

**Committee and Date**

Council
14th December 2023

Item

Public



Annual Report – Communities Overview Committee 2022/23

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Gwilym Butler		
Scrutiny Chair:	Robert Macey		

1. Synopsis

Communities Overview Committee looked at a range of key topics in 2022/23 which are summarised in this paper.

2. Executive Summary

The Shropshire Plan includes ‘Healthy Organisation’ as a priority outcome and the Strategic Objective that “We will ensure councillors are supported to advocate for their constituents but to also be ambassadors for the council”.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the governance of the council, where councillors who are not on Cabinet can hold decision makers to account and make evidence recommendations to inform and influence the development of policy.

This report shares the annual statement for 2022/23 for the Communities Overview Committee.

3. Recommendations

Members are asked to note and comment on the 2022/23 annual statement for Communities Overview Committee.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 Effective Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) is a feature of the Council's governance arrangements, particularly where the Council is operating executive arrangements. There are a range of factors that could result in risks to Council of not doing O&S effectively.
- Failure to challenge and hold decision makers to account.
 - Failure to link O&S work to the delivery of the council's priorities and risk management – failure to demonstrate added value
 - Failure to carry out thorough and appropriate research to make evidence-based recommendations.
 - Failure to engage partners and providers.
 - Failure to ensure that structures and models of operation are fit for purpose and match ambition and available resources.
 - Failure to ensure that O&S can operate as the voice of communities.
 - Failure to draw on member knowledge and experience to inform policy development.
- 4.2 To mitigate, tolerate or eradicate these risks, enablers for effective scrutiny include:
- Operating in an apolitical manner.
 - Clarity of vision and purpose
 - Overview and Scrutiny support availability, capability and capacity
 - Effective engagement and commitment by Members and officers at all levels, including Cabinet, Opposition Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs and Senior Officers who play a central role in setting the tone and direction
 - Robust work programming and prioritisation of topics with clear objectives and expected impacts
 - Access to and availability of robust data and intelligence
 - Good relationship with partners and providers
- 4.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committees have remits that cover the breadth of the work of the Council, as well as looking externally including Health Services and provision through Health Overview and Scrutiny requirements.
- 4.4 Topics for Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes are identified based on a number of different considerations including an understanding of risks to the Council, employees, people who use services, to service themselves, and to communities. These may be identified through reviewing performance information and comparing with others, changes to national and local policies, budget information, feedback from communities and customers/service users, feedback from partners/providers, and reports from regulators.

- 4.5 During Overview and Scrutiny work evidence will be gathered that builds on this understanding to inform the development of conclusions and evidence-based recommendations.
- 4.6 The use of external peer challenge such as that offered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny provides objective review and feedback about opportunities to develop the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny. The Council carries out a regular review of Overview and Scrutiny to collect feedback from Members and Officers on what is going well and where there are opportunities for continuous improvement.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with the annual statements of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees set out in this report.
- 5.2 Effective Overview and Scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations. These can be informed by learning from best practice and an understanding of "what works" at other similar local authorities, as well as developing a robust picture of the situation locally based on data, intelligence and insights. Where adopted recommendations can help with the efficiency and effectiveness of services that can be delivered differently, as well as informing the development of current and new policies.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes directly link to the Shropshire Plan priorities, including Healthy Environment which is built around climate change and carbon reduction, and the natural and historic environment.
- 6.2 Climate change and carbon reduction related issues are directly identified in the remit and therefore focus of the Place Overview Committee i.e.
- delivery of the agreed lower carbon footprint and emissions targets, including air quality, by the Council and its partners;
 - actions to protect, enhance and value Shropshire's our natural resources and respect the historic environment;
 - arrangements to safeguard and promote a clean and green environment;
 - the delivery of work to reduce landfill and waste;
 - management and development of the physical and digital infrastructure

7 Background

- 7.1 During the year the committee worked on topics across its remit, but had particular focus on the development of the Economic Growth Strategy and Housing.

Economic Growth Strategy

- 7.2 The committee considered the draft Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2027 over a couple of meetings.

- 7.3 They started by looking at the framework and content of the strategy and outlined the strategy's core principles and themes, taking an interest in and focus on the consultation process and the engagement of Members.
- 7.4 Key points arising from member questioning included:
- that key infrastructure projects such as the Northwest Relief Road and the Mile End Roundabout were key to the strategy and that connectivity was a key theme to attract to businesses to Shropshire.
 - a vital element of the strategy was the importance of encouraging young people to be involved in the economy to ensure they do not move away from Shropshire.
 - broadband and transport links were essential enablers for the trend in working from home and people moving out of cities and to places such as Shropshire
 - recognition that there had been a lack of KPI's was taken on board and it was explained that the development of KPI's would be included in the action plan being developed to implement key themes in the strategy.
 - that post the Covid pandemic there had been a number of changes and Officers were now working with local businesses to understand the economy in Shropshire and this would feature in the action plan.
 - that future governance arrangements would be essential to the success of the strategy and there was the potential for the current economic taskforce to evolve into an Economic Investment Board with overview and oversight of the strategy going forward and would monitor and review delivery.
- 7.5 The committee were joined by members of the Place Overview Committee to follow up on the development of the strategy, learning more about the draft framework, the supporting action plan and development of key performance indicators (KPIs), and associated governance arrangements.
- 7.6 This included hearing from two members of the Economic Task Force representing the partnership, the Chief Executive of the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and the Development Manager for the Federation of Small Businesses, as well as from the Council's Climate Change Team Manager and Assistant Director for Economy and Place.
- 7.7 Their recommendations included:
- That a Key Performance Indicator in relation to the Shropshire pound be developed.
 - That the Committee receive an annual review and update, including a review of challenges and any specific areas that the Committee may need to look at more closely (e.g. young workforce mobility), to which Place Committee members were welcome to attend.
 - That climate change should be included as a key theme within the Action Plan.
 - That KPI's to support the Economic Growth Strategy and the Shropshire Plan should be developed to provide an overview of progress and impact, and insights to inform future development of plans and the strategies.
 - That an annual report of progress and performance on the delivery and impact of the Economic Growth Strategy through the Shropshire Economic Partnership should be published.

Draft Housing Allocations Policy

- 7.8 The committee started its work on housing, looking at the draft allocations policy and scheme for allocations to Council owned stock and nominations to housing associations. They considered the background of the need for the review, understanding that there were limitations system in place and that these included a lack of preference for people with local connection, limited differentiation for different housing needs and the current policy did not allow for discretion.
- 7.9 They reflected that the changes in the draft policy responded to the need for the Council to comply with legislation. Responses to their questions confirmed that:
- With regards to individuals fleeing domestic abuse, it was clarified that an individual could apply to any local authority and local connection did not apply. Ukrainian refugees also did not need to show a local connection, discretion would be used. Prison leavers would also be classed as exceptional and discretion could be used and it would usually be based on the individual's family connections, preventing homelessness, and preventing reoffending. Each case was considered on an individual basis.
 - In terms of joint tenancies, landlords were hesitant to introduce joint tenancy because of the wider implications of legislation, it this could not be stipulated.
 - The vast majority of individuals were able to make their own bids on a weekly basis and choose the properties they wish to bid for.
- 7.10 Members also asked about the disposal of stock by housing associations and learned about the calculation that the associations were looking at to establish whether the rental income would support the work needed to bring a property up to net zero energy efficiency levels.
- 7.11 The Committee felt that reductions in available affordable housing stock was a problem across the whole of the local authority area. They enquired about whether the Council could lobby central government for stop gap funding to help the issue.

Social Housing – Understanding the Housing Market in Shropshire and the Housing Strategy,

- 7.12 The Committee started a deep dive investigation to understand social housing need in Shropshire with the objective of informing the future review and update of the Housing Strategy. [As this work bridged the move to the new way of delivering Overview and Scrutiny the final report went to the Economy and Environment OSC and from that committee to Cabinet.]
- 7.13 The work was informed by hearing from the chief executives of a number of Private Registered Providers, and it was also developed through constructive working and challenge with the Assistant Director Homes and Communities, the Housing Strategy and Development Manager, and the Head of Service Housing, Resettlement and Housing Services Management.
- 7.14 The work highlighted that social housing can help people who cannot afford to pay the levels of private rent in a location to have access to a suitable home in that area.

- 7.15 The Committee’s work considered different socio-economic factors that inform demand for social housing as well as recognising the role that social housing plays in enabling sustainable communities and the economy. This included recent pressures arising from the pandemic, the rising cost of living, and increasing demand and competition for private rental properties with rising values of private rents.
- 7.16 Members also identified that the availability of social housing located in or close to a place of work can be beneficial for the environment, reducing the need to travel by car, especially where access to public transport may be limited. The example of an ageing population with the associated demand for domiciliary care was referenced, where carers had to travel into the communities they serve, in part because there were no homes there that they could afford to live in.
- 7.17 Six recommendations were made through this work, with the aim that they help to shape and inform the Housing Strategy and help to bring the Strategic Housing function more centrally into the thinking, planning and delivery of other key strategies such as the economic growth strategy and transport plans. This includes greater alignment between the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy teams.
- 7.18 All recommendations were accepted by Cabinet and the delivery of the action plan is being monitored by the Economy and Environment OSC

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Meeting Papers for the Communities Overview Committee April 2022 to March 2023

Local Member: All

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]