



Committee and Date

Economy and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11th July 2024

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2024

**In the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

2.00 pm - 3.45 pm

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend Committee Officer

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Present

Councillor Joyce Barrow (Chairman), Steve Davenport (Vice Chairman), Garry Burchett, Rosemary Dartnall, Roger Evans, Nick Hignett, Ed Potter, Paul Wynn and David Vasmer (Substitute) (substitute for Rob Wilson)

32 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rob Wilson (Councillor David Vasmer was in attendance as his substitute), Councillor Julian Dean and Councillor Pam Moseley.

33 Disclosable Interests

Members were reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

During Agenda Item 6 (Progress against the actions from the Social Housing and Housing Strategy Report) Councillor Garry Burchett declared an interest when a question was asked regarding HomePoint, as he was registered on HomePoint as a client. He then left the room for the remainder of this item.

34 Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED:

- That the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 25th January 2024 be approved as a correct record.
- That the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting (Call In of Cabinet Decision on Sports Village Transformation) held on 9th February 2024 be approved as a correct record.

- That the minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting (Call In of Cabinet Decision on Parking Tariffs, Operations and Development) held on 19th February 2024 be approved as a correct record.

Regarding the 9th February 2024 minutes, a question was asked regarding the resolved section, which stated that future plans for the Quarry Pool would be dealt with 'separately at a later date' and it was requested that the Executive Director Place be asked when this might be.

Regarding the 19th February 2024 minutes, a few points of order were raised by a member, as having referred the Cabinet Decision on Parking Tariffs, Operations and Development back to Cabinet for reconsideration, it took 58 days for the appropriate Cabinet meeting to reconsider it and not 15 working days, as is stated within the Council's Constitution. Concern was also expressed as no one from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended the Cabinet meeting when the decision was reconsidered and it was also felt that not all issues raised at the Call In meeting had been taken into account. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggested that the member raise their concerns with the Council's Legal Team and that the Scrutiny Manager also make the Monitoring Officer aware of the concerns.

35 Public Question Time

None were received.

36 Member Question Time

None were received.

At this point in the meeting, the Assistant Director Homes and Communities was asked to provide an update regarding the Racecourse Crescent site in Shrewsbury that Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing (STAR) was developing to deliver new Council housing. She explained that work on site had ceased in February 2024 as a result of Tricas Construction going into administration and that STAR Housing were currently in the process of procuring an alternative contractor to complete the scheme. Whilst there had not been any reports of anti-social behaviour, a concern was raised regarding this and the security of the site whilst it was standing empty. The Assistant Director Homes and Communities commented that she would find out and report back regarding when the new procurement of a contractor was expected to be completed, the security arrangements that were in place on the site and the situation regarding insurance and bonds.

37 Progress against the actions from the Social Housing and Housing Strategy Report

The committee received the report of the Assistant Director Homes and Communities which updated them on the progress and actions taken regarding Social Housing and

the Housing Strategy, as reported to their 9th November 2023 meeting, and highlighted any changes that had arisen, including those stemming from the medium-term financial strategy.

The Assistant Director Homes and Communities took members through each of the six recommendations detailed in the action plan updating them of action taken to date and further action that was being planned. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services was also in attendance.

A question was asked regarding recommendation three of the action plan and the Big Town Plan as the timescale against this action stated 'ongoing'. In responding, the Assistant Director Homes and Communities explained that she would obtain a more definite date to put against this action point. However, work was progressing and it was important to make sure that the right mix of homes were provided in Shrewsbury, especially in the town centre.

A question was asked regarding the planned upgrade of the Abris system that sits behind HomePoint, as detailed in recommendation one of the action plan and it was confirmed that the upgrade would result in an improved service for users, given that the current version of Abris was not the latest version. Regarding the advertisement system on HomePoint, it was commented that local need should be considered at the beginning of the process, with people not being allowed to bid on a property where local need would apply. The Assistant Director Homes and Communities responded that she would take this away to discuss with the team.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Garry Burchett declared an interest as he was registered on HomePoint as a client. He then left the room for the remainder of this item.

Members were informed that the Council did buy houses to use for social housing.

With regard to the Right to Buy Scheme, the Government had recently announced a change in policy and whilst the Council had not put forward any comment about it as yet, they would consider doing so. It was noted that local authorities have never been able to keep 100% of the Right to Buy proceeds.

RESOLVED:

1. That committee notes the progress towards delivering the recommendations agreed upon at Cabinet in September 2023 and the progress against the actions from the Social Housing and Housing Strategy Report presented to Scrutiny on 9th November 2023.
2. That committee reviews and provides feedback on the action plan delivery and planned work and agrees to receive future updates on progress.

38 Progress against the actions from the New Housing Developments Work

The committee received the report of the Assistant Director Economy and Place which provided them with an interim update on the progress being made on the

Housing Development action plan as agreed at their meeting on 9th November 2023. It was noted that although the review period was twelve months, an interim update had been requested.

The Assistant Director Economy and Place took the committee through the action plan and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services was also in attendance. It was noted that whilst not all of the tracked changes were highlighted in red, all the information had been included and was correct.

In responding to questions, committee discussion and comments covered:

- Data on the various council schemes that are in progress and how many were using the Council's building control service would be shared with the committee.
- Building Control Officers would embrace any support and help by members in making sure that the various parts of the council used their service.
- An Officer had recently been appointed with a specific remit of ensuring well-designed, high quality coherent, biodiverse open space on new developments and when the action plan is next considered by the committee, the Officer will be invited to attend the meeting.
- Regarding the resourcing of S38/278 work, The Assistant Director Economy and Place explained that this needed attention as it has been under resourced for more than ten years, resulting in a lot of legacy cases. As to whether there was a priority system in place, Officers were working through a list and some additional temporary resource had been taken on.
- Regarding the length of time between a development being finished and final adoption, it was confirmed that there were no penalties in place for developers where estates were not adopted as quickly as one would like and residents were being let down. The Assistant Director Economy and Place explained that unfortunately, it can take years for roads and infrastructure on an estate to be completed.
- Regarding whether the council could buy into the open market for private companies to oversee agreements on an open market basis, the Assistant Director Economy and Place commented that the ideal situation was for Shropshire Council Officers to do this work.
- The Assistant Director Economy and Place was not aware of a league table showing the position of Shropshire Council compared to other Councils in relation to S38/278 agreements.
- A question was asked regarding dog control orders in relation to unadopted and private roads. In responding, the Assistant Director Economy and Place commented that whilst this was not her area of expertise, those that owned the road would be responsible for what happened on that road. The question would need to be directed to the Council's Legal Team to advise further on this.
- A detailed list containing those roads that were adopted in Shropshire and those that were not would be provided to the committee, provided that the information could be easily compiled.
- Communication was a common thread that had featured in both the Task and Finish Group and the action plan. This would continue to be addressed in

terms of how information is shared with the public informing them of the things that the Council can and cannot do.

- The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services commented that a press release could be issued informing people of the issues that they may experience if they do not use the Council's Building Control Team.
- Where roads had not been adopted, the Council's Legal Department would need to be consulted as to whether the names of the developers could be shared.

RESOLVED:

That the committee note the progress being made on the agreed action plan as highlighted in red on Appendix A of the report.

39 Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Scrutiny Manager presented this item and members were informed that the River Water Quality topic would be considered at their 11th July 2024 meeting.

A question was asked regarding the Standing Climate Change and Environment Task and Finish Group and whether it was still running as at a recent Scrutiny Chairs meeting, a decision had been taken to cease all current Task and Finish Groups. However, this decision had not been communicated to the various Scrutiny Committees. In responding, the Scrutiny Manager explained that whilst the Standing Climate Change and Environment Task and Finish Group had been agreed to be set up at the committee's last meeting on 25th January 2024, a Scrutiny Chairs meeting had subsequently been held and it was at this meeting that members had made the decision that Task and Finish Groups would not be operating in the Council this year. This would therefore apply to the Standing Climate Change and Environment Task and Finish Group. In addressing the concern expressed over this decision, the Chairman explained that unfortunately, whilst good results had been seen from the Task and Finish Groups over the last six months, the Council was in financial difficulties and the current situation was difficult as it was unclear as to what would happen to the scrutiny team and other council staff. It was noted that there was a Climate Change Advisory Board that came under the Climate Change Team and some of the work of the Task and Finish Group might be addressed by them.

Regarding the work programme, the Chairman made the following suggestions of topics that the committee might want to consider looking at in future meetings:

- Devolving ground maintenance to Town and Parish Councils.
- Community Safety and specifically CCTV.
- Flooding - what the Council could do to disseminate information and how could the Environment Agency role be improved by joint communication?
- Temporary Accommodation.

During the committee discussions, it was agreed to add the topic of devolving ground maintenance to Town and Parish Councils onto the work programme.

Potholes and communication with both members and Parish and Town Councils was also raised as a possible work programme topic. In responding, the Chairman commented that she would not be in favour of adding this to the work programme, as the committee had looked at this numerous times in the past, Fix My Street had greatly improved and the problem of potholes was an issue across the country, not just within Shropshire. The Scrutiny Manager commented that having listened to the discussion, local member engagement and communication around road closures and diversions was being identified as a recurring issue and it was agreed that communication be added to the committee’s work programme. This would involve looking at the protocols that are in place for working with local members and local member engagement regarding road works, both prior to any work being undertaken and diversions being put in place. It was also suggested that third party company involvement be looked at in terms of whether protocols are being followed, what happens if third parties cause damage and how the council would deal with the situation.

The Scrutiny Manager outlined the topics that were planned to be considered at the committee’s 11th July and 14th November 2024 meetings, as well as a few areas that the committee might wish to consider relating to their remit, such as Community Safety and Crime and Disorder Partnerships and Flooding.

In concluding this item, a couple of comments were made regarding potholes and how disappointing it was that this topic would not be put on the work programme as members of the public were dissatisfied with the issue and the reforms that had been talked about in the past were not working. In responding, it was suggested that Kier be asked to attend an online meeting with members in order to address their concerns.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Manager update the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme to reflect the discussions of the committee.

40 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the next meeting of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 11th July 2024 commencing at 2.00 p.m.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: