



Council  
15 December 2016  
10.00am

Item  
**10**  
Public

**Councillor Steve Davenport**  
**Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee Chairman**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

### **ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

#### **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This is an overview of the work of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee during 2015-16 as well as providing an update on the work during the first few months of 2016/17.

#### **2.0 Scrutiny activity in 2015/16**

The Committee has met formally on seven occasions over the last year (2015/16) and received the following reports and presentations: -

Update on the work of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership

Update on Tourism activity across the county and Shropshire Council's changing role in this sector

Regular updates on the redesign of the Economic Growth Department

An update on the apprenticeship activity across the county and Shropshire Council's role in this

An update from Connecting Shropshire on the Mobile Network Operators commercial deployment plans to improve Mobile Telecommunications across the county in line with Government licencing obligations. Connecting Shropshire continues to act as the key stakeholder for the Authority and its partners in working with the telecommunications industry, Government, local MP's and Ofcom to address poor mobile (voice and data) signals across the county. Headlines include:

- Voice and text coverage from each operator will increase to 90 per cent of the UK geographic area by 2017;
- Full coverage from all four mobile operators is expected to increase from 69 per cent to 85 per cent of all geographic areas by 2017;
- O2 to provide 4G indoor coverage to 98% of the national population by December 2017;
- Ofcom are due to report on the latest collected data before the end of 2016.
- Connecting Shropshire periodically host Mobile Network Operators who present updates on upgrade progress to MP's.

Update on the work of the Shropshire Business Board and specifically asking a range of questions to the Chair

Scrutiny of the Financial Strategy for the period 2015/16 - 2020/21 and specifically those areas that fall under the remit of the scrutiny committee

Update on progress against the Economic Growth Strategy 2012-2016 and how the new team will align itself to this

## **2.1 Empty Homes Task & Finish Group**

At its meeting on 2 July 2015 the Committee received the report of the Empty Homes Task and Finish group which made a number of recommendations around enabling future Empty Homes targets to be more ambitious; a greater number of empty homes to be returned to use annually; a higher level of income to be generated for the Council through empty homes work; and to maximise the benefit of empty homes work in Shropshire communities.

The Committee also received an update from the Empty Homes Officer at the meeting in January 2016. These updates have helped inform additional funding into this area for 2017/18 that was confirmed by Cabinet in October 2016.

## **2.3 Planning Committee Task and Finish Group**

During the year the Committee received the final report of the Planning Task & Finish Group which made a number of recommendations, the aim of which was to achieve a more consistent decision making process across the three planning committees through changes in process and practise.

A further Planning Task and Finish Group was established in October 2016. This has looked at how the delivery of planning processes has been changed following a review of the Planning Service undertaken early in the year and members have also provided feedback to assist the service manager in

implementing these operational changes. The group is now focussing its attention on the strategic objectives of economic growth and looking to identify how the Development Management and Planning Policy roles can be optimised to support this.

## **2.4 Student Accommodation Task and Finish Group**

The Student Accommodation Task and Finish Group reported during the year and made the following recommendations

1. The Local Plan Review should consider specific policy formulation for HMO's and a HMO Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) should be produced to guide the development management process in the assessment of planning applications for HMO's. Within the policy there should be appropriate threshold levels in order to inform the decision making process.
2. That a HMO database identifying properties in HMO use with ongoing monitoring should be established and that included in the monitoring should be the registering of complaints received related to HMO's.
3. A Student Accommodation Accreditation Mark should be introduced in 2016 in order to set expectations of standards from an early stage in the development of the University Centre and that these standards should be endorsed by UCS.
4. These recommendations have since been brought forward and were agreed by Cabinet in a separate report, following consultation, in autumn 2016.

## **3.0 Activity undertaken so far in 2016**

- 3.1 The Committee has met with representatives of the Shropshire Business Board, the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. Those sessions have given an insight into the challenges and opportunities for businesses in Shropshire and the role of those organisations.
- 3.2 As part of the development of the new Economic Vision for Shropshire, the Committee took part in a facilitated discussion in July 2016 with a senior researcher from IPPR North. A series of sessions were held by IPPR North to include the Shropshire Business Board, the Cabinet and Group leaders, the Economic Growth Scrutiny and other stakeholders.
- 3.3 Following the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy the Committee received a briefing on the Levy in October 2016 and its implementation. The Levy applies to around 50 major employers in Shropshire, including the Council. As a result of these changes to apprenticeships, their

structure and how they are funded, an internal Apprenticeship Board has been established. The aim is to plan for and put in place actions that enable the Council to access the apprenticeship levy; funding which will be paid by the Council and other major employers from May 2017 into a digital account.

- 3.4 One of the planned outcomes from the review of the Economic Growth service was the development of a new website and the Committee has received a presentation on the new website; [www.investinshropshire.co.uk](http://www.investinshropshire.co.uk). The website has a wide range of information for businesses looking to come to Shropshire or grow and expand in the County.
- 3.5 The provision of superfast broadband in the County continues to be a key issue for householders and particularly rural businesses that are reliant on improved infrastructure. Connecting Shropshire presented in December 2016 progress to date with Phase 1 of the project due to be completed this winter, with Phase 2a commencing at the same time. In addition a new procurement (Phase 2b) process has now commenced, with tenders due from the 'open' market in January 2017.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Reports to Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

**Cabinet Members**

Councillors Mal Price, Steve Charmley and Stuart West

**Local Member/s**

All

**Appendices**

None