



Place Overview
Committee

24 March 2022

2.00 pm

Item

3

Public

MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2021

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend

Email: sarah.townsend@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257721

Present

Councillor Joyce Barrow (Chairman)

Councillors Paul Wynn (Vice Chairman), Steve Davenport, Julian Dean, Geoff Elner, Dan Morris, Pamela Moseley, David Vasmer and Roger Evans (Substitute) (substitute for Andy Boddington)

31 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andy Boddington. Councillor Roger Evans was in attendance as his substitute.

32 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

33 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

The chairman explained that following the last meeting of the committee held on 25th October 2021, a complaint had been received from Councillor Evans who had stated that at the end of the meeting, the meeting went into private session to further discuss one of the recommendations of the reports. Councillor Barrow clarified that all committee members present had voted to have a general discussion at the end of the meeting, but this was not held in private session.

A comment was made that in the 17th September 2021 meeting, member workshops on the Economic Strategy were discussed for members to engage in. However, the arrangements for these had not yet been put in place. The Scrutiny Officer commented that he would arrange for these to take place. The Executive Director of Place explained that it was intended to have a draft strategy compiled for spring 2022, which would be presented to the committee. Member briefing sessions would take place and all members would have the opportunity to be engaged with the process. The Economic Strategy would be a different type of strategy to what was in place before.

A question was asked regarding when the Planning Committee Structures agenda item would be discussed. The Scrutiny Officer responded that, due to the pressures faced by Committee Services and the forthcoming by-election, this had been delayed and it was hoped the topic would be considered at an additional meeting of the Place Overview Committee in January 2022. At the request of the chairman, the Executive Director of Place agreed to look into the pressures upon Committee Services.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Place Overview Committee meeting held on 25th October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

Members noted that despite being marked as ‘To Follow’ on the agenda, the minutes of the Place Overview Committee meeting held on 17th September 2021 would now be considered at the next meeting of the committee.

34 Public Question Time

Public questions were received as follows:

- **Mr Stephen Mulloy** – regarding national tables for performance on planning enforcement. Mr Mulloy was in attendance at the meeting to ask his question.
- **Mr Stephen Mulloy** – regarding development without planning permission. Mr Mulloy was in attendance at the meeting to ask his question.
- **Mr Paul Wiseman** – regarding breaches of planning conditions. As Mr Wiseman was not in attendance at the meeting, his question was read out by the chairman of the committee.
- **Mr Paul Wiseman** – regarding the discharge of planning conditions. As Mr Wiseman was not in attendance at the meeting, his question was read out by the chairman of the committee.

A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

35 Member Question Time

Member questions were received as follows:

- **Councillor Julia Buckley** – regarding the closure of the highway depots in Bridgnorth and Hodnet and whether the EISA would be carried out. As Councillor Buckley was not in attendance at the meeting, her question was read out by the chairman of the committee.
- **Councillor Kate Halliday** – regarding the production of “Future Connectivity Plans” for NE Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth by the Council and the work on a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. As Councillor Halliday was not in

attendance at the meeting, her question was read out by the chairman of the committee.

A full copy of the questions and responses provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

36 Winter Maintenance

The committee received the report of the Executive Director of Place which provided a progress update on improvements to the winter maintenance service and highlighted some emerging issues that had been required to also be considered.

The Head of Highways was in attendance to present the report along with the Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure.

The committee received an update on gritting routes, grit bins, operational delivery model, communication, local engagement and coverage. They were also informed that decision making arrangements had been changed and they were now working much more closely with Kier concerning gritting operations.

The Executive Director of Place and the Head of Highways explained that significant progress had been made this year and the council were going into the winter in a far stronger and more robust position compared to last year. The feedback that had been received from last year had been acted upon and information captured through the working group had informed some of their thinking this year.

The Head of Highways responded to questions from the committee, during which, the following points were noted / explained:

- A comment was made regarding the lack of progress in terms of working with the Town and Parish Councils. The Head of Highways commented that this was a fairly recent piece of work and it was frustrating that they hadn't had the resources to do everything, such as engaging with local communities. Attention had been focused on critical service improvements as well as statutory requirements that had to be delivered on. However, significant progress had been made between last winter and this winter and the service would continue to evolve and improve.
- It was hoped to recruit technicians into some of the vacant posts within the service, resulting in a greater level of resource. It was also noted that compared to last year, more staff were available on hand to respond to emergencies at very short notice. From an asset perspective, the service was better placed to cope with flooding and severe weather events.
- The location of grit bins throughout Shropshire was now understood and had been captured and the replenishment of salts had already started. This was happening much earlier when compared to last year.
- The frustrations that private farmer snow plough contractors had encountered last winter concerning communications with duty officers, shouldn't be an issue this winter due to a change of arrangements.
- A question was asked regarding whether councillors had ever been contacted informing them of the route to be gritted and asking them if there were any

areas that had been missed, as they couldn't recollect this happening. The Head of Highways responded that the defined gritting network was publicised and has been the same in Shropshire for some time.

