



Place Overview
Committee

7 December 2017

10.00 am

Item

3

Public

**MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7
DECEMBER 2017
10.00 - 11.55 AM**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes
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Present

Councillor Gwilym Butler (Chairman)
Councillors Dean Carroll, Julian Dean, Rob Gittins, Simon Harris and Paul Milner

11 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dan Morris and Harry Taylor. Councillor Dean Carroll attended as Substitute for Councillor Morris. Councillor Carroll's apologies for late arrival were noted.

12 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Julian Dean requested that an interest be recorded in Agenda Item 6 as he was employed by Telford College and worked on a casual basis for Pearson's who provided qualifications for the apprenticeship schemes.

13 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14th September 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

14 Public Question Time

There were no questions from members of the public.

15 Member Question Time

There were no questions from members of Council.

16 Apprenticeship Levy

The HR Manager gave a presentation to Members on the Apprenticeship Levy [copy attached to the signed minutes]. Members noted that the Levy had come into force in April 2017, it applied to organisations with a pay bill in excess of £3m per year, and

was set at 0.5% of the pay bill per annum. The levy collected was for apprenticeship training and assessments but could not be used for salaries or transport. Government made a contribution of 10% to the fund.

She continued that Upskill Shropshire Board had been established with the Director for Place and Enterprise appointed as its Chairman. The Board was a vehicle for delivering apprenticeships but it had a wider function than this. Apprenticeships were available across all Directorates of the Council and each Directorate took responsibility for considering and approving applications and selecting the Provider from the fifteen on the framework, across the twenty-four available categories. The scheme also unpinned the Council's Leadership Programmes and upskilling the Council's existing workforce, including the new skills identified by the Digital Transformation Programme.

The Council also had a commercial offer, which was open to other organisations and Local Authorities. There were three levels of offer and organisations could decide to only purchase access to the Council Framework, the Council could provide a full matching service or an advice service. To date, two local authorities had signed up to access the framework, although a number of enquiries had been received, and take-up of the service was expected to increase. A dedicated website had been developed, Officers had promoted the offer at the NHS employment Fair and would do so at the Telford Apprenticeship Show in March. A presentation had also been made to the Shropshire Business Board, and further work was being undertaken to better understand their priorities.

Members noted that the Framework consisted of twenty-four categories with fifteen providers, based both locally and nationally. The larger national providers could offer whole suites of subject areas. Members noted that apprenticeships were no longer just for young people in low skill roles but were now open to all ages and included professional and post degree level training.

Members considered the scheme's performance and noted that the Government had set a target of 2.3% of an organisation's workforce consisting of apprenticeships, which had not yet been achieved. This was not causing concern as it was accepted that the scheme was still in its early days. She continued that the funds collected through the levy could be kept in the Council's accounts for up to two years. In answer to a Member's query, the HR Manager explained that there were no targets for schools as maintained schools were outside the Council's control in terms of the way they managed their workforce, although the team provided advice to encourage the take up of apprenticeships.

Members discussed the need to fully utilise the Levy and increasing the number of apprenticeships offered by the Council. The HR Manager confirmed that an apprenticeship role had to comprise of a minimum of 20% time spent in off the job training although some of this could be completed on-line without the need to attend a college site. In answer to a Member's question, she explained that the length of the apprenticeship was dependent on the level of qualification; with level 2 or 3 taking 1 year to complete, but level 7, which was equivalent to a Master's Degree, taking up to 4 years. She confirmed that the employer was not bound to offer a permanent position at the end of the apprenticeship. In response to a Member's enquiry she explained that equality and diversity issues received consideration and flexible access to training promoted. Members asked that Officers consider how the

scheme could benefit the children for whom it had corporate parent responsibilities and young carers. The Director of Place and Enterprise agreed to raise this with the Board.

Corrine Brown and Karen Haywood from Shrewsbury Colleges Group were invited to update Members on the Government's proposed new qualification of Technical Levels (T'levels). Members heard that the current system of technical qualifications offered by different organisations caused confusion. The Government was proposing a systematic reform post 16 education, restructuring it from Level 3 onwards. The reform included reform of funding structures and appointing a single awarding body for each route. Employers had complained that the current system did not adequately equip students for the working life, and they lacked basic work place skills. It was proposed that to close the skill gap, T'levels would have a minimum forty day work placement directly relevant to the study programme. It was hoped that the extended work placement would lead to employers taking on the students placed with them at the end of the qualification. Pilot schemes had shown that 20% of students received a job offer at the end of the placement compared to 10-12% with previous schemes.

Members noted that the increased time spent in work placement brought challenges in the form of transport, work wear and other support required. Providers were working closely with students to ensure that these issues did not have a negative impact on them. Employers could choose to reimburse students expenses and make a subsistence allowance but this was not mandatory. Ms Brown confirmed that employers in the pilot scheme had been positive about working with providers and they had received support from the Federation of Small Employers. Employers were represented on each T'level development panel.

Public consultation work had demonstrated a lack of understanding about the proposed changes and Members noted that work needed to be undertaken with the current Year 8 students to introduce the new system. Ms Brown added that it was understood that people would expect to change careers three to five times during their working lives and the Government was developing a new Career Strategy which was expected to be launched in early 2018. Ms Brown confirmed that there was an intention to have a parity of esteem between A'levels and T'levels, with either qualification acceptable to universities, although universities had not yet commented on this.

Members discussed the availability of provision and ensuring that there was similar provision offered across the county.

Agreed: that the report be noted and an update should be added to the Committee's work programme.

17 Shrewsbury Town Centre Development

The Director of Place and Enterprise updated Members on the Shrewsbury Centre Shopping Centres development, which was considered by Cabinet on 6th December 2017. He advised that following the discussions by Cabinet, a final revised report would be considered by Council at its meeting on the 14th December 2017. Council would make the final decision whether or not to progress the development. Members noted that the Red Book Valuation was expected to be finalised by Friday 8th

December 2017 and this would be included in the revised report to be considered by Council on the 14th December 2017. He continued that should Council be minded to agree the proposal, Officers would then have five working days to finalise the agreement and then four working weeks to complete the contractual information and exchange contracts.

Members noted that a business plan was being developed on an annual basis for the future development of the shopping centres and the scope of the partnership with Montagu Evans. Internal Governance was anticipated to be completed by the end of December. The Director of Place and Enterprise observed that this would contribute to the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan as the retail experience was an important part of the overall visitor experience.

Members discussed the importance of the acquisition to the future of Shrewsbury over the next 20 to 25 years, and the wider impact of the project. Members considered the possibility of setting up a Task and Finish Group to consider the Council's role in place shaping and legacy.

18 **Business Rate Update**

The Head of Economic Growth updated Members on the work being undertaken in conjunction with Shropshire Business Board on the Business Rates Model. She advised that the criteria was being developed with the Council's Finance department. The aim of the model was to explore how discretionary rate relief could be applied on a criteria basis to attract investment to Shropshire and ultimately to drive more business growth and business rates.

She continued that the pros and cons of different approaches to Business Rate Relief had been considered and it was a complicated area with conflicting views. Discretionary Relief was being reviewed but it had been established that it had to be a short term measure and a blanket approach should be avoided. Any changes in policy would require testing with companies to ensure that the policy was fair and robust in its approach.

In response to a Member's question on how Business Rates Relief was assessed, the Head of Economic Growth responded that the Relief was based on National Policy and demand. She continued that it was important the policies centred on encouraging business growth, jobs and supply chain linkages. She added that growth sectors had been identified and the existing criteria's applied to broad sectors and required revision.

In response to a Members query, the Head of Economic Growth explained that on 28th November 2017 there were one hundred and sixty-six businesses qualifying for the one off Business Rate Relief, brought in by Government to help deal with the immediate impacts of the business rate revaluation process. This equates to a 83.4% take up from eligible businesses in Shropshire.

The Head of Economic Growth confirmed that the Council had sufficient resources to manage enquiries. Discussions had also been undertaken with the County's Members of Parliament and representatives from the Shrewsbury BID companies. The issue of listed buildings having greater running costs and so disadvantaged the

business situated in them had been raised. Business Rate Relief granted to empty buildings had also been considered.

19 **Brexit Task and Finish Group Update**

The Head of Economic Growth updated Members on the work undertaken by the Brexit Task and Finish Group. Members noted that the Group had been gathering information and had undertaken a SWOT analysis and received information from the Marches LEP and Government data.

At its second meeting it had identified the issues that the group wished to focus on. These included the Government's Industrial Strategy White Paper. It had recognised the importance of working with what was already known, concentrating on economic impacts and opportunities specific to Shropshire. She continued that the Task and Finish Group had considered the current European Structural Investments Funds Programme made up of the European Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Rural Development Fund.

She observed that the key purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to ensure that the Council was in a position to respond to any future Government consultations. Members noted that it was anticipated that there would be three meetings held over the first three months of the new year, where a number of external guests would be invited to talk to the Task and Finish Group. She anticipated that further evidence would be collected through a Business Survey to take place in the spring, although larger companies were reporting directly to the Department of International Trade. A small survey already undertaken had had a low response rate but anecdotal reports showed that business concerns outweighed positive views. With larger organisations expressing concern over Head Quarter location and the need to move staff to Europe.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Economic Growth confirmed that the Marches LEP were also considering Brexit.

20 **Work Programme Update**

Agreed: that the Committee would consider the following items at its future meetings:

- Place Shaping,
- 20 mph speed limit in built up areas;
- North West relief road;
- Business/Council relationship;
- Marketing Shropshire;
- Infrastructure Demands; and
- Review of household waste recycling centres

21 **Date/Time of next meeting of the Committee**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be at 10am on 1st February 2018.

<TRAILER_SECTION>

Signed (Chairman)

Date: