



Enterprise and
Growth Scrutiny
Committee

2nd June 2016

10.00 am

Item

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Public

**MINUTES OF THE ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON 17 MARCH 2016
10.00 - 11.35 AM**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes
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Present

Councillor Steve Davenport (Chairman)
Councillors Pauline Dee (Vice Chairman), Andrew Bannerman, John Hurst-Knight,
Jean Jones, Nic Laurens and William Parr

63 Apologies for Absence and Substitutes

No apologies were received.

64 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none disclosed.

65 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

66 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

67 Member Question Time

There were no questions from Members.

68 Shropshire Business Board

The Chairman welcomed Mandy Thorn, Chairman of the Shropshire Business Board to the meeting and asked that she tell the Committee about the work of the Board.

Ms Thorn explained that the Shropshire Business Board comprised of voluntary representatives from various business sectors in Shropshire including the educational establishments, as well as the organisations which supported them, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses. Members also included Shropshire Councillors and Senior Council Officers. Administrative support was provided by Shropshire Council. Members noted that it was a well-established advisory forum where business sector representatives could channel information on business needs, views and priorities to both the Council and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). It was also a body which the Council and LEP could draw on for information and input when developing economic policies and procedures due to its Members' wide range of knowledge, skills and experience.

The Board also actively encouraged and supported collaboration between companies to achieve common goals and development of their business sectors. This was done through its network of Business Ambassadors.

Ms Thorn observed that the Board's greatest concerns related to the skills gap, and the provision of digital and physical infrastructure within Shropshire to support the County's economic development. It was noted that Shropshire was well located, close to the Midland industrial areas of Birmingham and Manchester and with links to Wales and Ireland, but without the necessary infrastructure it was not possible to fully utilise this location. Members discussed the need to improve road and rail links in the County and the provision of broadband. It was acknowledged that the public and businesses did not recognise local government administrative borders. Responding to a Member's comment, Ms Thorn agreed that a large number of businesses in Shropshire exported goods and services to Europe and beyond.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Tourism Sector, Ms Thorn explained that the work had been undertaken to encourage businesses in this sector to work collaboratively and it was the predominant sector attending the Business Summits arranged by the Business Board. She continued that the Board appreciated the support provided by Council Tourism Officers to develop the sector.

In answer to a Member's question, Ms Thorn observed that although useful, the Business Summits were only engaging with members of the business community who wished to do so. The Board was looking to develop initiatives which engaged those who were not, and to ensure that all business sectors had representation on the Board. She added that she was conscious that expanding Board Membership beyond twenty members could make the Board's work less efficient and effective. Ms Thorn also confirmed that the role of the Business Ambassadors was being considered, and ways to give greater focus to the role were being sought.

Ms Thorn confirmed that she was aware that 85% of businesses in Shropshire were SMEs, and they were represented on the Board by the Federation of Small Businesses. She continued that the Marches LEP had now launched the Shropshire Physical Growth Hub at the Food Enterprise Centre and had also opened a Business Lounge based at the University Centre, to support all business based in the County as well as those looking to relocate. There were also plans to provide pop-up Growth Hubs in the larger market towns. The Physical Growth Hub was supported by the Virtual Growth Hub which provided information via the internet. The Chairman

commented that Shropshire Council was also about to launch a dedicated business website and Ms Thorn confirmed that there would be links between the two.

The Physical Regeneration Manager commented that talks had been held with the neighbouring Welsh Local Authorities, the rail companies and LEP about improving rail connectivity in the region. These had been very positive.

The Chairman commented that he had received a request for the Committee to consider supporting the extension the M54 to Shrewsbury on economic grounds. He was also aware that the Minister for Transport was considering improvements to the A5. He suggested that it might be useful to hold a joint meeting with the Environment and Services Scrutiny Committee to receive more information.

69 **Outline of Planning Review Methodology**

The Group Manager for Public Protection and Enforcement distributed a briefing note on the Planning Review Methodology which outlined the Scope of the Review, its outcomes and timetables and its methodology [copy attached to the signed Minutes]. He explained that the decision had been made to carry out an in-depth review of Planning Services and its Development Management function due to the recognition that it was operating under severe pressure as a result of:

- the SAMDev review;
- the 5 year land supply requirement in the National Planning Policy Framework;
- the voluntary redundancy scheme; and
- problems with recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff.

It had been acknowledged that these issues had had an impact on the quality and performance of the service provided.

Referring Members to the Briefing Note, The Group Manager for Public Protection and Enforcement explained that the scope of the review was set out on page 1. He stated that it was important to evaluate the effectiveness of Development Management from the customer's perspective, to look at internal reviews previously undertaken and to conduct an objective review of the system in a concentrated period of time. He continued that he felt well qualified to undertake an objective review as he did not have a planning background which could influence his views. He added that this review was particularly important at this time to ensure that Development Control was in a healthy position before the Government introduced commercial markets to the sector.

The Group Manager for Public Protection and Enforcement explained that the process mapping exercise had not revealed any surprises but had revealed much about what needed to be done when going forward. The qualitative research had shown that processes needed to be designed to ensure customer focus and simple processes.

He continued that all the recommendations in the report were all evidenced based and supporting evidence would be appended.

A Member observed that Development Control was not just about customer satisfaction, but about developing better communities and facilitating development that was in the interest of all. He expressed concern that the Government was introducing commercialism into this function. He congratulated the Planning Section on continuing to provide such a good service despite the enormous pressures it had encountered. He commented that the training received by Members of the Planning Committee was not rigorous enough, nor well attended by Members. The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment responded that the training offered to Members of the Planning Committee had equipped them for the decisions they needed to make but it was unfortunate that it was not well attended. He acknowledged that the lack of knowledge shown by some Members who had not undertaken the training offered had led to poor decisions being made on occasion.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing, Regulatory Services and Environment agreed that it was important to gain the views of all users of the planning service and it was important to achieve the right outcomes for all.

A Member commented that as a Member of the Planning Committee she often felt under siege from conflicting interests of Developers and Communities, she expressed concern that service redesign may increase these conflicts. The Planning Services Manager explained that the managing of the public's expectations was an important issue. It had become clear that people expected immediate replies and were not always willing to accept the professional advice given. The public had the expectation that the Local Authority would defend their perspective regardless.

Concern was expressed regarding the Government's plan to open the planning system to private companies and market forces. A Members commented that private companies were not subject to the same statutory duties and community responsibilities that the Local Authority were.

The Chairman observed that at a previous meeting the Committee had recommended the establishment of a Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group, which in light of the review being undertaken was no longer current. He suggested that Members establish a Planning Review Task and Finish Group, which he felt would be more useful.

Members requested sight of the draft report. The Group Manager for Public Protection and Enforcement explained that the Director of Commissioning was the project sponsor and as such was expected to make comment on it with the Chief Executive. Once this had been completed it was at the Directors discretion to decide how the report was circulated and further developed. This was particularly important as it contained sensitive HR issues. The Group Manager for Public Protection and Enforcement confirmed that he expected to produce an executive summary of the report. He agreed to discuss its circulation with the Director of Commissioning.

RESOLVED:

That a Planning Review Task and Finish Group be established. The Group Manager for Public Protection be given delegated authority to produce the Terms of Reference for the Group with the agreement of the Chairman of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee.

70 Future Work Programme for the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

Members noted that a meeting of the Work Programme sub-group was to be called to develop the work programme further.

71 Date of Next Meeting

Members welcomed Councillor John Hurst-Knight back to the Committee after his recent illness and wished him a speedy continued recovery. He thanked them for the good wishes they had sent him whilst he had been unwell.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee next meets on Thursday 2nd June 2016.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: