



Enterprise and
Growth Scrutiny
Committee

22nd September 2015

10.00 am

Item
3
Public

**MINUTES OF THE ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON 30 JULY 2015
10.00 AM - 12.10 PM**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes
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Present

Councillor Steve Davenport (Chairman)
Councillors Dean Carroll (Vice Chairman), Andrew Bannerman, Nicholas Bardsley,
Charlotte Barnes, Pauline Dee, John Hurst-Knight, Jean Jones and William Parr

22 Apologies for Absence and Substitutes

None were received.

23 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none disclosed.

24 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

26 Member Question Time

There were no questions from Members.

27 Tourism Update

The Visitor Economy Manager thanked Members for their ongoing support and allowing her the opportunity to speak to them about the changes within the Visitor Economy Team and the new working practices these changes had brought about.

She explained that the changes had happened more quickly than expected due to the necessity of financial savings being brought forward, with funding reductions expected in the 2016/17 budget being made a year early.

She continued that since becoming a Unitary Council in 2009, Shropshire Council had employed two dedicated Tourism Officers with time also allocated to the Visitor Economy Service Manager to work at a strategic level as part of the wider service. From 1st August 2015 the Tourism Officer posts would cease and would be replaced by the single post of Visitor Economy Development Officer.

Members noted the importance of the tourism sector to the Shropshire economy, with 14,500 people employed in the industry, and highlighted in the Shropshire LEP and ESIF strategies as an investment priority. The Visitor Economy Manager described the resilience of the tourism sector and the work already undertaken by the Council's tourism section to develop robust strategies and build strong partnerships. She continued that the growth structures and growth agenda plans were in place.

The Visitor Economy Manager continued that she was concerned that the Visitor Economy Development Officer post concentrated on strategic aims rather than hands on involvement in the tourism sector, and as such was not in such a good position to react quickly to promotion opportunities as had happened with obtaining the funding to promote Much Wenlock during the Olympics. She reported that the team were working with other partners to consider the best way to enable other organisations to take on this function. A Member suggested greater Parish and Town Council involvement. The Visitor Economy Manager agreed that this was one possibility and she was also looking to private businesses to take on some of the work.

In answer to a Member's question, the Visitor Economy Manager explained the role of the Visitor Economy Officer to concentrate on:

- Developing the Council's own tourism assets, such as the museum. To include marketing and sponsorship;
- Providing strategic support to the sector;
- Leading on commissioning for the Visitor Information Service;
- Acting as conduit for large organisations such as Visit England and Visit Britain;
- Working with the LEP Tourism Group to shape tourism priorities around European funds.
- Day to day support with businesses.

In response to a Member's query, the Visitor Economy Manger explained that she had concerns regarding the Council's ability to develop large bids for European funding and seize investment opportunities when they arose at short notice. The Chairman suggested that this may be a useful subject for a Task and Finish Group to consider. Members expressed support for the establishment of a Tourism Task and Finish Group.

Members discussed increased partnership working with Telford and Wrekin Council, and the way in which visitors to the County did not perceive boundaries between the administrative areas. Members noted that the tourism-specific opportunities for European funding were concentrated on non-urban areas therefore Telford,

Ironbridge and Shrewsbury would not be directly eligible. The Chairman suggested that this could be another potential area for the Task and Finish Group to consider.

A Member asked whether the previous targets for increasing visitor numbers to the County remained sufficiently ambitious and whether there was a clear plan to achieve these numbers. He suggested that this could also be examined by the Task and Finish Group.

In response to a Member's question requesting examples of the new structures adding value to the tourism sector, the Visitor Economy Manager explained that all points of the post as outlined earlier in the meeting would provide general support to the sector together with the improved ability to develop strategic support. She continued that once the new post had bedded in it would be easier to understand the level of capacity. The Chairman again suggested that this issue could be explored by the Task and Finish Group.

A Member asked about the success criteria for the newly established post. The Visitor Economy Development Officer stated that resilient organisations seeing this as an opportunity to provide leadership and become proactive in the sector would vindicate the decision made. Also finding the additional capacity to develop a strong, significant, strategic project would be seen as a huge success.

The Visitor Economy Development Officer reminded Members of recent or forthcoming BBC programmes based in Shropshire where tourism officers had provided information and support. He added that he aimed to continue in this role as those programmes were seen by millions of viewers and attracted both visitors and employers to the County.

Agreed: that the Chairman be given delegated powers to work with the Visitor Economy Manager to establish the terms of reference to set up a Tourism Task and Finish Group.

28 Economic Growth Redesign Update

The Head of Economic Growth and Development updated Members on the redesign of the Economic Growth section. Members noted that two new posts of Business Relationship Manager and Physical Regeneration Manager were being created, with a flat structure of 12 posts beneath them. The two management posts would be recruited first to enable those officers to participate in the interview process and team selection.

The consultation process had included staff workshops, one to one interviews with staff and invitations to make written submissions. The information gathered was being submitted to the Director and through him to the Chief Executive and Directors at their regular meetings.

The Head of Economic Growth explained that prototype working arrangements were being trialled with formal reviews at 3 monthly periods. In response to a Member's question he stated that any problems identified in the prototype would be acted on immediately. He added that the aim of the redesign, as had been identified by the

Task and Finish Group, was to work more effectively and efficiently and was not about budget savings.

Members noted that the budget for the new website had been allocated and it would be the first task of the new team once they were established.

The Head of Economic Growth confirmed that he would provide regular updates to the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the implementation of the service redesign.

