Telford & Wrekin Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest to create a better borough

BUSINESS AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 30 September 2026 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors G Luter (Chair), B Carter and S Syrda.

Also Present: Councillors N England (Cabinet Member for Safer Streets and Better Housing, Z Hannington (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resident Services).

In Attendance: M Brockway (Director: Finance, People & IDT), K Callis (Service Delivery Manager: Housing Improvement Programme), R Cook (Executive Director: Place), J Cornwell (Housing Strategy and Commissioning Programme Manager), S Heron (Legal Advisor), A Hickman (Democracy Officer), K Kynaston (Director – Housing Commercial and Customer Services), P Starkey (Lead Democracy Officer) and D Toy (Service Delivery Manager).

Apologies: Councillors J Kaur, L Lewis, R Mehta and R Tyrrell.

BFSC7 Declarations of Interest

None.

BFSC8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 June 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

BFSC9 Innovative Approaches to Alternative Accommodation Working Group Report

The Democracy Officer presented the report outlining the work that was undertaken by the Innovative Approaches to Alternative Accommodation Joint Working Group.

Members were reminded that the Joint Business & Finance and Communities Scrutiny Committee Working Group had been established following agreement at a Committee meeting in March 2026. The cross-party Working Group held four meetings on 27 April, 16 June, 10 September and 22

September 2026. It was noted that the final report would be presented to Cabinet on 15 October 2026.

The Committee heard that the purpose of the Working Group had been to examine innovative and alternative forms of accommodation, including the repurposing of existing structures, modular and micro-unit developments, and other creative housing solutions that could help address housing need within the Borough. The Democracy Officer highlighted the increasing housing pressures within Telford and Wrekin, particularly the demand for affordable housing and accommodation suitable for single-person occupancy.

The Committee noted that at its meeting on 27 April 2026, the Working Group had considered various forms of innovative accommodation and the potential benefits associated with different delivery models.

At the meeting held on 16 June 2026, the Working Group had received evidence from a representative of Bristol City Council, who outlined the authority's approach to delivering alternative forms of accommodation and shared lessons learned from their experience.

Members were advised that, on 10 September 2026, the Working Group had examined a range of development options for Council-owned sites, including the GAP housing model and mixed-use development approaches.

The Committee further noted that, on 22 September 2026, the Working Group had considered the potential for a pilot scheme with Housing Plus Group (HPG) to assess the viability of delivering housing on garage sites and explore how innovative approaches could support development on constrained land.

The Chair of Business & Finance Scrutiny Committee commented positively on the Working Group process, noting the constructive cross-party approach that had been adopted throughout the review. Appreciation was expressed to officers for their work in supporting the Joint Working Group and it was noted that Members had been keen for the recommendations to be progressed to Cabinet as soon as reasonably possible.

RESOLVED - that the report and recommendations of the Innovative Approaches to Alternative Accommodation Working Group be endorsed and submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

BFSC10 <u>Housing Investment Programme Annual Update (Nuplace)</u>

The Service Delivery Manager: Housing Investment Programme provided a presentation updating Committee on the Housing Investment Programme since the previous report which came to Scrutiny in June 2025. Members noted that the report contained information on progress against planned and

pipeline developments, outturn financial performance for 2025/26, customer satisfaction and tenancy management performance, and social value outcomes.

The Committee heard that recent changes to legislation placed new responsibilities and requirements on the housing investment programme. It was noted that the Building Safety Act 2022 had introduced additional requirements for Nuplace and development partners in relation to building safety. The Renters Rights Act 2025 was also highlighted as a significant reform of the private rented sector, strengthening tenant rights and increasing landlord responsibilities. The Head of Service: Housing Investment praised the Housing Investment Team for their work in adapting to these changes successfully.

Members also noted that interest rates, while down from 2023 levels, still posed a challenge with projections expecting interest rates to rise, putting pressure on future viability appraisals and operational costs. It was added that construction costs and private rents had increased while house prices remained relatively stable.

The Committee noted that Nuplace's housing portfolio comprised of 759 homes across 17 sites, with a further 37 homes under construction, bringing the total portfolio to 796 homes. Members were informed that 75 affordable homes were available at discounted rents and that the programme had also facilitated the delivery of a further 399 affordable dwellings through housing association partners. Approximately 2,000 residents were living in Nuplace homes.

Members heard that the programme continued to prioritise the delivery of low-carbon homes incorporating high levels of thermal insulation, solar PV panels, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle charging facilities. The programme also maintained a focus on delivering accessible and adaptable homes to support older residents and those with demonstrated needs to live independently. The redevelopment of 47.94 acres of brownfield land, alongside the refurbishment of 4,656 square metres of redundant floorspace, addressed stalled development sites and brought redundant and underutilised land back into use. Nuplace’s updated Business Plan, approved by Cabinet in February 2026, included pipeline schemes with the potential to deliver a further 300 homes.

The Committee received updates on completed and ongoing developments, demonstrating diversification and the delivery of wider social value benefits. Projects were delivered in partnership with a range of organisations and included both new-build developments and the conversion of existing properties into affordable homes. The Head of Service: Housing Investment provided examples of the transformation of redundant and underutilised

buildings into high-quality residential accommodation, safeguarding historic assets while meeting local housing needs. The redevelopment of The Gower in St George's, was highlighted as a significant transformation project which involved the conversion of a Victorian school building, into a community centre, Parish Council offices and new homes.