- Data information was collated and captured, with data going back a number of years – this would be able to show the differences that the changes and initiatives have made to the service.
- A few comments were made concerning the report being very 'surface level' and 'lacking in data' and the chairman requested that data be provided to the committee in the new year.
- It was disappointing that 'Fix My Street' would not be fully implemented until April 2022.
- The county's salt barns were at full capacity, having received their deliveries, and reserve salt stocks were also in place. The salt levels were at the same level as last year, with extra capacity having been built in at the other depots, to take into account the closure of the depot at Bridgnorth.
- A member of the committee expressed concern regarding the operation of the Kier contract and asked if this could be looked at in a future meeting. He had noted it was in the committee's work programme, but requested that it be brought forward.

The Scrutiny Officer commented on the sheer number of reports that officers were expected to produce for scrutiny committees, along with their vagueness, with officers across all six scrutiny committees not always knowing the level of detail that was expected from them. He encouraged members to think about what the objectives and priorities of the committee were, what information they wanted from officers to support those objectives in terms of data and reporting and how they were expected to be delivered. The chairman asked that committee members look at the work programme well in advance of any report being written, in order to identify the information that they wanted to know from a report. She also asked that committee members email this information to her and copy the Scrutiny Officer in, which would hopefully result in more informed reports.

The chairman paid tribute to the officers within the highways department regarding the service they provided, as well as the improvements that had been made within the service area.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the website and the GIS system be brought up to date as soon as possible.

37 **Footpath and Cycle Path Maintenance**

The committee received the report of the Executive Director of Place which outlined the current position and also highlighted the issues currently facing the service, in relation to the maintenance of footway and cycleway assets.

The Head of Highways was in attendance to present the report along with the Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure.

The committee were informed that the service continues to be in a transitional phase and working towards a future operating model, which would see further improvements in highways over the coming years. However, there was a limit on what could be achieved without additional funding.

The Head of Highways responded to questions from the committee, during which, the following points were noted / explained:

- A member commented that several street trees in pavements had been lost and not replaced within his ward. The Head of Highways stated that he would take this away as an action point.
- Maintenance of footpaths and cycle paths had been neglected over the years and if active travel was to be encouraged, they needed to be in a good condition otherwise people would be put off from using them.
- Some cycle paths had been poorly designed from the outset.
- There was an administration priority to invest additional resources in highways and footpaths.
- Through a number of initiatives, much more 'find and fix' operations were starting to be undertaken e.g. carriageway defect repairs, cleaning of signs and cutting back vegetation.
- Regarding data to be collected, the Head of Highways commented that this needed to be considered with captured data informing the service operational plan going forward.
- Regarding whether landowners could be held responsible for cutting back their overgrown verges and clearing up mess from their property e.g. wet leaves falling onto cycle paths, the Head of Transport and the Environment explained that if a landowner had got some outgrowth that was impacting on the public highway, a discussion and a request was initiated. This could ultimately result in a letter being sent explaining that if action was not taken to rectify the situation, the council would do the work and charge the landowner.
- The Executive Director of Place commented that members might wish to put forward a recommendation to engage in an active media campaign appealing to people who have overgrown hedges or trees and clearing up leaves and soil that encroach onto footpaths from overgrown verges.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That areas of concern, not already considered within the report for consideration as part of the ongoing service improvements be noted.
3. To support an active media campaign with regards to overgrown hedges and foliage, where it encroaches upon footpaths and cycle paths.

The Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure requested that the above recommendations be sent to both The Assistant Director of Infrastructure and himself to pick up. The chairman also requested that this be noted at a forthcoming Cabinet meeting, as part of the regular scrutiny items on the agenda.

38 Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP 4)

The committee received the report of the Head of Transport and the Environment which provided an update on progress with the development of the next Local Transport Plan for Shropshire (LTP4) and built upon the previous report brought to the committee in December 2020.

The Head of Transport and the Environment was in attendance to present the report along with the Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure. He explained that transport had a key role to play in maintaining sustainable communities, encouraging economic growth and strengthening links with environmental and health agendas.

