

**Committee and Date**

Council
21 March 2024

Item

Public



Annual Report – Place Overview Committee 2022/23

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Scrutiny Chair:	Joyce Barrow		

1. Synopsis

Place 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-based recommendations to inform and influence the development of policy.

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

3. Recommendations

Members are asked to note and comment on the 2022/23 annual statement for Place 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 relationships 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 services 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.

7 Background

- 7.1 Through 2023/24 the committee maintained a full programme of work across the range of its remit. The following sets out some of the key topics that were considered and highlights the key points that were made in the work done.

Waste Minimisation Strategy

- 7.2 The committee considered early proposals for a Waste Minimisation Strategy. This included taking account of proposals to charge for green waste against contemporary proposals by the government, in a green paper, to subsidise LAs to not charge for green waste.
- 7.3 They did not wholly accept the view in the report presented to them that homes without gardens subsidised the green waste collection of those with gardens, and that an increase in households and population in coming years would increase the cost. Members emphasised that there are a number of services that the council funds, without additional charges, that are not used universally, plus that the increase in population and households would increase council tax revenue.

- 7.4 The committee highlighted that food waste collection could not be charged for so the current collection combined arrangements of food and green waste would need to be amended which would mean needing to develop an additional collection stream.
- 7.5 They recommended that the Council should await the final position of government on subsidising LAs to not charge for green waste before setting a local strategy and associated policy.

Parking Strategy

- 7.6 Members took the opportunity to have early input into proposals to review the Parking Strategy to help influence and inform the scope of the work. This included the identification of:
- The need for a review of extensions of pay and display schemes beyond town centres.
 - The need for the review to cover on-street and off-street parking with a number of Members reporting on issues with on street parking in residential areas.
 - Questions about finances and the £2.7m income generation for car parking set out in the budget book and £1.6m internal recharges, and a request for more financial details – as net parking income had dropped due to activity not fully recovering after Covid.
 - The need to ensure economic viability of towns when reviewing different categories of car parks and the need to understand that one solution would not fit all market towns and locations, with a need to do what was right in each location. They highlighted that a more dynamic approach was needed to reflect the individual needs of different local economies and communities.
 - The importance of including town and parish councils in the review.
 - The need to ensure early alignment with the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan, and Movement Strategy which was progressing at pace.
 - Questions about the impact on the strategy and impact on rural bus services if the Levelling Up bid was not successful.
 - Actions not yet implemented from the original review should be part of this review and built into any new model.
- 7.7 They supported the review of the current parking strategy, taking account of the points raised by the committee, and identified that there should be further scrutiny input into proposals for the review before they went to Cabinet.

New Housing Developments Task and Finish Group

- 7.8 The committee received the report of the Housing Development Completions Task and Finish Group who had focused on
- Understanding the specific issues that residents and builders of a newly completed housing development might face, and where responsibility for those issues sits.
 - Examining the policy and legislative framework that results in these challenges for residents, housing developers, and the local authority.
 - Researching the extent to which these issues may exist with Shropshire, and
 - Making policy recommendations that will ensure that housing developments are completed fully and at pace.

- 7.9 The task and finish group undertook site visits, met with Housing Developers, considered accounts from Shropshire residents, and received briefings from officers.
- 7.10 Following their consideration of the report and further discussions the committee's recommendations, that were agreed by Cabinet, were that Shropshire Council:
- Should always encourage the local authority to use its own building control service for its own developments or those of its ALMO (Arm's Length Management Organisation).
 - Requests its building control and communications services collaborate to develop a plan to increase awareness of building control, the New Homes Quality Board and the Housing Ombudsman, to would-be homeowners in Shropshire.
 - Includes building control in the programme of induction training provided to elected members following all-council elections in 2025.
 - Supports Cornovii and STAR Housing's work in creating their own open space management company.
 - Proceeds to recruit a dedicated officer with a specific remit of ensuring well designed, high-quality, coherent, biodiverse open space on new developments.
 - Reviews its Section 38/278 process to create a greater focus on securing legal agreements early in the planning process.

