and boosting growth and employment opportunities in the county and looked to see if there was anything more that the Council should be doing. Members commented that the team was undertaking excellent work within limited resources. Further information was requested on the budget and the monitoring and outcomes of projects undertaken by the team.
- Joint Housing Strategy for Herefordshire and Shropshire Consultation
The Committee asked for details of consultation arrangements for the draft Joint Housing Strategy and these were outlined. It was confirmed that Parish Councils and Local Joint Committees would receive a note on the Joint Housing Strategy and be directed to the full consultation document and means to feed back comments. The Committee discussed the draft priorities identified in the Strategy. Members particularly focused on the extent to which demand for affordable housing and housing services outstripped supply and on the required percentage of affordable housing development. The Committee returned to the Housing Strategy in the Autumn to look at initial feedback obtained through the consultation and will receive a full report on outcomes of the consultation at an extra meeting to be held on 25 November 2011.
- Destination Shrewsbury
The Committee asked to comment on and contribute to the development of the Destination Shrewsbury Strategy and Action Plan. The Strategy is for all stakeholders involved in the Visitor Economy within Shrewsbury and seeks to focus both public and private investment into the most cost effective actions

that will create sustainable economic growth. The Committee felt that the issues raised relating to tourism and its potential in Shropshire were significant and that leadership by the Council in this area would be vital. It was agreed that a Task and Finish Group be set up on the Tourism industry throughout the county.

- **Market Towns Revitalisation Programme**

The Committee asked to comment on progress, issues and achievements to date and consider whether there were any further ways to both simplify its operation and maximise its impact. Members looked at examples of projects both approved already and under consideration by the Market Towns Revitalisation Informal Programme Board and were encouraged by the positive impact they would have.

The Committee felt that progress was good and the right balance between flexibility and monitoring had been achieved.

The Committee asked for a six monthly update on this important work to be able to evaluate economic outcomes.

- **Mobile Coverage**

The Committee was concerned that mobile telephone reception and broadband availability represented some of the principal barriers to business growth in Shropshire. Because 87% of businesses employ fewer than 5 employees, self employment in Shropshire is 10% above the national average and the county has one of the highest levels of home based businesses in the UK; it is in fact mobile technology coverage that is the more critical of the two for many small businesses. Members recognised that reception was difficult or non-existent in many rural locations within the county, creating serious challenges for people working on the move. In addition the absence of a universal mobile telecommunications provider creates problems for businesses operating county wide.

The Committee looked at Mobile Phone Coverage in Shropshire to identify if it was possible to take any action to influence improvement. The Council's mobile provider, Orange, made a presentation at the meeting. (This took place in exempt session as it included commercially sensitive information). The Committee was encouraged to hear that considerable improvements in 2G and 3G coverage were expected. The Chairman of the Committee wrote to the Portfolio Holder for ICT to advise him of the Committee's findings

4. Current Work

Tourism

More than 10 million tourists visit Shropshire (including Telford and Wrekin) each year, with the industry worth around £560 million annually. Tourism is of greater importance to the Shropshire economy than it is to the regional or national economies and employment in tourism is higher than for all of the county's statistical neighbours except Devon and Dorset. The Committee

feels that leadership by the Council is vital and has set up a Task and Finish Group looking at issues around Tourism in Shropshire, and particularly progress made by each of the Destination Partnerships.

Single Plot Exception Sites Policy

Following concerns raised at a meeting of the Committee, Scrutiny Chairs decided to set up a Task and Finish Group on Single Plot Exception Sites which will involve a review of the effectiveness and suitability of this policy. Three members of the Group are representatives from each of the Planning Committees with a particular interest and expertise in Planning matters.

5. Future plans

Details of some of the areas the Committee will be focusing on in the forthcoming year are outlined below.

5.1 Employment Land, Serviced Sites and Industrial and Office Premises right across Shropshire

The Committee recognises that adequate provision of appropriate employment land and property is vital to encourage businesses to start up, grow and relocate. It wishes to establish if there are areas within Shropshire where the lack of employment sites and business premises is holding back business growth and business re-location. The Committee will be looking into supply and demand of Employment Land, Serviced Sites and Industrial and Office Premises right across Shropshire. This will include a review of the results of a Shropshire wide study on supply and demand of employment land to understand where provision may be lacking. Following this the Committee will look to put forward recommendations for action.

5.2 Overview of the Economy in Shropshire

At its first meeting of 2012, the Committee will be hearing from representatives of the Business Board, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses who will be asked to share their opinion on Shropshire's economy and highlight issues they feel the Committee should be aware of. The Committee will also be considering the sections of the SAMDEV which are of particular relevance to Enterprise and Growth in Shropshire. This meeting will help identify where future scrutiny attention should be focused.

5.3 Shropshire Link Service

Recognising the challenges of providing bus services in a large and sparsely populated county and in the light of the conclusions of the Bus Strategy Task and Finish Group, the Committee, along with the Protecting and Enhancing the Environment Scrutiny Committee, will be reviewing the Shropshire Link Service. This currently provides accessibility for the rural population, giving access to the nearest market town during the daytime, at least twice a week.

The scope of the review will include looking at cohesion with other services, wider usage of the service and potential links with community transport services. Potential operational efficiencies will come under review along with vehicle replacement strategy.