It was noted that a number of theme workshops had taken place and discussions had been held with a number of groups to obtain their views. A young people's workshop was in the process of being planned and a member workshop was scheduled to take place in January 2022.

The Engagement Plan that had been developed as part of the LTP4 development was outlined to the committee. This detailed the programme of completed, ongoing and forthcoming engagement opportunities in relation to the LTP.

The Head of Transport and the Environment responded to questions from the committee, during which, the following points were noted / explained:

- The LTP had been brought to scrutiny before, details of which were referenced at the end of the report.
- LPT4 was within budget.
- As the LTP4 involved a huge amount of work and was a 'Whole Council' solution, it was suggested that the chairman of the Place Overview Committee should establish if it should be overseen by the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee.
- The work that had been previously undertaken in the development of the LTP had been used and transposed into LTP4, with all evidence and data having been checked to make sure that it was still live and valid.
- Whilst the previous LTP3 was brought to scrutiny some years ago, it had never been formally endorsed by the Cabinet. However, it was referenced within the report to the committee, as well as previous scrutiny reports, and was also on the council's website.
- It was hoped that the draft LTP4 would go to Cabinet around February / March / April time and would therefore, probably come back to scrutiny for consideration in February 2022.
- It was commented that when talking about active modes, the language used should be stronger, with the word 'encouraging' being replaced with words such as 'enabling' or 'facilitating', given all the government's current targets and guidelines.
- Reference was made to a council motion that had been agreed in February 2021 and it was commented that traffic reduction and electrification did not come across very strongly within the report. In addition, the council motion had specifically made reference to public health being an originator and a consultee in developing the LTP and there was no evidence of this within the report, with the term 'public health' not appearing. The other part of the

council motion that had been approved was the need to see a LTP which had specific carbon reduction targets and the Head of Transport and the Environment was asked to provide reassurance that this commitment would be upheld. He responded that the report presented to the committee was about methodology and approach of implementation and delivery. Comments regarding decarbonisation, modes of travel and public health were very valid and as the work progressed, this would be evident.

- It was not just major road schemes that were being looked at e.g. conversations were being held regarding Baschurch and Whitchurch railway stations.
- The Head of Transport and the Environment commented that whilst he was not opposed to a member of the council being on the Performance Board referred to within recommendation five of the report, this was an issue that needed to be worked through and a discussion was needed.

RESOLVED:

That the Place Overview Committee:

- Note the progress made to date in line with the agreed approach for development of the next Local Transport Plan (LTP4) for Shropshire.
- Note the approach taken for engagement with stakeholders and the public.
- Support the proposed Members workshop on LTP 4 to be held in January 2022.
- Request that a further report on the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP4) is reviewed by this committee prior submission to Cabinet for approval for public consultation.
- Agree that (assuming Cabinet approval of LTP4) a Performance Board, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Transport is arranged (to include an appropriate member). It is proposed that this Board would meet quarterly to review the implementation and performance of the approved plan. This Board would also oversee the production of an annual report on LTP4 which would be presented to this committee for further discussion prior to general release to ensure progression and delivery of intended outcomes of LTP4.
- That continued LTP development ensures that council decisions in February including the sustainable transport hierarchy principles, the involvement of public health and pathways to net zero including interim targets are fully embedded.

39 Scrutiny of Planning Enforcement - Draft recommendations

The committee received the report of the Scrutiny Officer. In his absence, the Executive Director of Place outlined the slide that accompanied the answer to Mr Mulloy's public question that he had asked earlier in the meeting. The slide detailed facts and figures relating to enforcement in Shropshire from 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021 and would be circulated to all committee members after the

meeting. It would also be attached to the web page for the meeting and the signed minutes.

A question was asked regarding whether an updated list of all outstanding and past planning enforcement cases could be sent to all town and parish councils as soon as practicable. Upon being put to the vote, this proposed amendment to the recommendations was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations as detailed within the report of the Scrutiny Officer be approved.

40 Place Overview Committee Work Programme

The committee received the report of the Scrutiny Officer.

A member of the committee asked if the Kier contract could be reviewed at a future meeting. The chairman agreed to have a discussion with the Scrutiny Officer to establish where it could be fitted into the work programme, which was already very full.

A member of the committee asked if they could consider the WSP contract prior to it going to Cabinet or Council. The chairman requested that the Committee Officer make the Scrutiny Officer aware of this.

RESOLVED:

That, with the addition of the WSP contract being added into the work programme, the proposed committee work programme attached as appendix 1 to the report be agreed.

41 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

Members noted that the next meeting of the Place Overview Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 27th January 2022 at 2.00 p.m.

Signed: (Chairman)

Date: