

## **Development Services Scrutiny Committee –Statement to Council – 29 April 2010**

### **1.0 Key Achievements 2009/10**

- 1.1 During 2009/10 the Development Services Scrutiny Committee has worked through a challenging work programme covering the diverse range of services delivered by the directorate. This programme has included former district and borough services brought together by the creation of the unitary authority such as planning and street cleansing services, as well as major regeneration projects in Shrewsbury and the North West Relief Road scheme.

### **2.0 Strategy and Development**

#### Design Guide for Residential Developments in Shropshire

- 2.1 In September 2009 the Scrutiny Committee reviewed a report on the design guide for residential developments in Shropshire. Members pointed out concerns over the provision for car parking in new developments and the risk to public safety caused by cars parking on narrow roads. This work informed the feedback into the Local Development Framework Consultation.

#### Development Management Performance Exception Report

- 2.2 The Committee requested a report explaining the underperformance of National Indicator 157 which measures the speed of processing of planning applications. The report attributed the underperformance to a consequence of IT issues following the establishment of the Unitary authority and staffing issues. The report explained that an improvement plan had been in place. Performance had improved by focussing staff resource where required to clear the backlog of cases awaiting validation. Training was also offered to Members of the Planning Committee. .
- 2.3 Committee members asked if there were performance variations between the North, Central and South areas, and established that many of the difficulties had occurred in the South area where sick absence levels were particularly high.
- 2.4 Members also asked if all the IT problems had been resolved. They were informed that not all the issues had been resolved, however there was scope to utilise staffing resource from the Land Charges team to support the clearance of the backlog of planning application.
- 2.5 This performance indicator is now on track to achieve target for Q4 2009/10.

#### Shrewsbury Regeneration

- 2 In September 2009 the committee requested a special local meeting to be held to discuss the Shrewsbury Growth Point, Shrewsbury Vision, Flax Mill development and Northern Corridor regeneration. This meeting was held at Martin Wilson Primary School in Castlefields and enabled residents to ask questions and hear

from organisations involved in the Flax Mill proposals, including the architects and English Heritage. Attended by more than 70 people the meeting demonstrated the value of engaging with communities by taking scrutiny meetings out of Shirehall and allowing residents to discuss plans and issues affecting their area.

The meeting also received reports and updates on the Northern Corridor Regeneration project and on the Shrewsbury Growth point work. Both reports were endorsed.

- 2.7 At the same meeting the Chairman of the Committee explained that he had called-in Cabinet's decision to spend up to £120,000 on a regeneration framework for Shrewsbury. The Chairman was not opposed to regeneration, but was concerned about how the money would be spent and wanted to ensure that the project would deliver value for money.
- 2.8 It was reported that the framework would be funded via the Growth Point budget up to a maximum of £120,000. The Chairman asked Officers to explain how the money would be spent. The Head of Shrewsbury Growth Point stated that it was proposed to utilise the Homes and Communities Agency's Consultants Panel for Masterplanning and procuring a consultancy through restricted tender. Council Members spoke in support of the proposed work, pointing out the benefits of previous consultancy work in Shrewsbury.
- 2.9 The Scrutiny Committee supported the plans for the development of the Flax Mill site and also supported plans to spend up to £120,000 bringing forward the plans for the regeneration framework. An update report on the progress of Shrewsbury Growth Point was requested in 12 months time.

### **3.0 Environmental Maintenance**

#### Shrewsbury North West Relief Road

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Committee received a report on the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road in September 2009. The report outlined the latest estimated costs of the entire scheme and spend that would be incurred by the scheme prior to the presentation of a detailed report to Council in July 2010.
- 3.2 Members of the Committee questioned why the overall cost of the project now stood at £102 million and whether it was possible to avoid spending £900,000 by July. The Director of Development Services informed the Committee that the spend was necessary in order to complete the necessary preparatory work for the project, and that if this was not completed there was the risk of losing Government funding.
- 3.3 The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the importance of carrying out public consultation for the North West Relief Road and recommended to Cabinet that any expenditure is kept to the necessary minimum until the consultation stage.

In addition the Committee resolved to hold a public scrutiny of the consultation process and the project per se to enable all interested individual and groups to publicly voice their views.

### Street Cleansing Equalisation Plan

- 3.4 In December 2009, the Scrutiny Committee reviewed a report on progress with the equalisation plan for the street cleansing service. The Committee was informed that investment had been made in new equipment and creating a flexible multi-skilled workforce, however not all of the £550,000 investment to equalise service standards and performance had been utilised due to economies of scale.
- 3.5 The Committee noted the high level of performance of the Street Cleansing service against National Indicator 195 and the reduction in performance variation between the former District and Borough areas. Members congratulated the team on their excellent work in improving the service.

## **4.0 Public Protection**

### Interim report on disruption to waste collections

- 4.1 In response to the prolonged period of cold weather and the subsequent disruption to waste collections in the authority, the Scrutiny Committee requested an interim report on disruption to the service in January 2010 pending a full review later in the year. The report was delivered by the Head of Waste Management and the Managing Director of Veolia Shropshire.
- 4.2 The Committee were informed that the geographical spread of missed collections varied considerably. This was because the most senior member of the collection crew was required to make an assessment on how safe it was to collect and empty containers in a particular location. Whilst in many areas the roads had been treated and were clear, this was not the case with footpaths and side roads, which prevented the loaders from safely collecting and carrying containers.
- 4.3 The Committee accepted the operational decisions that were made, however Members felt that the changes to services had not been communicated effectively. The Chairman stated that a clear communications strategy was required for future events of this nature. Learning from the bad weather disruption has been discussed between essential service providers and improvements put in place eg to increase the information supplied to the CSC well ahead of any bad weather.
- 4.4 The Committee received an officer report which recommended cessation of the community skip service. Representations were made from a number of members and councils. Following a wide-ranging and detailed debate the Committee endorsed the report, by a majority, for presentation to Cabinet.

- 4.5 The Committee has periodically reviewed the **Speed Management Policy** implementation, **LTP progress** and regularly received update to the **Climate Change Action Plan** which it played a major role in developing as E & E Panel.
- 4.6 We scrutinised the proposed Parking Strategy and will review its' implementation at regular intervals.
- 4.7 A major review of the Shropshire Link was undertaken with the Committee particularly concerned with the relatively low usage and hence, the high cost per user of the scheme. The Committee recommended significant improvements to marketing and called for further scrutiny in due course.
- 4.8 The Committee received significant representation from members, residents and council of Bishop's Castle regarding: on street parking, a biomass proposal and the use of regeneration land. A full discussion led to calls for further consultation and meetings of portfolio holders and officers to consider possible resolution. It also commented on the length of time to resolve regeneration issues.