

BUSINESS AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 10 November 2020 at 6.00 pm in Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors E J Carter, N A M England, J E Lavery, A Lawrence, S J Reynolds (Chair), K S Sahota and C F Smith.
Co-optees: R Williams

Also Present: Councillor D Wright

In Attendance: Kate Callis (Service Delivery Manager: Housing Investment Programme, Prosperity & Investment), James Dunn (Director: Prosperity & Investment), Anthea Lowe (Associate Director: Policy & Governance), and Kieran Robinson (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer)

BFSC5 Apologies for Absence

None.

BFSC6 Declarations of Interest

None.

BFSC7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

BFSC8 Terms of Reference

Members received a brief clarification of the proposed change to the Committee's terms of reference.

RESOLVED – that the terms of reference be approved.

BFSC9 Scrutiny Review of the Housing Investment Programme

The Committee received the presentation of the Director: Prosperity & Investment. The presentation covered the Council's Housing Investment Strategy, which had been approved by Cabinet. The report and business case examined the case for expanding the Council's NuPlace programme.

Members were briefed on the achievements of NuPlace. There had been 460 homes either delivered or on track to be delivered. The scheme offered a range of homes up to four bed properties and housed over a thousand Telford & Wrekin residents.

NuPlace offered a number of affordable homes as a part of its developments and had recently expanded into the accessible and adaptable market. A 19 home pilot at Dothill was under construction, which offered homes that met a range of accessible and adaptable standards.

Homes that helped to reduce the Borough's carbon footprint were regarded as key to NuPlace. Where possible solar panels were being fitted to properties in an effort to reduce fuel poverty. Electrical vehicle (EV) charging points were also being included in the new development at Southwater and would be examined for future developments.

Since its launch, NuPlace had regenerated 28.6 acres of brownfield land.

The project was deemed a success both for the Council and with residents. NuPlace's portfolio had a 1.88% void rate and was popular among residents. The scheme had generated a £4.4m profit since 2015/16.

The project was being used to promote positive social outcomes in the Borough through apprenticeships, training, and community engagement. There were economic benefits for the region more broadly, with the majority of contract spend being within a 30km radius, which equated to roughly £32.5m.

In the future, NuPlace hoped to expand and diversify its portfolio further with another 320 homes planned, which focused on brownfield sites. These new homes would bring the portfolio to 786 homes. New homes would be built to meet a range of needs; including different sized homes as well as more accessible and adaptable homes.

In addition to constructing new homes, there were plans to acquire existing stock for refurbishment from other suppliers and two schemes were in progress to refurbish buildings in the Borough.

There was an ambition to bring high quality urban living to Telford & Wrekin as a part of the Station Quarter development through one and two bed apartments in the town centre.

Members asked a number of questions: *Were the apprenticeships and other training offered as a part of the scheme quantified in any way?* Officers confirmed that this information could be circulated to Members.

NuPlace was looking to reduce carbon footprints, were all its properties solar powered?

Solar generation would be considered on a site-by-site basis, but the 46 homes being built at Southwater would have them. A pilot scheme would also be run at Donnington Wood that would trial solar generation and battery storage. It was thought possible that in the future the sites may be able to sell stored energy to the grid. In such a scenario, the money generated could be used to pump-prime future developments.

Was rent on NuPlace developments below, at, or above market level?
NuPlace properties, except for those that were affordable housing, were let at market level. Rent was equivalent to other new build private rental schemes in the Borough. Affordable units were let at affordable levels. The product on offer was of high quality in terms of both build and management, and the rent reflected that. The demand for units justified this and was evidenced by the void rate.

Would new houses be solely electric? Were they being fitted with gas, which would have to be removed in the future?

The Donnington Wood development was piloting solely electric houses, with 10 to 15 houses on the development meeting this criterion. The pilot was viewed as important to demonstrate NuPlace's ability to cost effectively build low carbon homes.

Questions were also asked about the diversity of developments, specifically the number of affordable, accessible, and adaptable homes.
Accessible and adaptable homes were new to the NuPlace programme. Previous developments had proved that the NuPlace model worked and provided a stable base to expand and diversify from.

The Council had received West Midlands Combined Authority funding for brownfield sites, would there be any other funding?
There were several funding options for the Authority. The New College site project had received funding from the Marches LEP. Other affordable schemes had had Homes England funding. The scheme was looking at opportunities for brownfield funds where possible.

BFSC10 Work Programme Review

The Associate Director: Policy & Governance delivered an overview of the Committee's work programme. The work programme had received updates to the expected dates for items to come to Committee.

BFSC11 Chair's Update

Members were reminded of the date of the next meeting of the Committee, which would take place on 9 December 2020.

The meeting ended at 6.59 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday, 9 December 2020