

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 16 October 2018 commencing at 4:30 pm

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor P W Awford
Councillor R E Allen

and Councillors:

G J Bocking, K J Cromwell, P A Godwin, R M Hatton, H C McLain, P E Stokes, M G Sztymiak, H A E Turbyfield and M J Williams

also present:

Councillors G F Blackwell and R E Garnham

OS.39 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 39.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was taken as read.
- 39.2 The Chair welcomed the representatives from the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Team to the meeting and advised that he would be taking Agenda Item 10 – Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee Update after Agenda Item 7 – Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel Update; he indicated that the Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel was in attendance to give the update. It was noted that the Lead Member for Organisational Development was also present as an observer.

OS.40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 40.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J E Day, D T Foyle, T A Spencer and P D Surman. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 41.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.
- 41.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.42 MINUTES

- 42.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2018, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OS.43 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

43.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 14-19. Members were asked to determine whether there were any questions for the relevant Lead Members and what support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give to the work contained within the plan.

43.2 It was

RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.44 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

44.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018/19, circulated at Pages No. 20-27, which Members were asked to consider.

44.2 In response to a query regarding the grass cutting improvement plan, the Head of Community Services suggested it might be worthwhile to establish a small Working Group of Members to assist officers with its delivery. Members welcomed this proposal and it was subsequently agreed that a report be brought back to the next meeting to agree the Terms of Reference for the Group. The Head of Community Services went on to advise that the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure had been identified for review in the Corporate Policies and Strategies Report which had been agreed at the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Since that time, it had become apparent that the new 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' guidance that had been published by central government would have a significant impact on how the safeguarding committee would work at County Council level. The work in relation to this would need to be completed by June 2019 and it would be necessary for Tewkesbury Borough Council to review its own policy once the details had been published in September 2019; on that basis, he felt it may be prudent to put the review on hold until that time. A brief debate ensued as to whether it would be possible to work on the policy in the interim and Members were advised that, whilst it was unclear what the extent of the changes would be, Tewkesbury Borough Council's current Safeguarding Policy was fit for purpose so there was no urgent need to start the work. As such, Members agreed that this item should be moved to the 2019/20 Work Programme.

44.3 It was

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018/19 be updated with the following amendments:

- Additional Item - 27 November 2018 – Grass Cutting Improvement Working Group Report – to establish a Working Group to oversee delivery of the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan and to approve its Terms of Reference.
- Review of Safeguarding Policy and Procedure to be moved from pending items to 2019/20 Work Programme.

OS.45 GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

- 45.1 Members received an update from the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel, on matters discussed at the last meeting of the Panel held on 14 September 2018.
- 45.2 The Council's representative indicated that, when he had reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July, a Member had enquired about crime detection rates. He had raised this with Gloucestershire Constabulary and this had resulted in a lengthy report which had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. He did not intend to go into the detail of the report but indicated that the local Police Inspector would be happy to attend the next meeting of the Committee to take Members through the challenges and give reassurance about what was being done to address them.
- 45.3 Members were advised that the Panel had received the regular Chief Executive's report which gave updates regarding complaints, crime figures and topics discussed with the Chief Constable etc. Tewkesbury Borough Council remained second out of 15 Most Similar Groups (where one was good) and there was a reduction of 2% in crime figures compared with the same period last year. The Council's representative indicated that the www.police.co.uk website was useful for finding out more information about crime in specific parts of the borough. It was noted that a new "all age, all gender" independent sexual violence adviser service was being set up; this was a seven year contract awarded by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre. A number of questions had also been raised in respect of the ongoing badger cull; rural policing; and how motorists with dash-cam footage may be able to submit this to the Police in future.
- 45.4 Members were advised the 'Creating a Child Friendly Gloucestershire' proposals had generated the most discussion at the meeting with five gaps having already been identified: true voice of young people; voluntary sector; intelligence gathering; involving communities and businesses; and, mapping of work undertaken in Gloucestershire. A steering group had been established to help move this project forward and would report back in early 2019; the group included the Chief Constable, Lord Lieutenant and the Director of Children's Services as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner. Members of the Panel had highlighted the good work already being carried out across the county and had spoken of the need to avoid duplication. As part of the presentation, the Police and Crime Commissioner had highlighted funding issues for the Police and his intention to increase Council Tax by at least 4% in 2019.
- 45.5 A briefing note had been provided to the Panel highlighting that the Police and Crime Commissioner now chaired the Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Board. The role of the Police and Crime Commissioner in the "crime" part of his title continued to evolve as the Ministry of Justice devolved more powers down to a local level. A review of the work of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) – private sector companies which were given less serious crimes to deal with and received performance-related payment – was highlighted and it was noted that the current contract would be terminated in 2020 due to the project generally being viewed as unsuccessful.
- 45.6 The Panel had also received its regular report on the Police and Crime Plan priorities which covered activities achieved during the current quarter; activities expected in the next quarter; risks or issues identified; and an overview of the budget.

