



Communities
Overview Committee

21st September 2022

1.00 pm

Item

Public

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23
MARCH 2022
1.00 - 3.19 PM**

Responsible Officer: Emily Marshall
Email: emily.marshall@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257717

Present

Councillor Robert Macey (Chairman)
Councillors Ted Clarke, Mark Jones, Nick Hignett (Vice Chairman) and Christian Lea, Les Winwood (Substitute for Dan Morris) and David Vasmer (Substitute for Viv Parry),

30 Apologies for absence and substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillors Dan Morris (Les Winwood Substitute), Duncan Kerr (Cllr Julian Dean substitute), Nigel Hartin (Ruth Houghton Substitute) and Viv Parry (David Vasmer Substitute).

31 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members were reminded that they must declare their disclosable pecuniary interests and other registrable or non-registrable interests in any matter being considered at the meeting as set out in Appendix B of the Members' Code of Conduct and consider if they should leave the room prior to the item being considered.

32 Minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

33 Public Question Time

None received.

34 Member Question Time

None received.

35 Strategic Housing Review of the Housing Revenue Account Management

The Chairman welcomed Jane Trethewey, Assistant Director, Homes and Communities to the meeting. The Assistant Director presented the report, the purpose of which was to present Campbell Tickell's report from the review into the

Housing Revenue Account Management function. The report described the scope and the remit of the review undertaken and set out Campbell Tickell's recommendation as to the future arrangements for the management of the council's retained stock and Housing Revenue Account setting out also how the recommendations are to be implemented.

The Chairman welcomed Lucy Heath, Client and Commissioning Manager, Homes and Communities Team and Sue Adams, Managing Director of Star Housing, to the meeting.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the Assistant Director confirmed the following:

- The work that was being taken to meet the decarbonisation programme was outlined, including funding opportunities being sought and a project to install air pumps at a Greenfields sheltered housing. The importance of involving tenants was highlighted and it was explained that achieving zero carbon would be difficult due to lack of funding.
- The intention behind the recommendation was not to merge CDL and Star Housing but rather to look at new ways they could work together and share responsibilities. The Committee agreed that this topic should be kept on the work programme for future review.
- Details of a passive house project were outlined.

RESOLVED:

1. That Campbell Tickell's report on the strategic review of the Housing Revenue Account be noted.
2. That the proposal of Campbell Tickell that STAR is retained, and for a delivery model which optimises and aligns STAR and CDL to be developed, be noted and that progress in this area is kept on the work programme of the Committee for future review.
3. That feedback be provided on the recommendation of the report and proposals for closer alignment between the activities of STAR and the strategic aims of the Council

36 Draft Revised Housing Allocations Policy

Jane Trethewey, Assistant Director, Homes and Communities presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide an overview of social housing in Shropshire.

The Chairman put forward the suggestion that the working group set up previously to look at this be reformed, given that the allocations policy was going to Cabinet in April, to provide initial views and feedback on the proposed draft allocations policy and scheme. The feedback and comments to be reported to the next meeting of the Communities Overview Committee. The Scrutiny Officer advised that new members would be needed and asked for nominations. Councillor Macey agreed to lead the group and Councillor Ted Clarke also volunteered to sit on the group. The Scrutiny

Officer would email the Committee, to include those not present at the meeting, to seek nominations for the group.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director confirmed:

- The Policy brought Shropshire in line with the rest of the Country.
- Informal family carers were referenced as part of the eligibility criteria.
- The Housing Strategies would be on the Council's website so that people could easily access them.
- With regards to empty properties and affordable homes, the vacant properties in housing association ownership were monitored and scrutinised, housing associations tried to turn them around quickly and those that were vacant for any substantial amount of time, usually required substantial investment to bring them up to rentable standard or grouped together if they required bringing up to energy efficiency standard. The situation was scrutinised by the Empty Property Officer in the Private Sector Team and the Affordable Housing Forum.

RESOLVED:

1. That the information provided on the social housing stock in Shropshire be noted; and
2. A working group be established, comprising of Councillors Macey and Clarke and others to put their names forward, to provide initial views and feedback on the proposed draft allocations policy and scheme.

37 Economic Growth Plan

The Chairman welcomed Tracy Darke, Assistant Director for Economy and Place and Hayley Owen, Growth Programme and Strategy Manager to the meeting. The Assistant Director provided a brief introduction to the report the purpose of which was to inform the Communities Overview Committee of the Economic Growth Strategy (EGS) review 2022-2027, the work undertaken to date, work in progress, next steps and consultation process.

The Growth Programme and Strategy Manager, gave an update and overview on the journey so far, current performance, work done to date and the next steps.

Procurement processes were outlined and how these steps could be made simple for smaller businesses.

With regards to a skills audit, through the covid pandemic, the team had been drafted in to delivering business grants, have now got funding for a new post, to support skills. This is something new and the team would work closely with training providers.

Consultancies and experts who advised business throughout the UK, were excellent in Shropshire, and could be looked at and expanded and developed to support businesses within Shropshire.

RESOLVED:

That Community Overview Committee note the content of the report and request that the draft Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2027 is brought back to committee in advance of any future Cabinet report and recommendations.

38 Blue Badge Online Applications

The Chairman introduced Robert Smith, Information and Advice Manager at Age UK and Frances Darling, Head of Business and Consumer Protection, Trading Standards and Licensing – Shropshire Council.

Robert Smith presented his report, which provided an overview of blue badge applications and accessibility for disabled and older people for Age UK Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

The Head of Business and Consumer Protection provided an overview from the perspective of Shropshire Council and explained that the shift to digitalisation was driven prior to the pandemic by the Department for Transport (DfT), decentralising the whole process and this was part of that shift. The approach had helped the Council to process applications throughout the pandemic. It was recognised that there were people who did find it difficult to access applications using digital technology but it was predicted that as time went on this would shift. Shropshire Council did understand the point being made by Age UK, but the world as a whole was seeing a shift towards accessing services digitally. Locally, the pandemic had meant a restriction in hubs and direct access to go to in to offices, however the Council was committed to hubs being available in the future as well as buses which would go out to areas where there is need.

The Chairman suggested that a meeting be held with Age UK and Shropshire Council to discuss the issues outlined in the bullet points on page 2 of the report from Age UK. This suggestion was agreed and the Head of Business and Consumer Protection will report back to the Committee on the steps being taken to address the concerns of Age UK.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

39 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer suggested that there were some important issues on the work programme, including housing and economic growth, both of which were closely linked. It was suggested that the Committee wished to keep these pieces of work within their remit, it meets informally to identify the particular areas they wanted to examine.

RESOLVED:

1. At the start of the municipal year 2022/23 the Committee holds a private session, informal meeting with senior officers to identify specific areas and priority areas in terms of strategy and policy to ensure work is focused.

2. That the proposed committee work programme attached as appendix 1 be agreed

40 **Date/Time of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was due to take place on 4th May 2022.

<TRAILER_SECTION>

Signed (Chairman)

Date: