

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 1 May 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, D T Foyle, P A Godwin, R M Hatton, H C McLain, T A Spencer, P E Stokes, M G Sztymiak and H A E Turbyfield

also present:

Councillor G F Blackwell

OS.91 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 91.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.
- 91.2 The Chair welcomed the Lead Member for Organisational Development – which included scrutiny – to the meeting and indicated that she was present as an observer. He went on to thank the Committee for participating in the hearing in respect of the Scrutiny Review of Water Supply Outage which had taken place the previous week. He felt it had been a very good piece of work and he had been particularly pleased with the quality of the supplementary questions. He also wished to thank the partner organisations for their attendance and the Officer team for their support.

OS.92 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 92.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J E Day, P D Surman and M J Williams. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.93 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 93.1 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.
- 93.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.94 MINUTES

- 94.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2018, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OS.95 CONSIDERATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

- 95.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 13-19. 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.
- 95.2 A Member noted that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Consultation Response had been added to the Agenda for the Executive Committee meeting that had taken place on 25 April 2018. He raised concern that this had not been on the Forward Plan previously and the decision taken by the Executive Committee was not subject to call-in. The consultation response had not been referred to the wider membership at any point and therefore Members had not had the opportunity to express their views. The consultation period ran from 5 March until 11 May and, in his opinion, it seemed to have been left until the last minute and then rushed through. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that the approved draft response would be used as the basis for discussion at a Member seminar which had been arranged for 3 May 2018. Members were encouraged to raise any questions or comments at the seminar and, at the conclusion of the discussion, a summary of any amendments or additions agreed would be incorporated into the response prior to final submission on 11 May. This was in accordance with the delegation to the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Built Environment, to add further comments to the response prior to its submission on behalf of the Council. A copy of the draft response would be circulated to Members following the meeting.
- 95.3 It was
RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.96 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

- 96.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 20-33, which attached, at Appendix 1, the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018/19. Members were asked to approve the Work Programme.
- 96.2 A Member indicated that the Healthwatch Gloucestershire contract had recently been taken over. The Committee had previously received a presentation on Healthwatch and he felt it would be appropriate to invite a representative to a future meeting in order to explain the changes that were being made and how they would impact on Tewkesbury Borough. It was agreed that this be added to the 'pending items' section of the Work Programme in order for Officers to agree a suitable date with the relevant person.
- 96.3 It was
RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018/19 be **APPROVED**.

OS.97 HOUSING STRATEGY MONITORING REPORT

- 97.1 The report of the Head of Community Services provided a summary of the key activities for the first three months of year two of the Housing Strategy Action Plan (January-March 2018). Members were asked to consider the progress made to date in respect of the outcomes identified in the Action Plan.

- 97.2 The Head of Community Services advised that the Housing Team had been peer reviewed in 2017 with a view to ultimately reaching the gold standard of the homelessness prevention programme. The team had recently achieved the bronze award and been invited to the national awards ceremony in July. In terms of other highlights, with regard to Priority 1, it was noted that an additional member of staff had been employed using new burdens funding associated with the Homelessness Reduction Act. As well as helping to meet the demands of the new statutory duties, the Officer would be working on a private sector landlord scheme to increase the accommodation available to residents. In respect of Priority 2, the new extended homeless duties within the Homelessness Reduction Bill had taken effect from 1 April 2018 and this had been a primary focus for the housing service within the last few months. There had been a slight increase in applications to date but this would need to be monitored over the course of the year. In terms of the action to stop use of bed and breakfast accommodation, Members were informed that, whilst there had been an increase in the length of time people were staying in bed and breakfast accommodation, the number of people being accommodated had reduced. The Head of Community Services provided assurance that Officers were looking at alternative ways to assist those people. It was also noted that the standard methodology for calculating housing had now been confirmed through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the county was in a position to progress the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in accordance with Action P3.1.
- 97.3 A Member noted that the average number of days spent in bed and breakfast accommodation had increased and this had been attributed to the reluctance of landlords to take on high risk tenants. She felt it would be hard to encourage private landlords to take on these tenants due to genuine concerns about whether they would receive their rent on time etc. The Housing Services Manager clarified that the Housing team was currently having problems persuading registered providers to accept tenants who had previously had difficulties. It was intended to work with social landlords – as opposed to private landlords – to take on lower risk tenants in order to cultivate a relationship and build trust to encourage them to come to the local authority for tenants. A Member questioned why the costs of bed and breakfast accommodation in 2017/18 were yet to be confirmed and was advised that this was because there was no average cost; it was down to supply and demand i.e. the less rooms available, the more expensive they would be. It was difficult to forecast what the cost would be this year but bed and breakfast accommodation was approximately £85,000 for the previous financial year. The Head of Community Services also pointed out that Cheltenham and Gloucester had greater access to that type of accommodation so Tewkesbury Borough was often at the back of the queue. It was recognised that bed and breakfast accommodation was expensive and was not good for tenants so a concerted effort was being made to move away from that type of accommodation. There were a range of potential alternatives, e.g. modular housing, and Officers were working with registered providers with the intention of bringing something forward later in the year.
- 97.4 A Member drew attention to Action P1.2 in relation to identifying Tewkesbury Borough Council-owned land suitable for future housing development and questioned whether either of the projects on the two former garage sites at Staverton and Winchcombe were for modular housing. The Head of Community Services advised that Officers were still working with the registered providers to consider the options; however, the Staverton site would lend itself more to modular housing than the Winchcombe site. The Member felt there was a conflict between the local authority and registered providers and he raised concern that sites had been put forward in his Ward for use for social housing that had subsequently been put onto the open market. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that discussions were taking place with Severn Vale Housing Society about how best to develop the

sites. The Asset Management and Community Services teams had been advised that they would need to set out a series of options when presenting reports to Members in order for them to make a decision which would clearly include socio-economic benefits as well as the potential for a capital receipt. This would give the ability to fully consider what was needed in the area. Officers were aware of Members' views about wanting to showcase modular housing in the borough and Rooftop Housing - the social housing provider in ownership of the Staverton site - was very keen to explore developing using modular construction techniques.

- 97.5 A Member sought clarification as to the level of new burdens funding and whether this was of real value. The Head of Community Services confirmed that the funding was £63,000 for the first year and reduced slightly for year 2; it had paid for an additional Officer so it did have value. With regard to Action P1.4 in relation to identifying long-term empty homes and bringing vacant properties back into use, a Member queried whether this included empty habitable spaces above shops. He also questioned whether there was a correlation between the empty homes action plan and planning guidance. The Head of Community Services indicated that he could not comment on planning policy but confirmed that "empty homes" was a term used to describe any empty properties including flats above shops. The Housing team worked closely with Planning colleagues to bring empty properties back into use. Another Member indicated that a number of houses within his Ward were empty due to transition and he questioned whether discussions had taken place with housing associations around hard to let properties etc. The Head of Community Services explained that some properties were empty due to repairs etc. but there were very few properties in the borough that were hard to let. Discussions had taken place with Severn Vale Housing Society about whether the development of certain sites would free up others for use as temporary accommodation, particularly in the case of one bedroom properties.

- 97.6 A Member expressed concern that the red text within the Action Plan, used to show the progress that had been made since the last report, varied considerably in length for each action and did not necessarily correlate with the status column. The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that he had also picked up on this and it would be addressed in future reports. He advised that some projects would be ongoing for 12-24 months and, although they were on track to be delivered within that timescale, he appreciated that Members would benefit from more information about the progress that had been made at that point in time. It was subsequently

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

OS.98 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS REVIEW MONITORING REPORT

- 98.1 The report of the Environmental Health Manager, circulated at Pages No, 56-63, provided an update on progress against actions contained within the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) report. Members were asked to consider the report.
- 98.2 Members were reminded that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the way in which DFGs were undertaken in 2015/16 and the Committee received six monthly updates on the progress made against the actions arising from that review. The figures set out at Page No. 62 of Appendix 1 to the report demonstrated the spend against the DFG allocation for the last four years. The Head of Community Services indicated that it was a routine and restrictive process so there was little that could be done to improve it; however, the Council was getting better at taking advantage of opportunities to do things which were slightly outside of the process. He explained that, in January 2018, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government had allocated additional funding to local authorities that committed to spend it before 1 April 2018. The extra funding was available for DFG adaptations and to be used more broadly on other social

care capital projects. Tewkesbury Borough Council had taken advantage of the funding and had been allocated £112,304 – it had worked closely with Severn Vale Housing Society and had spent 80% of its allocation on residents with the remaining money going back into the countywide pot.

- 98.3 A Member noted that there was an underspend of approximately £500,000 for 2017/18 and he questioned why this was the case. The Head of Community Services explained that the Council had not spent its full allocation since 2014/15 and he reiterated that the money had to be spent on adaptations. Whilst people could be encouraged to apply for DFGs, the level of demand in the borough did not correspond to the allocated money. He clarified that the additional funding which the Council had applied for was completely separate and there had been more freedom to spend that. Any unspent money had to be given back. In response to a query, he indicated that Severn Vale Housing Society carried out a lot of adaptations for its tenants via the DFG process and he was not aware of any registered providers carrying out works outside of that process. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that every application had to be referred by an Occupational Therapist and he understood there was a waiting list for these assessments which was outside of the Council's control. In response to a query as to whether anything was being done differently now compared to 2014/15 when the amount spent had exceeded that which was available, the Head of Community Services advised that the regime itself had not changed other than the allocation being significantly increased in 2014/15. The money came from the Better Care Fund - which had changed in recent years with the reform of public health - and the government had given a lot more money to local authorities. He clarified that the extra spend in 2014/15 was due to demand.

- 98.4 The Chair indicated that the Committee currently received progress updates on a six monthly basis and he sought a view on whether reports should be received on an annual basis going forward, given that there was little movement in relation to the outstanding actions. Members agreed this would be more appropriate and it was

RESOLVED

1. That the progress against the recommendations arising from the Disabled Facilities Grants Review be **NOTED**.
2. That it be **AGREED** that future progress reports be provided on an annual basis.

OS.99 CUSTOMER CARE STRATEGY

- 99.1 The report of the Corporate Services Manager, circulated at Pages No. 64-74, provided an overview of the progress made in delivering the actions contained within the Customer Care Strategy 2017/18. Members were asked to consider the progress made and to endorse the action plan for 2018/19.
- 99.2 The Corporate Services Manager advised that the Council Plan stressed the importance of putting customers first and, as a result, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had undertaken a workshop in January 2016 to put in place a number of Customer Care Standards. As Members would appreciate, customer service did not have a destination - it was ongoing and something which the Council was continually looking to improve. The action plan held Officers accountable to a number of key actions for a specific year and the majority of actions within the 2017/18 plan had been completed with a small number of actions being moved forward to the 2018/19 plan. There had been significant successes throughout the year in terms of the action to implement online forms which had seen huge uplift and improvement in online and self-service functions.

- 99.3 A Member noted that the target date for the action to review the Advice and Information Centre (AIC) buildings had been changed from July 2017 to March 2019 and he questioned why this had slipped so much. The Head of Corporate Services advised that this was largely due to capacity within the team and the change in the Corporate Services Manager. There were four AICs in the borough in Brockworth, Churchdown, Bishop's Cleeve and Winchcombe and they had not been reviewed for a number of years. It was important to ensure they were being used to their full potential and it had been intended to carry out a review during 2017/18; however, this would be a significant piece of work and his team had been tied up with other work, such as the garden waste project. The Deputy Chief Executive felt that the AICs had potential to deliver a lot more to customers and the review would provide an opportunity to consider how their use could be maximised, as part of the options appraisal. He indicated that the Revenues and Benefits team had been looking at their working practices to see how they could get more people out to the AICs at certain times of day. A Member felt that the AICs were extremely valuable and she would not welcome a proposal to close them. The Head of Corporate Services felt that it was necessary to undertake some data analysis to establish who was currently using them and why. The Corporate Services Manager would be going to visit Bishop's Cleeve Library - which Tewkesbury Borough Council worked out of - to see if there could be more effective partnership working. This data would be collated over the coming months and could potentially feed-in to a Scrutiny Review going forward.
- 99.4 The Member went on to query why the action to introduce a method of gathering service-level feedback from the website had also been delayed by a year and sought assurance that the deadline would not be pushed back further. In response, the Corporate Services Manager confirmed that a number of other projects were coming to an end and she was confident that both this action, and the review of AICs, would come in on time. She explained that it had been necessary to improve the self-service and online offering to be able to use this as an effective method; now that had been done, the team was in a better position to take this action forward. A Member questioned whether any progress had been made in relation to this action, for example, the commentary mentioned working with the Web Design Officer and operational managers and he queried if either of those tasks had been completed. The Corporate Services Manager reiterated that the delay was two-fold: lack of resources and the need to ensure that the online service was sufficient to be able to collect feedback. Initial discussions had taken place with the Web Design Officer and it was hoped that this element could be delivered before the target date. The second part would be around ensuring that feedback was used effectively within the various Council departments.
- 99.5 In terms of the plan for 2018/19, Members were advised that there were a number of new actions. The Corporate Services Manager explained that there were several Office 365 applications, such as Skype for business and webchat, which could provide additional value to customer services and support the Council's digital vision. The current Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system meant that work was done in a silo fashion which was not conducive to good customer service; a one-stop shop was something which the team was looking to progress. Compliance with the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) was a key part of that; there were a number of requirements that needed something that the current system was unable to provide so changes were essential in that regard. A Member raised concern that the status and progress to date columns had been omitted from the 2018/19 plan and, whilst he appreciated it was a new plan, he assumed that significant progress would already have been made against some of the actions. The Head of Corporate Services explained that they had only been omitted because it was a new action plan and provided assurance they would be included when the next update was provided in six months' time.

99.6 It was

RESOLVED

That the progress made in relation to the actions contained within the Customer Care Strategy Action Plan 2017/18 be **NOTED** and the Customer Care Strategy Action Plan 2018/19 be **ENDORSED**.

OS.100 ANNUAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT 2017/18

100.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 75-91. Members were asked to approve the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2017/18 attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

100.2 It was

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2017/18 be **APPROVED**.

The meeting closed at 5:30 pm