- 45.7 A Member queried whether there was an update on the proposal for the Police and Crime Commissioner to take over the fire service. In response, the Council's representative explained that all Police and Crime Commissioners had been asked by the government to look at the possibility of taking over the Fire Service and the resulting paper had showed this would be difficult in Gloucestershire where the Fire Services and local authorities were not coterminous. It was noted that there was now a Minister for Policing *and* Fire and the new association for Police and Crime Panels had been named the National Association of Police, *Fire* and Crime Panels so this seemed to be the route that the government wished to go down; however, it was yet to be seen if a robust business case could be put forward and this was an ongoing debate.
- 45.8 A Member indicated that he used the Police UK website to find out what crimes had taken place within his Ward. Whilst it was very useful, he raised concern about data protection as it appeared to show incidents in areas where, because there were only a few houses, the exact house where the crime was committed might be pinpointed. It was also noted that it was only when you delved deeper into the detail on the location maps could you determine exactly what was meant under different headings. The Council's representative felt that this was a good point and he undertook to raise it outside of the meeting.
- 45.9 In response to the questions that had been raised at the July meeting in respect of crime detection statistics, the Council's representative confirmed that, in addition to regular monitoring by a Policy Officer, the Police and Crime Commissioner's office produced a comprehensive crime report to the Police and Crime Panel on a bi-monthly basis. The Constabulary's own performance team also monitored detection rates and produced commissioned reports as and when required; a performance dashboard was available to both staff and officers to seek further information. In terms of crime detection rates, since 2014, a new outcomes framework had been used to provide more meaningful information. The outcome descriptors gave a more truthful picture and provided more detail about whether someone was charged or summonsed; if a crime was "taken into consideration"; if there were difficulties with gaining evidence and whether the victim supported or did not support further action; if the prosecution was prevented, or was not in the public interest; and if the investigation had been completed but no suspect had been identified. The papers circulated to Members prior to the meeting showed the difficulties in reporting detection rates with Figure 3 showing that, in the period 1-31 July 2018, under the old crime detection rate regime 98% of burglaries (286) were undetected, with just 2% being detected; however, when the new 21 point outcome framework was applied to those statistics, 82% did have an outcome and the remaining 18% were still being investigated. A number of the 82% (8% of the overall total) had a range of actions against them under the new framework; however, it was acknowledged that 74% of the overall total had been closed under the framework title "Investigation Complete – No Suspect". The Council's representative explained that trying to define and detect burglary was extremely difficult as the offenders and victims were not in contact as they may be with other crimes, for example, drug offences; nevertheless, 74% was still quite a high percentage to go unpunished. Several Members indicated that the figures were quite confusing and expressed the view that it would be beneficial for the Police Inspector to be invited to the next meeting to provide more details. Subsequently, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel update be **NOTED**.
2. That the Police Inspector be invited to attend the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 November 2018 to give a further update on crime detection and prevention.

OS.46 GLOUCESTERSHIRE JOINT WASTE COMMITTEE UPDATE

- 46.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Head of Community Services, circulated at Pages No. 28-65, which provided an update on progress against the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee Action Plan 2018/19. Members were asked to consider the report.
- 46.2 Members were reminded that Tewkesbury Borough Council had joined the Joint Waste Committee in December 2014 and five of the local authorities within Gloucestershire were now members. The Joint Waste Committee produced a three-year rolling business plan, and an annual action plan, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered progress made against those plans. The action plan for 2018/19 was attached in full at Appendix 2 to the report and progress against actions impacting on Tewkesbury Borough Council was set out at Page No. 30, Paragraph 3.1 of the report. The Head of Community Services made particular reference to the direct delivery of all residual waste streams to the Javelin Park Energy from Waste facility from 2019. He advised that good progress had been made in discussions with the Joint Waste Committee and Gloucestershire County Council in order to minimise disruption to Tewkesbury Borough residents; he undertook to update Members further once negotiations were complete.
- 46.3 The Head of the Joint Waste Team explained that the Team provided support to the Joint Waste Committee and the waste management officers at each partner Council. In highlighting some of the key areas of the action plan, he explained that Cotswold District Council's vehicle fleet was coming to the end of its useful life and the Committee had supported a partnership-wide service benchmarking study with a view to inform wider service alignment across all partners. He explained that refuse, food waste and garden waste collection was already fairly consistent across the county but recycling did tend to vary; whilst there were good reasons for this, there was scope to ensure that all authorities collected the same materials so that residents were clear on what could and could not be recycled, which was an ongoing problem – there were things that could be done to align services without making them identical. A significant amount of time had been spent on monitoring the Javelin Park contract and it was noted that the construction project was on track so the facility could be operating by March 2019. The discussions about how waste would be delivered were ongoing; this had highlighted the benefits of having a partnership in place as Gloucestershire County Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council had been able to get together and have an honest discussion about their objectives and desires in order to come up with a sensible outcome for both authorities.
- 46.4 In addition to the projects and tasks identified in the action plan, the Joint Waste Team carried out cyclical tasks and a client-side role for the waste, recycling and street cleansing contracts and provided a customer service interface for contract, policy and service-related queries and complaints which were highlighted at Page No. 31, Paragraph 4.1 of the report. The current business plan was attached to the report at Appendix 1. It was noted that a new national waste resources strategy

was anticipated to be issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) before the end of the financial year and its publication would be a timely opportunity to review the Gloucestershire Waste Strategy to refresh the vision for waste management across the county and set longer term objectives.

46.5 With regard to the action plan at Appendix 2, a Member drew attention to Action 4.12 'Work with Ubico to undertake a review of the discretionary trade waste service to ensure it is operating on a viable commercial level' and raised concern that no progress was being made despite this having been discussed for a number of years; in his view, the amber status was not an accurate reflection of this project. The Head of Community Services felt that the amber status was correct as there was a trade waste service in operation; whilst it was not failing, it was not profitable and he was bringing a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2019 with a full set of options to move this forward. The Member went on to express the view that the overall report was very general and was not specific to Tewkesbury Borough Council – this had been raised as a concern previously and he asked for a focused report to be brought to the Committee in six months' time. In response, the Head of Community Services reminded Members that Tewkesbury Borough Council was part of the Joint Waste Committee and he felt it was important that the Committee was kept informed of what was happening across the county. He confirmed that, in future, a section specific to Tewkesbury Borough Council could be included within the report; however, he would ensure that an update report was brought to the Committee in six months as an exception with the concerns specific to Tewkesbury Borough Council appended to that report.

46.6 In response to a query as to whether the other two local authorities in Gloucestershire would be joining the Joint Waste Committee, Members were advised that, whilst there was regular dialogue with both Gloucester City and Stroud District Councils, and both had shown an interest in joining, there was no firm commitment from either at this stage. A Member noted that Tewkesbury Borough Council would have agreed to certain criteria when it had joined the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Partnership in 2014 and she questioned whether the agreement had been renegotiated at any point. The Head of Community Services explained that the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Partnership had an inter-authority agreement which had first been developed in 2012 and, to the best of his knowledge, that had not been amended when Tewkesbury Borough Council had joined. A refresh of the waste strategy was pending and there was a desire among the partner councils to look at the way costs were shared so it may also be opportune to revisit the agreement and ensure it remained fit for purpose. A Member expressed the view that the report might be of interest to the wider membership of the Council and, whilst it was noted that all Members could access reports, the Head of Democratic Services indicated that she would be happy to circulate this specific report following the meeting.

46.7 It was

RESOLVED

1. That the progress made to date in relation to the 2018/19 Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee Action Plan be **NOTED**.

2. That a six month interim report, with a specific focus on Tewkesbury Borough Council, be brought to the Committee in April 2019.

OS.47 GLOUCESTERSHIRE HEALTH AND CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE.

47.1 The Chair advised that, in the absence of the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee who had given her apologies for today's meeting, the update from the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 September 2018 would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

47.2 It was

RESOLVED That the update on the last meeting of the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

OS.48 GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

48.1 Members received an update from the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee on matters discussed at the last meeting held on 5 September 2018.

48.2 The Committee had concluded that the arrangements for hosting locally-held meetings had been useful in gaining better understanding of some of the issues impacting on economic growth in local areas and had agreed to continue with these arrangements. Members had also received an update on the initial findings from the Vision 2050 Big Conversation Consultation which had ended on 31 July 2018. The representative from the University of Gloucestershire had agreed to explore some of the Committee's comments as part of the detailed analysis of the outcomes from the consultation and had agreed to attend a future meeting of the Committee to report on progress and future activities.

48.3 With regard to the request from the Economic Growth Joint Committee to consider a proposal by the Cotswold Conservation Board to seek National Park status for the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Committee had received an update on the work being undertaken by Cotswold District Council in response to a Motion at its Council meeting in May 2018. The Motion had requested officers to carry out an evaluation of the potential advantages and disadvantages of designating the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as a National Park. Cotswold District Council hoped to gain a better understanding of some of the implications the proposal might have on local residents, including the possibility of increased housing costs. The outcome of the meeting was to undertake early preparatory work on issues relating to the Cotswold Conservation Board's aspiration and the Cotswold Conservation Board was currently seeking to meet with Cotswold District Council to discuss the proposal. The Committee had therefore agreed to await the outcomes of Cotswold District Council's review before considering the request by the Economic Growth Joint Committee to consider the impact of the proposal and this had subsequently been deferred until the New Year.

48.4 In terms of the Committee's Work Plan, the Committee would be receiving a briefing note to consider the implications of leaving the European Union post-Brexit and Members had requested periodic updates, as and when appropriate. It had been agreed that a presentation from mobile telephone providers would be held in the New Year to consider issues affecting mobile telephone coverage and connectivity in rural areas, and a presentation from the Cotswold Water Park Trust had also been included on the Committee Work Plan.

48.5 The Vice-Chair of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee indicated that a report had been provided by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) which may be useful for Members to see in advance of the presentation which the LEP would be giving at Tewkesbury Borough Council in December and he undertook to circulate this following the meeting.

48.6 It was

RESOLVED That the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee update be **NOTED**.

OS.49 DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REVIEW ACTION PLAN

49.1 The report of the Head of Development Services, circulated at Pages No. 66-99, provided an update on progress against the Development Services Review Action Plan. Members were asked to consider the report.

49.2 The Head of Development Services explained that the Development Services Review was approved by Council in April 2018; the review was supported by an action plan to help improve the whole service, not only planning, and this was attached in full at Appendix 1 to the report. One of the key actions related to the implementation of a new structure for Development Services and key appointments had been made, particularly in respect of the Growth Hub and the partnership with Gloucester City Council which had already been beneficial in terms of joint improvement projects. The vast majority of the actions related to Development Management and would act as a platform for further improvement. In terms of customer contact, officers would shortly be piloting an electronic method of notifying applicants and agents on the progress of their planning applications and she drew attention to the slide, displayed at the meeting, which showed what this would look like. The new method would be more user-friendly and easier to understand which would make the process quicker. It would initially be used for householder applications before being rolled out for larger applications.

49.3 The Business Transformation Manager introduced herself to the Committee and gave a brief overview of her background. She felt that her role had created an opportunity to take a step back and think about how things could be done differently, something which was not always possible for officers to do when carrying out their day-to-day roles. Delivery of the detailed action plan was a starting point for improvement and a number of projects were in progress – she was keen to involve members of the team and had built this into the timescales for delivery. She felt it would be helpful to go through some key actions to give Members an idea of what was being done. With regard to Action B.8 - Update validation checklist in line with Joint Core Strategy and investigate portal link to validation - she explained that there were various application types, some of which were quite complex, so it was intended to give customers the information they needed to self-serve. The document was very interactive and told customers exactly what was needed to ensure their application was 'valid' and would include links to direct them to additional information on the website. In terms of Action B.11 – Prepare a framework/protocol for undertaking Planning Performance Agreements and publicise – she explained that, on larger applications, it was sometimes necessary to agree a programme of work with the applicant and it was proposed to do this upfront, by working through the planning issues, for an additional fee. As well as increasing planning income, it would ensure that both applicants and officers understood exactly what was needed and would enable officers to be more responsive to customer requirements. Planning Performance Agreements could also help to overcome some of the problems in respect of engaging with statutory consultees, e.g. County Highways, within set timescales which was a difficulty for all

local planning authorities. It was intended that the framework would be the same as that used by Gloucester City Council and would be rolled out across the county as an example of good practice.

