

SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2016

2.00 - 3.40 pm in the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes

Email: julie.fildes@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257723

Present

Councillor Claire Wild (Chairman)

Councillors Steve Davenport (Vice Chairman), Joyce Barrow, Gerald Dakin, Roger Evans,
Vince Hunt, Miles Kenny, David Lloyd and Dave Tremellen

52 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were no apologies or substitutions.

The Committee asked that their best wishes be conveyed to Julie Fildes, Committee Officer, for a speedy return to good health.

53 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members were reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they had a disclosable pecuniary interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

54 Minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

55 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

56 Member Question Time

There were no questions from Members.

57 Terms of Reference Budget Task and Finish Group

The Committee considered the proposed terms of reference for the Budget Task and Finish Group (copy attached to signed minutes).

The role in the Task and Finish Group of the Voluntary and Community Sectors, Town and Parish Councils and other potential partners was discussed.

It was confirmed that when the Task and Finish Group first met it would identify portfolio holders, officers, directors, communities, groups, partners and providers it

needed to hear from. They would be asked to attend meetings and provide evidence, views and statements and answer questions.

In response to a query about the timescales set out in the report, the Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance confirmed that the Task and Finish Group would be able to challenge, ask questions and feed into the budget setting process as it progressed. Reports on the financial strategy and budget would be presented to Council in July and September 2016, with ultimate budget setting taking place at Council in February 2017.

The Committee approved the draft terms of reference for the Budget Task and Finish Group with the proviso that Scrutiny should be able to feed into Cabinet and Council at the relevant stages, and not just through a final report at the conclusion of the work in January 2017.

58 A Partnership Approach in Designing the Future of our Local Services

The Portfolio Holder for Rural Services and Communities introduced the report (copy attached to signed minutes) which highlighted the Shropshire Council projected funding shortfall of £61m by 2018/19 which would result in discretionary services such as leisure, libraries, museums, public open spaces and support for youth activities facing significant cut backs or in the worst case scenario, closure. This was a serious challenge and it was important to recognise a one size fits all approach would not work. It was anticipated that local members in their role as community champions would play an important role in supporting and leading at a local level the proposed activity. She referred to the recommendations in the report and asked the Committee to consider how elected members could best be drawn into these discussions.

In addition, she reported that: identifying statutory duties was proving complex; there was a need to be aware of external funding and contractual obligations; there was an extremely challenging timeline with plans needing to be in place by 30 September 2016; and a need for robust programme management.

The Director of Commissioning and Local Commissioning Manager then gave a presentation (copy attached to the signed minutes) providing detail around:

- The approach to be taken;
- Financial implications;
- Possible alternative funding solutions for local services;
- Progress so far and examples of communities seeking new solutions;
- The prospect of decommissioning services and the decommissioning approach to be taken;
- Roles and responsibilities of officers;
- Information provided to potential partners;
- Engagement approaches;
- Key areas of importance identified so far.

Lead Officers for place and theme had been identified and the role of the Community Enablement Team was key. Discussions had already been started with larger Town and Parish Councils and many organisations had come forward to start conversations with the Council. Resource packs were made available to those expressing an interest.

Examples of new solutions found in Pontesbury and Gobowen were shared. In these cases parish councils and local communities had responded well and had been led by local members. The Chair suggested that details of these examples be made available on parish websites.

The funding of services in central locations such as market towns was discussed, as these were often used but not funded by residents of surrounding parishes. It was confirmed that this would be an area considered by the Budget Task and Finish Group.

A Member said it was absolutely essential that Local Members were involved right from the start when decommissioning was a prospect. Officers emphasised that although Local Members were not referenced in the presentation slides, the importance of Local Members involvement was writ large throughout the whole approach.

Members emphasised the need for Town and Parish Councils and other potential partners to have access to asset details and statutory obligations. They also asked about the prospect of potential judicial reviews. The Director of Commissioning emphasised the need for the process to be robust and the impact of any change or decommissioning decisions clearly identified and understood.

Members asked whether there was sufficient council officer capacity to take the work forward in a quick and efficient manner and whether it was realistic to complete the work by September 2016. They expressed serious concern about the potential loss of the Community Enablement Team and how this work would be delivered without this team. The Portfolio Holder for Rural Services and Communities acknowledged this risk and confirmed that hard work was underway to find ways to generate income so that the team could be retained.

A Member expressed concern around the awareness of Parish and Town Councils of the September 2016 deadline, particularly as many met infrequently. There was also confusion amongst Parish Councils with regard to the Environmental Maintenance Grant. It was confirmed that this would be available at least until next year. The Chair suggested that a clear message in relation to this be circulated which would help provide some reassurance. Members felt that the retention of this grant beyond April 2017 should be considered, as they felt it was an important feature of the partnership between Town and Parish Councils and Shropshire Council.

The County Secretary, Shropshire Association of Local Councils was invited to address the meeting. She reported that the SALC Executive Committee and Parish and Town Clerks had expressed concern around the timescales involved, particularly as annual meetings were currently taking place. There was also a concern that smaller Parish Councils were not yet involved.

She confirmed that the link to the Cabinet paper on the Partnership Approach in Designing the Future of Our Local Services had been circulated via the SALC bulletin. She would be working with the Local Commissioning Manager to identify a programme of work and what Local Councils could expect over the next weeks and months. She confirmed that Parish Councils could be encouraged to hold special meetings where necessary.

She reported on very positive feedback from Town and Parish Councils in relation to the Community Enablement Team and reiterated concern about the potential loss of this team. Lastly she referred to the charge made by Shropshire Council for advertising Parish Clerk vacancies. The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder for Rural Services and Communities to look into this.

The Committee wished to thank the Community Enablement Team and recognise the excellent work it was carrying out supporting Local Members whilst under some considerable pressure.

The Commissioning Support Manager confirmed that the approach set out in the report would come under the consideration of the Budget Task and Finish Group.

It was agreed:

That the Portfolio Holder for Rural Services and Communities be requested to give consideration to the retention of the Community Enablement Officer roles as Members considered that they were essential in supporting their work as a Local Member as they work with their Town and Parish Councils and Community Groups to redesign local services.

That the Portfolio Holder be requested to give consideration be to the retention of the Environmental Maintenance Grant beyond April 2017 as Members considered it to be an important feature of the partnership between Shropshire Council and the Town and Parish Councils.

That a further update on this work be brought back to Performance Management Scrutiny Committee at an appropriate time.

59 Future Work Programme for the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

It was confirmed that matters related to delivery of the Council’s IT Strategy would be considered by the budget task and finish group.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: