



Enterprise and  
Growth Scrutiny  
Committee

17<sup>th</sup> March 2016

10.00 am

Item

**3**

Public

**MINUTES OF THE ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2016  
10.00 - 11.45 AM**

**Responsible Officer:** Julie Fildes  
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**Present**

Councillor Steve Davenport (Chairman)  
Councillors Andrew Bannerman, Nicholas Bardsley, Charlotte Barnes, Pauline Dee,  
Nic Laurens and William Parr

**52 Apologies for Absence and Substitutes**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Hurst-Knight and J E Jones.

**53 Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

Councillor P Dee was appointed as Vice-Chairman.

**54 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were none disclosed.

**55 Minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2015**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**56 Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

**57 Member Question Time**

Councillor Andrew Bannerman asked the following questions and the written response was tabled.

What is the remit of the Shrewsbury Vision Group? Who set it up? When? How often has it met? Are there any records of its meetings? If not, why not? To what other Council committees or business does it relate? What is its membership? How were they (and the Chairman) elected or selected? Whom are they consulting? To whom will they report? When?

*Response:*

*Cabinet agreed on 19th October 2011 to develop and deliver the key actions outlined within the Shrewsbury Vision delivery plan. Establishing a key stakeholder group to oversee the design and delivery of key projects.*

*In considering these recommendations it was felt that the Vision may require a refresh in light of new developments such as the University Centre Shrewsbury and the creation of the Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID)*

*Councillor Mal Price took the lead to bring an initial group of a small number of stakeholders to consider how the refresh could be undertaken, what resources would be required and what officer capacity existed in order to deliver and monitor the actions. Councillor Claire Wild had subsequently taken the lead role given her other responsibilities including the University and the BID until recent Cabinet changes in January 2016. The Chair has now reverted back to Cllr Mal Price for the immediate future.*

*The group established has met several times and additional attendees have joined. It is very much in the formative stages as initially resources particularly staff resources were required to be established.*

*The group relates to Cabinet through the Portfolio Holder.*

*To date there have not been any formal records of the meetings.*

*There is nothing yet to formally consult upon, however, projects which will have already been initiated such as the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package will be consulted upon as a key project.*

*As regards to reporting mechanisms and timescale this is yet to be discussed.*

Councillor Price added that the review was expected to take approximately six months and would consider the future of the Group, its strategic vision and aspirations. Following the review a report would be made to Cabinet with recommendations. Councillor Price continued that resources for the work of the group were limited and it was hoped that it would be supported by various business organisations in Shrewsbury including the Shrewsbury BID and Chamber of Commerce.

**RESOLVED:**

- i. That the Shrewsbury Vision Group be added to the work programme of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee; and

- ii. That the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment, with the Lead Officer for the Shrewsbury Vision Group, be invited to give a presentation to the Committee.

## 58 **Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy and Economic Growth Redesign Update**

The Business Relationship Manager circulated a briefing note on Economic Growth at Shropshire Council [copy attached to signed copy of the minutes]. Members noted that the new Economic Growth Team were in place and work had started on a revised Economic Growth Strategy. This was being developed in conjunction with the Shropshire Business Board and assistance from the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee was anticipated. She continued that Planning Policies were also being reviewed and it was an ideal point to align strategies and plans to ensure that conflicts did not arise. The Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy would articulate the ambitions for Shropshire.

A pragmatic approach was being taken, working with partners to enable confidence and encourage private sector investment. It was anticipated that the new Economic Growth Strategy would be ambitious and proactive.

Members noted that the Economic Growth team had undergone a period of transition but new working practices were now in place which enabled them to be flexible enough to undertake the tasks required. The team were outcome orientated with an emphasis on the Council's new strategic direction.

Referring to the 2 draft outcomes for the team set out in the briefing note the Business Relationship Manager explained that it was important that the underlying conditions for growth were right, and GVA (Gross Value Added) was not just about creating more jobs but better jobs. Better jobs would be achieved if the underlying conditions were right. Creating good underlying conditions included having the appropriate infrastructure to support businesses such as broadband connections and road networks, and having land available for development in areas of economic demand.

The Business Relationship Manager explained that the County had high levels of out commuting, where people chose to live in Shropshire but work elsewhere. It also had lower GVA generating industries. Although many national companies traded in the County there were few Head Quarters located in Shropshire. For accounting purposes the GVA was credited to the County where the HQ was located, so although the company was trading in Shropshire, Shropshire could not include that company's turnover in its GVA calculation.

The Business Relationship Manager out-lined the steps that the Economic Growth Team would take to achieve its objectives which included

- identifying the correct property projects;
- acting as a single point of contact and maintaining the role of honest broker;
- ensuring companies had easy access to the tools they needed, such as loan schemes, LEP Growth Hubs and UKTI; and
- providing access to the universities and other educational establishments which could train and supply the skilled employees required.

She continued that the team needed to ensure that strategies were aligned and to find ways of measuring these. The members of the project team would also be responsible for bringing leads into the County.

Members noted that the team were looking at identifying drivers and metrics which would show how value was being added either directly or indirectly.

In response to a Member's question the Business Relationship Manager explained that Shropshire Council did not offer grants to businesses but acted as a signpost to agencies that did. She continued that they were looking at partnership working through cross LEP work with Birmingham City Council.

Members commented that a robust Economic Growth Strategy would support investment in Shropshire.

In response to a Member's question on the Government's proposal to allow Councils to retain the business rates they collected, The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment explained that the loss of the Revenue Support Grant and possible loss of Grants that came from the redistribution of business rates the Council was likely to be in a worse financial position than at present. He added that it was important to support existing businesses as well as trying to attract new ones.

The Business Relationship Manager confirmed that Tourism featured in the Economic Growth Strategy although it was not part of her remit.

#### **59 Economic Growth Redesign Update**

Members noted that this item had been covered during the consideration of the Economic Growth Strategy.

#### **60 Empty Homes Task and Finish Group Update**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment thanked the Committee for the work it had undertaken regarding the Empty Homes Strategy. He continued that the Task and Finish Group's report had raised the profile of the Strategy and had demonstrated a clear understanding of the issues. He confirmed that the issue of Empty Homes Officers being able to recover data from the Council Tax system had been resolved.

The Operations Manager for Health and Community Protection reported that there was evidence to show that the investment made in Empty Property Officers produced a return through the New Homes Bonus. A private company had approached the Council, offering to undertake this work and suggested that they could generate an income of £200,000 per year and would charge on a performance basis. She continued that this offer had been examined but this was not feasible for a number of reasons such as the failure of the company to check the validity of information given to them by owners, their lack of qualification in assessing housing conditions and the fact that their fee is charged whether Officers agree with their findings or not.

The Empty Homes Officer confirmed that there was now had a better working relationship with the Council Tax section, although Legislation precluded the Council Tax section from accepting evidence which would change the status of a property. She continued that Officers were still experiencing difficulties with taking enforcement action but the situation was gradually improving. A Member commented that at a recent Historic England Members' briefing the need for a joined up approach was demonstrated with a single point of contact.

She continued that the New Homes Bonus allocated to Shropshire Council for 2015/16 was £7,353,179 of which £250,000 was allocated to fund Empty Property Incentive Grants. Shropshire's provisional New Homes Bonus allocated for 2016/17 was £9,219,285. It was anticipated that a support Officer would cost in the region of £11,300 per annum to employ. It was anticipated that the Government would be examining how Council's used the New Homes Bonus and possibly reduce the period it was paid from six years to four.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment explained that the Public Protection Section of the Council, which included the Empty Homes Team were being asked to deliver savings and it had been identified that the Public Protection Section had already undergone significant redesign to improve efficiency and deliver savings. Members noted that the Head of Public Protection was undertaking a review of the Development Management Service which focused on performance and processes. He continued that Members of the Scrutiny Committee may be minded to consider the report on that redesign at a future meeting of the Committee.

#### **61 Future Work Programme for the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee**

Members consider the items on the Committee's work programme. It was suggested that Red RAG items of the Council's budget may be a future item for consideration. It was agreed that advice would be obtained as to whether this would be within the remit of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman suggested that the Committee may wish to consider the consequences of the anticipated Referendum Vote on the European Union. Officers advised that advice also needed to be taken to ascertain whether this topic was within the remit of the Committee.

#### **62 Date of Next Meeting**

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee next meets at 10.00am on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016.