- 49.4 In terms of Action B.20 – Manage five key officer-led workstreams – the Business Transformation Manager indicated that planning had an impact on everyone's life, whether it be through submitting an application themselves or being affected by an application in their local area, and communication and understanding of the planning process was key. As a starting point, it was intended to produce a questionnaire which would be targeted at people using the pre-application advice service, as this was an optional service, to find out more about their experience. There was a lot of scope to improve customers' perception of the planning service so this was a very important action. Linked to that, Action B.21 – Improve clarity of "who's who" and what is happening at Planning Committee – had been included in response to a comment arising from the Planning Advisory Service review about members of the public and their experience of Planning Committee. It was recognised that, for some people, a planning application may be their only experience of engaging with the Council and Planning Committee acted as a 'shop window' for the Council so a few small changes could help to improve that experience. For example, it was not always clear to people in the public gallery what was happening during Committee meetings so it was proposed to introduce an explanatory pamphlet setting out the process and a seating plan to identify who was speaking. Action B.22 related to Member training and ensuring that Members had the knowledge to deal with difficult applications, given the huge growth agenda within Tewkesbury Borough and the potential for contentious applications. It was intended to hold regular briefing sessions following the corporate induction for new Councillors in May 2019.
- 49.5 In terms of the other service areas, the Head of Development Services indicated that the Planning Policy team had been focusing on the preparation of the issues and options stage of the review of the Joint Core Strategy, and the preferred options stage of the Tewkesbury Borough Plan which was out for consultation. The team would also be reviewing the Statement of Community Involvement which was out of date. With regards to economic development, the Growth Hub was in operation, although the formal launch would not be until the following month, and a key element of this would be ensuring the Council's services had a business-friendly approach. The Place Programme was a key priority for the Community Development team and a Member briefing was being arranged to clarify and define the place approach.
- 49.6 A Member raised concern that planning enforcement was not as good as it should be and he noted there was a shortage of officers within that department. In response, the Head of Development Services acknowledged that there had been some difficulties within that area and there had been a time when there was only one officer in post; however, she was pleased to report that an officer had been appointed from within the Technical Administration team who would be learning on the job and an experienced Enforcement Officer had also been appointed on an interim basis to help with key cases. She was confident that the right people were now in place to help to make improvements in the short term, including delivery of the Planning Enforcement Plan which had been approved earlier in the year. A Member understood that one of the actions within that plan was to provide a regular enforcement report to Planning Committee and he questioned why that was not being done. The Head of Development Services advised that consideration was being given to what information could be included in that report and it would be taken to the Planning Committee by December. Members had been sent an email earlier that week with statistics in terms of the number of applications determined

and whether they had been approved within the required timescales etc. and it was intended to circulate this information on a quarterly basis going forward. She accepted that Members were not currently able to see details of enforcement cases online and she would be working with IT to address that shortly.

- 49.7 A Member drew attention to Action A.7 – Devise detailed Key Performance Indicators and ensure consistent framework between Gloucester City and Tewkesbury Borough Councils – and noted that the target date had slipped from October 2018 to March 2019; in total, he had calculated that the target dates for 22 of the actions within the plan had been changed and he questioned what the reason was for this. The Head of Development Services explained that the initial target dates had been over-ambitious, and appointments to key roles had taken longer than anticipated so a lot of dates had been changed to make them more realistic; she confirmed that the new dates were achievable. In terms of the Key Performance Indicators, these were reported regularly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the quarterly performance management report but a baseline report would be prepared by March 2019 so Members would have a more detailed picture of the framework. A Member expressed the view that this was not soon enough and, following a brief debate, the Deputy Chief Executive agreed to bring a report on the Planning Key Performance Indicators to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 8 January 2019. In response to a query regarding Action B.1 i) - Ensure senior officers have skills and expertise to make robust recommendations – the Business Transformation Manager clarified that there were processes and procedures in place but these needed to be brought together into a procedure manual for senior officers.
- 49.8 A Member noted that reference had been made to the Joint Core Strategy and Tewkesbury Borough Plan but not to Neighbourhood Development Plans and she questioned what weight they would hold once approved. The Head of Development Services clarified that the action plan was not intended to be an overall programme for the Development Services section so there would be other work ongoing within the various teams which was not included. The local development scheme set out that, once approved, Neighbourhood Development Plans must be taken into account. Another Member went on to raise concern about the lack of communication in respect of place planning which needed to be addressed. The Head of Development Services absolutely agreed that the place approach needed to be re-designed and she had met with the Lead Members for Community and Health and Wellbeing to start these conversations.
- 49.9 Having considered the information provided, it was
- RESOLVED**
1. That progress against the Development Services Improvement Plan be **NOTED**.
 2. That a further update be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.
 3. That a report on Planning Key Performance Indicators be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 8 January 2019.

OS.50 HOUSING STRATEGY MONITORING REPORT

- 50.1 The report of the Head of Community Services, circulated at Pages No. 100-125, provided a summary of the key activities for the first six months of year two of the Housing Strategy Action Plan. Members were asked to consider the progress made to date in respect of the outcomes identified in the Action Plan.

- 50.2 Members were reminded that the strategy contained four key priorities to meet the housing needs of the borough: increasing the supply of housing; prevent homelessness; meet the housing needs of specific groups; and improving the health and wellbeing of local people. The report summarised progress on each of these areas and highlighted significant actions. In terms of increasing the supply of housing, the Strategic Housing and Enabling Officer explained that both Rooftop and Severn Vale Housing Society were considering modern methods of construction as their preferred option on the former garage sites at Winchcombe and Staverton. Members had been impressed with their visit to the modular housing site in Nuneaton and the Parish Councils had also been supportive so this could be the start of an exciting project for Tewkesbury Borough with one of the sites planned for delivery in 2019. In respect of empty homes, the Council Tax empty homes premium had been introduced from 1 April 2018 in respect of 88 properties within the borough that had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than two years. The affected taxpayers had been contacted and encouraged to seek advice from Environmental Health on bringing their properties back into use; unfortunately, only six responses had been received to date. Review of empty homes would continue under the forthcoming Empty Homes Strategy and part of that would involve further attempts to engage with empty home owners. The Homelessness Reduction Act had created a significant amount of work for homelessness services across the county. Central government was looking to introduce indicators on every client who approached as homeless and was collecting data for each person – this was currently anonymised before it was sent out, but the government may be able to collect it without being anonymised provided it complied with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Someone approaching the Council as homeless may have to wait for up to 112 days for a decision which gave the Housing team longer to try to resolve the issue. The government was aiming to half the number of rough sleepers by 2021 and eradicate it completely by 2025. The Housing Services Manager confirmed that the Council had accepted a statutory duty to 75 residents in the first quarter of 2018 and a full homeless statutory duty to two households. There had not been a large rise in homelessness because of welfare reform itself, although it was difficult to find resolutions for some people who were affected by associated issues, for example, households in temporary accommodation may struggle to find work in an area they would not stay permanently. With regard to priority three, around meeting the needs of those who need it most, Members were advised that the county was now in a position to progress the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and the county group would be commissioning a consultant to start work on a Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA); this was a big piece of work which was likely to take some time.
- 50.3 A Member noted that the Homeless Reduction Act gave local authorities more powers to make housing associations and registered providers offer certain properties to tenants and he questioned if this was being pushed forward. In response, the Housing Services Manager advised that Tewkesbury Borough Council was in partnership with the rest of the county and West Oxfordshire District Council and indicated they had no influence on who registered providers would accept; however, housing associations such as Bromford, Severn Vale, Gloucester City/Cheltenham Borough Homes tended to be more socially aware. It was only really necessary to make tenants more palatable for temporary accommodation, for example, by guaranteeing them against damage and rent arrears to a certain level, and this was done on a case by case basis. She stressed that homeless households were not homeless intentionally, rather they had become homeless due to other issues, such as alcohol or drug abuse, and therefore were considered high risk to private sector landlords and social housing providers. The Member also indicated that land owned by the authority may have a higher social, as opposed to

monetary, value if used for social housing so it should not necessarily be sold to the highest bidder. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Housing Officers had given an overview of what was becoming an increasingly complex picture nationally. A lot of good work was being done with housing associations to try to counteract homelessness and improve prevention. Tewkesbury Borough Council did not own a lot of land as an authority and when a site came forward it would be a question of interpreting how it would be used and whether a capital receipt would be the best value for money. Officers would put the options together and Members would ultimately make the final decision; it would undoubtedly be a difficult decision in light of the Council's financial situation. In terms of the former garage sites, it was not only about cost but also the wider social responsibility and how to put a value on that. A Member indicated that one of the latest options for housing was shipping containers which were converted to living units and he suggested that could be explored. The Housing Services Officer advised that this had already been looked into but it was quite expensive and required a lot of groundworks e.g. electricity. The Member felt sure there would be a lot of Town and Parish Councils which owned land around the borough which may be useful so it would be beneficial to ask them for help.

50.4

It was

RESOLVED

That the progress made to date in respect of the outcomes identified in the Housing Strategy Action Plan be **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 6:45 pm