Keir Contract Performance Arrangements

- 7.11 The committee considered the performance of Kier in the previous year and heard about some of the positive changes that had taken place to improve the contract management and contract performance and value for money. Identification of areas of concern in Keir performance for further review as part of the highway's improvement programme.
- 7.12 Through responses to these questions the Committee learned about the work that had taken place in relation to the Kier contract that resulted in there being a much clearer understanding of where they could add value and where Council self-initiated direct work would be more effective.
- 7.13 Some of the key points that arose from the committee's consideration of the issues were that:
- Compared to a year before a wider range of interventions were in place for repairing potholes e.g. 'Find and Fix' on the unclassified network.
 - Kier had now fully migrated to the Council's 'Confirm' software system, which provided far greater levels of transparency and synchronisation of management systems.
 - Joint working was undertaken with utility companies who were required to provide their annual plans to the Council in advance, to allow for road resurfacing work to be co-ordinated as far as possible.
 - Both Shropshire Council and Kier had progressed restructure proposals which continue to be refined as the service evolves and ensures that the correct level of resources at technician level is in place.

- An Engagement Officer had been appointed by the Council which would result in more effective working with supply chain partners and improved community engagement.

LED Lighting Programme

- 7.14 It was acknowledged that from a Salix finance delivery programme perspective the LED Lighting programme had not been delivered as quickly or as effectively as the Council would have liked.
- 7.15 Members explored this and learned that at the time the council received the money it was not well equipped to deliver the programme and was also dealing with a significant amount of failure demand placing core services under huge pressure. Resources had been stressed which made delivery of the programme very difficult.
- 7.16 They heard that amendments to the initial business case had given the Council much better control. Tightened up governance procedures and the reshaping of the streetlighting service helped to ensure that the programme moved forward.
- 7.17 During discussion the committee asked a range of questions to understand the issues and options to take the programme forward:
- what were the skills or capacity that were missing and how would learning from this experience help inform future projects?
 - was the key issue the lack of in-house capacity?
 - was there a current shortage of parts?
 - was the 28-day repair target currently achievable and if not, when would it be?
 - when would phase 2 of the project be announced?
 - would lamps be fitted with sensors that automatically reported lamp failure?
 - how often were columns inspected and how often should they be replaced?
 - what were the plans for the heritage columns in the county?
- 7.18 The focus on Keir contract performance identified that Street Lighting performance targets in the contract were not being achieved. The Members explored the issues to understand what was contributing to the situation and what the Council was doing as the contract manager, hearing about:
- prioritisation of replacement of faulty SOx street lights with new LED units in locations with critical safety issues,
 - how reporting of issues through Fix My Street would help with visibility of what is reported and to provide feedback when action was taken in terms of customer perceptions and expectation,
 - provide clearer information on Fix My Street to confirm where delays in street lighting repairs were occurring due to the LED replacement programme.
- 7.19 The Committee recommended that
- a briefing session on a wider set of issues be provided to all members from which potential topics for scrutiny could be identified, and
 - that for clarity, performance reporting for KPIs that were well below target should include the actual numbers as well as the proportion (%) achieved to help demonstrate the scale of the issue with more tangible data.

Planning Committee Structures

- 7.20 The Committee reviewed arrangements for planning committees and in doing so considered the impact of previous changes to the current 2 committee arrangements and whether this remained fit for purpose.
- 7.21 They highlighted the importance of consistency in seeking local member views on applications where the Planning Officer view differed to views shared by Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs). They also emphasised the need to align the length of time that T&PCs and Shropshire Councillors have to respond to planning applications in their area so that they are the same.
- 7.22 Linked to this, they recommended to Cabinet that the deadline for responses to planning applications by both Shropshire Councillors and Town and Parish Councils should be the same, and that the current arrangement of two planning committees be maintained.

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 Place Overview Committee April 2022 to March 2023

Local Member: All

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]