

BUSINESS AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 25 June 2025 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors N A M England (Chair), N Page (Vice-Chair), J Kaur, G Luter, S Syrda and R Tyrrell.

Also Present: Councillor R A Overton (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Highways, Housing & Enforcement).

In Attendance: K Callis (Housing Investment Programme Service Delivery Manager), J Dunn (Director: Prosperity & Investment), A Lowe (Director: Policy & Governance) and P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)).

Apologies for Absence: Councillor L Lewis.

BFSC1 Declarations of Interest

None.

BFSC2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

BFSC3 Terms of Reference 2025/2026

The Director: Policy & Governance presented the Business & Finance Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference for the 2025/26 municipal year.

Members heard that each council Committee had been granted delegated authority to approve their own terms of reference at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2025.

It was noted that there were no proposed changes.

RESOLVED – that the Terms of Reference set out in Appendix A of the report be approved.

BFSC4 Business & Finance Scrutiny Work Programme 2025/26

The Director: Policy & Governance presented the draft Business & Finance Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for the 2025/26 municipal year.

Members heard that the work programming process had commenced early in the calendar year and included a period of consultation with Council officers, external Partners and elected Members. Suggestions put forward for the work programme had been assessed against the Council's priorities before being put forward for consideration by the Scrutiny Management Board.

The proposed work programme spanned across a period of two years to offer flexibility to accommodate ad hoc items. The work programme featured several standing items including an annual update on the Council's Housing Investment Programme, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Telford Land Deal. There were several new inclusions for the work programme such as a focus on the Growth Fund and Council's property investment portfolio, the regeneration of Wellington Market and a review of the Council's leisure services offer.

RESOLVED – that the work programme for 2025/26 be approved.

BFSC5 Housing Investment Programme Update

The Service Delivery Manager: Housing Investment Programme presented an update on the Housing Investment Programme, outlining progress made during the 2024/25 financial year.

The Housing Investment Programme was first established in 2015 to meet identified housing need through the delivery of a portfolio of properties for predominantly private rent and was in its tenth year of operation. Whilst the financial and housing markets had seen greater stability over the last 12 months, challenges remained for the construction industry. High interest rates continued to affect viability appraisals and although construction costs had levelled off, previous price increases remained embedded. Private rents across the Borough had risen on average by 7.9% in the last year, while house prices continued to climb despite a 19.4% drop in sales, reflecting national trends. Legislative changes were also highlighted, including the Building Safety Act 2022, which imposed new safety requirements in response to the Grenfell Tower fire and the anticipated Renters Reform Bill, expected to be in place by the end of 2025, which would enhance tenant protections.

Members heard that Nuplace's housing portfolio had significantly grown with a total of 608 homes completed by March 2025 and a further 276 more homes in development. Of these, 76 were affordable homes offered at discounted rents, with an additional 486 affordable dwellings delivered in partnership with housing associations. The programme continued to focus on sustainability, with low-carbon homes featuring PV panels, battery storage, air source heat pump technology and EV charging points. There had also been a strong emphasis on accessible and adaptable accommodation, particularly for residents over 55 or with specific needs and at the time of the meeting, approximately 1,500 people were living in Nuplace properties.

The presentation detailed several completed and ongoing schemes, including Wild Walk in Muxton, New College in Wellington, Limes Walk in Oakengates, Walker Street in Wellington, The Gower in St Georges respectively and Station Quarter in Telford Town Centre. At the time of the meeting, the developments had regenerated around 48 acres of brownfield land and refurbished nearly 5,000 sqm of redundant space.

Established in June 2021, the Telford & Wrekin Homes programme had gathered pace with a further 32 homes acquired in the last year, bringing the total to 56 properties acquired and refurbished to support broader Council objectives such as move-on accommodation and fostering schemes.

Members heard about the former Phoenix site in Dawley; a new development earmarked for 212 new homes including 51 new homes and was subject to a live planning application with a decision anticipated in Autumn 2025.

Operational improvements included the implementation of the “One Housing” system to enhance tenancy management and the expansion of the Property Management Team. Tenant satisfaction had remained high, with 79% of tenants having moved from within the Borough, 74% viewing their Nuplace home as a “forever home” and 86% willing to recommend Nuplace. Tenants valued the security of tenure, responsive service and the professionalism of staff.

Social value activity had focussed on corporate objectives of employment and training, as well as delivering benefits to the community within the locality of Nuplace’s development sites, with outcomes achieved over the previous 12 months including 93 hours of engagement with schools and care leavers, 210 hours of employability support, 36 weeks of work experience, 55 apprenticeships and 22 new jobs created.

The draft outturn for 2024/25 showed strong performance for the scheme and the number of lettings available. For the 2024/25 financial year, voids had remained low at 0.84% which was below the business model assumption of 3%. The amount of turnover had increased to £5m and profit before interest and tax had risen to £3.2m. After interest, the total profit stood at £448k, with a £302k dividend returned to support frontline services. Against the £93m invested into the scheme, the Nuplace asset portfolio was valued at £122.84m, representing a 31% capital increase.

In response to questions raised relating to the financial return of Nuplace and the programme’s primary objective, the Director: Prosperity & Investment stated that Nuplace had delivered significantly more than 1% return when capital growth was considered and a £30m increase in asset value. The main objective of the programme was to provide high quality private and affordable housing with funds set aside for maintenance and to ensure long term sustainability.

The Service Delivery Manager: Housing Investment Programme commented on the partnership working that had taken place with the Wrekin Housing

Group (WHG) as a housing association to deliver a mixture of tenure offers including both private and affordable rent. The Wrekin Housing Group had been recognised as a reliable landlord with strong capabilities in both development and tenancy management. Homes delivered as part of the Telford & Wrekin Homes Programme had been acquired from Wrekin Housing Group at favourable rates and refurbishment of the properties had taken place post-acquisition helping to prevent homes from being sold at auction.

In response to questions asked around the impact of Nuplace on local business continuity and the supply chain, the Service Delivery Manager: Housing Investment Programme advised that the local supply chain was monitored on a scheme by scheme basis and each scheme included metrics for local investment agreed in advance, with contractors expected to report on spend within the Borough and a 25 mile radius. Approximately 80% of spend had occurred locally, contributing significantly to local employment and business growth.

As part of the discussion, Members highlighted the broader benefits of Nuplace and the importance of creating council-owned assets. It was suggested that figures relating to rental comparisons be included in future reports.

BFSC6 Chair's Update

The Chair thanked Members for their participation in the first meeting and looked forward to working with them during the municipal year.

The meeting ended at 6.46 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday 17 September 2025