29 **Planning Committee Task and Finish Group Report**

The Planning Services Manager introduced the Planning Committee Task and Finish Group Report. He explained that the review process had been undertaken during a time when the Planning Service had been under significant pressure. The Task and Finish Group had concluded that it was not an appropriate time to make significant changes to the delivery of Planning Committees. Members noted that the report recommended retaining the three Planning Committee model but with a further review in six months' time once SAMDev had been adopted.

The Planning Service Manager continued that the Task and Finish Group had concentrated on changes to practices which would improve consistency and efficiency and would ensure that processes were robust.

Members noted that evidence had not been obtained from all interested parties but Members and Parish and Town Councils had been canvassed for their views and the Group had undertaken a site visit to Chester Council to observe its Planning Committee at work.

Members discussed delegated decisions. The Planning Service Manager confirmed that the 96% target rate set by the previous Planning Task and Finish group but it remained at 94%, which was lower than the neighbouring authorities of Herefordshire and Chester West. The Planning Services Manager noted that some Parish and Town Councils saw the process of delegation as undemocratic, but stressed that whether or not an application was delegated or referred to Committee it had to be considered in the same way. He continued that it was important that the right applications were placed on Planning Committee agendas for consideration and this would involve an element of trust between Officers and Members. Members were referred to bullet point 4 in the recommendations, where the Group recommended that the process to decide which applications were delegated or considered by the Planning Committees had greater transparency.

Referring to bullet point 5 in the recommendations, the Planning Service Manager noted that it was difficult to ensure that all reports were completely consistent but Officers had been provided with a report template and guidance on the focus for each section of the report.

Members discussed the provision for Member speaking on applications within their Wards. A Member asked whether this recommendation 7 included changing the current system to allow the Committee Member to vote on applications within his or her Ward. The Planning Service Manager confirmed that the Task and Finish Group

were not recommending a change to this procedure. The Chairman confirmed that both the Committee Member and Non-Committee Member would be allowed to speak for five minutes from the speaker's table, and would be available to answer questions if required but would retire to the back of the room and not participate in the debate. It was agreed that this recommendation would be re-worded for clarity. The Planning Service Manager confirmed that this change would require an alteration to the Constitution. Members suggested that both Planning Committee and Non-Committee Members should remain at the committee table but the Planning Service Manager explained that this was not desirable due to the potential issue of undue influence.

Referring to bullet point 8 in the recommendations, the Planning Service Manager commented that the Group had witnessed the web broadcast of the Planning Committee in Chester and although some Members of the Group were in favour of this, the majority favoured only audio recording. The survey results supported recording of meetings.

In response to a Member's query, the Planning Service Manager explained that the recommendation to hold site visits on a separate day was not mandatory but was suggested to give the Committee greater flexibility when required. Members raised concerns that if this became standard practice it would unnecessarily increase Members time commitment and decrease the number of Members attending site visits and potentially may have a detrimental effect on the decision making process.

A Member suggested that bullet point 9 be strengthened to state that Members who could not attend site visits regularly speak to their Group Leaders with a view to being replaced on the Committee. The Planning Service Manager explained that this was not the view of the Group, who felt that it was up to the individual Member to decide whether they were able to fully commit to the time demanded. He continued that the perceived importance of site visits had been shown in the questionnaire responses from both Members and Town and Parish Councils and this would be re-enforced in the future Member training programme.

A Member suggested that moving the Committee start time to 10am would enable the Committee to consider a greater number of applications. The Planning Service Manager explained that Members had decided the start time of 2pm and they were able to change the time of the Committee if they were minded to.

The Planning Services Manager explained that some Town and Parish Councils had expressed dissatisfaction with the level of information received on the progress of planning applications, the final two recommendations addressed these issues. In answer to a Members question he confirmed that Planning Officers would make their recommendation and for housing applications instructions are then sent to the Legal Section for the drawing up of Section 106 agreements which can add to the time taken before a planning decision can be issued. He confirmed that the time taken to complete the S106 and release the planning decision can take a number of months. A Member suggested that it would be useful to request further information from the Legal Section about the length of time of this process.

In response to a Member's question on appeals against both Officer and Committee decisions, the Planning Services Manager explained that the County experienced the

second highest number of appeals in the Country but had the highest number of appeals dismissed. He continued that it was difficult to identify possible appeals and that the Planning Inspectorate was not always consistent in its decisions. He added that lessons were learnt from upheld appeals and the Committees received the appropriate training.

Referring to the recommendation to review the situation in a further six month's time a Member asked if would be possible for the Group to consider planning enforcement and the defence of conservation areas. The Member was advised that this was not within the remit of the Planning Committee Task and Finish group which had been established to consider the operation of the Planning Committees. If Members were minded, it would be possible to add this topic to the Committee's work programme for future consideration.

Agreed:

- i. that subject to the rewording of bullet point 7 in the Recommendations to improve clarity, the Planning Committee Task and Finish report accepted and formally presented to the Political Structures Monitoring Group for consideration; and
- ii. that a representative from the Legal Section be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to answer Members questions on the process for Section 106 Agreements.

30 Future Work Programme for the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

Agreed:

- i. That the topic of Planning Enforcement and protection of Conservation Areas be added to the work programme.
- ii. That the examination of the relationship between the Planning Section and Licensing Section be added to the Work Programme.

31 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the review of the Scrutiny Committees was still ongoing.

Agreed: that the next meeting of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee be held at 10am on 22nd September 2015.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: