



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Council
23 rd July 2015
10.00am

<u>Item</u>
14
Public

**Councillor Steve Davenport
Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee Chairman**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15
ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

1.0 Summary

1.1 This is an overview of the work of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee during 2014-15 and its plans for the forthcoming year.

2.0 What have we done?

The Committee has met formally on seven occasions over the last year and also held an additional meeting in December to review the Empty Homes Strategy following a call-in from the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group. The Members of the Work Programme Group have also met on three occasions to consider topics to be added or removed from the Committee's work programme.

2.1 Economic Growth Redesign

The Committee set up a Task and Finish Group to undertake a substantial piece of work. The Group considered the most effective methods of business engagement to take forward to the new Economic Growth operating model.

The Task and Finish Group worked in a number of different ways:

- It conducted a web based review of the Council's geographic and statistical neighbours' economic growth activity;
- A visit was undertaken to view Economic Development assets at two business park sites in Shrewsbury;
- A desk top review of assets was undertaken with maps detailing workshops and land holdings. Financial information was considered for both individual assets and the overall portfolio;

- The group reviewed the management of the Economic Development Portfolio and the transactions that took place for successful lettings and management;
- Council Members were asked to disseminate a questionnaire to local businesses to assess their business engagement with the Council;
- The Portfolio Holder for Business Growth, ip&e, Culture and Commissioning was interviewed.
- Two prominent commercial property agents were invited to answer questions on their interaction with the Council and to give views on how improvements could be made; and
- A process map proposing future engagement was studied and discussed.

The group's final report fully supported the aims of the Economic Growth Redesign proposals and acknowledged that Shropshire Council working in conjunction with partners had responsibility for promoting Shropshire as a business location. It recommended greater business intelligence and cohesive business engagement, working with stakeholders to allow a more complete approach to facilitating economic growth, underpinned by the provision of standalone website to act as a shop window for the County. It also made recommendations on the management of the Council's property assets and for Cabinet to provide direction on the Council's future role as investor and developer. These recommendations were all accepted by Cabinet on 20th May 2015.

2.2 Empty Homes Strategy

An additional meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was called following a call-in by the Liberal Democrat Leader of the Cabinet's decision to endorse the Empty Homes Strategy 2014 - 2017. The Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee also endorsed the Strategy but agreed to set up the Empty Homes Strategy Task and Finish Group with the aim of developing a better understanding of the national and local situation of empty homes and how the Empty Homes Team work. It also considered the funding for Empty Homes work, the generation of the New Homes Bonus, and how additional funding could be utilised to further the work of the Team.

The Group met five times and received detailed information on the work of the Empty homes team. They closely examined the working relationship between Council Tax and the Empty Homes Team and considered possible improvements in the Team's access to Council Tax information. The Group also examined how the Team's work was funded and how additional funding could increase the return of the investment in empty homes work. The Group's final report is expected to be considered by the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 2nd July 2015, before being considered by Cabinet at the end of July 2015.

2.3 Planning Committee Structures

The Committee re-established the Planning Committee Task and Finish Group, to consider:

- the mechanism for delivering efficient Planning committees and consistent decision making;
- the potential for a single Planning Committee; and
- to consider the options for dealing more effectively with controversial planning.

The work of the Task and Finish Group is ongoing but it has already received evidence from Members and Town and Parish Council Members via an on-line questionnaire, the group has visited Cheshire West and Chester Council to observe its Planning Committee, and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the existing Planning Committees have been invited to give their views.

2.4 Tourism

Tourism Officers updated Members on the work undertaken to promote tourism in the County since the completion of the work of the Tourism Task and Finish Group. Members agreed on the importance of the work to the local economy and the need for its continued support.

Members noted the recommendations of the Visitor Economy Manager's 'Delivering Shropshire's Visitor Economy Strategies through Destination Partnerships Report' and also noted the significant contribution made by the visitor economy to the global economy of Shropshire both through supporting employment and visitor spend. The Committee requested that further information be made available to them once the outcome of the LEP funding bid was known. Members also requested that Officers consider exploration of the potential for Members as a resource for promoting Shropshire.

2.5 Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing

The Senior Commissioner for Public Protection was invited to brief Members on the Council's system for licensing private hire vehicles and hackney carriages, and the Policy which underpinned it.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions about the licensing of drivers and vehicles, and how the Policy supported public safety and safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. The Senior Commissioner for Public Protection emphasised the need for Members appointed to Licensing sub-committees to undergo regular licensing training and this was supported by the Committee.

2.6 Business Rates

The Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance with the Financial Advice Manager briefed the Committee on the Business Rates System. Members heard how Business Rates were calculated and about the mandatory and discretionary reliefs available to businesses.

Members noted that the Council could not set its own Business Rates, the Valuation Office provided property valuations and a multiplier set by Central

Government determined the Business Rates levied according to the size of the business.

2.7 Progress in Delivering the Council's Financial Strategy

In November 2014, the Committee received the Quarter 1 Performance Report 2014/15 and the Business Plan and Financial Strategy 2014- 2017. The Director of Commissioning attended the meeting to enable Members to question him on these documents. The Performance and Design Team Leader also attended and Members considered a number of Dash Boards that brought together financial and business information.

Members raised concerns regarding the tourism economy and requested that these be noted. They endorsed the importance of the economy as a priority within the revised Business Plan.

At the end of January 2015, The Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance updated Members on the Progress of the Financial Strategy and Members considered a report on it that was considered by Cabinet in December 2014.

Members agreed that they would add the impact of the County's age demographics and the effect of this on the economy to the Committee's work programme.

3.0 What are our Future Plans?

3.1 The Committee's Work Programme Group met on three occasions to update and revise the Committee's Work Programme.

3.2 The Committee's on-going work programme includes:

- Economic Redesign Work - update
- Tourism
- Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy
- Planning Committees
- Telecom Connectivity
- The Museum Service
- LEP Funding
- Apprenticeships
- Provision of Student Accommodation following the establishment of the University Centre, Shrewsbury
- Age Demographics of the County and the effect this has in relation to employment and business

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
Reports to Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998

Environmental Appraisal

There are no environmental issues relating to this report.

Risk Management Appraisal

There are no risks associated with this report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

Consultation is a component of Scrutiny work to collect information to support the development of conclusions and recommendations.

Cabinet Members

Councillors Mal Price, Steve Charmley and Claire Wild

Local Member/s

All

Appendices

None