The Committee also received an update on Demark House development within Station Quarter, which has delivered high-quality fully furnished apartments with enhanced amenity provision. The development was recognised as creating a new market within the borough and remained under development. In addition, a range of projects across the borough's towns were highlighted, including the conversion, refurbishment and redevelopment of derelict buildings.

The Committee also noted pipeline schemes including the collaboration with Housing Plus Group (HPG) on the former Phoenix Site in Dawley and a business case which was in development for the Brandon Avenue site in Shawbirch and Station Quarter Plot 1.

The Head of Service: Housing Investment informed the Committee that annual satisfaction surveys and feedback data showed that 91% of tenants would recommend Nuplace to family and friends, while 82% were satisfied or very satisfied with both the repairs and maintenance service and their Property Management Officer.

The Committee noted that operational capacity had increased within the Tenancy and Property Management Teams. System improvements had also been implemented to support the growing and ageing housing portfolio. Governance arrangements remained strong, with strategic oversight provided by the Board and delegated responsibilities supporting financial sustainability and compliance.

The Committee heard that the social value outcomes delivered through the programme had included support for 58 apprentices and trainees, 36 work experience placements, 119 hours of school and college engagement activity, and 363 hours of employment support. Members also heard that 24 new and retained jobs had been created. Over £79,000 had been invested in community engagement projects, charities and local initiatives. Economically, £29.3 million had been spent through local supply chains, with 75% of expenditure retained within the local economy. 98% of construction waste had also been diverted from landfill.

The Head of Service: Housing Investment provided details of the 2025/26 year-end financial position. Void levels were reported at 2.18%, below the modelling assumption of 3.0%. Annual turnover totalled £6.2 million, generating a profit before interest and taxation of £4.2 million. Profit after

interest was reported at £588,000. A dividend of £327,600 had been returned to support Telford & Wrekin Council frontline services. Members were also advised that the housing portfolio had been valued at £135.9 million against total investment of £102.18 million, representing capital growth of £33.72 million.

During the discussion, the Head of Service for Housing Investment reported that, despite the successful delivery of a number of schemes, several projects had encountered challenges, including construction cost overruns. Costs had been absorbed by Nuplace. The Committee also noted that market conditions were anticipated to result in further upward pressure on interest rates.

Members were advised that interest in renting apartments at Denmark House, Station Quarter had been strong, with a high level of applications received. It was reported that the scheme was projected to reach full occupancy by November 2026. The Committee was informed that the application process included affordability checks, which could extend the timescales for completing lettings.

The Committee sought further information on the 75 affordable homes illustrated during the presentation. The Head of Service: Housing Investment informed committee that affordable housing provision was delivered at approximately 80% of market rent and formed part of the requirements secured through Section 106 agreements. It was explained that Nuplace sought to maximise the delivery of affordable housing by working with partner organisations. It was added that recent developments had delivered between 40% and 45% affordable housing.

The Committee welcomed the development of 1 and 5 bed properties recognising the increase demand for 1 bedroom and large family accommodation across the borough. Members were also satisfied to see a portion of profits being returned to support Telford & Wrekin Council frontline services.

The Committee welcomed the update and noted the continued success of the programme.

BFSC11 <u>Wellington Market Regeneration Progress Report</u>

The Head of Service: Regeneration & Investment provided an update on the progress of the Wellington Market Regeneration Project. Members were informed that Telford & Wrekin Council acquired the market through a successful Local Regeneration Fund bid in 2023, with the regeneration programme combining building repairs with a refreshed retail, food and leisure offer.

The objectives of the project included increasing footfall and dwell time, improved accessibility and circulation, preserving the market's historic features, creating a stronger sense of arrival, and developing a sustainable entertainment programme. The project also formed part of the wider regeneration of Wellington, aimed at supporting the local economy and attracting visitors.

Members heard that the project had been designed to address legacy maintenance and fire safety requirements. Structural works and floor space was tailored to different business types and trading needs, while ensuring customers could move smoothly throughout the market. The roof, insulation, heating, ventilation and entrance door upgrades had been designed to respect the conservation-area setting.

The next phase of the project was supported through stakeholder engagement activities. Group Ginger and PaveAways delivered the detailed design proposals, taking into account feedback received from stakeholders and the historic significance of the building. Stakeholder engagement played a key role in the design with six distinct stall typologies including: open gondolas, lock up units with over-counter trade and back area, free standing lock-up kiosks, lock-up walk in units, pop up retail area and café/bar.

The Head of Service: Regeneration & Investment presented an overview of Wellington Market in its existing form and outlined the proposed redevelopment, using colour coding to illustrate the different service areas within the market. Members noted that public feedback had highlighted difficulties with manoeuvrability within the existing layout. The proposed design demonstrated improved sightlines and the removal of pinch points, which it was anticipated would enhance accessibility and create a more navigable environment for visitors.

The Committee was informed that significant progress had been made, with 24 traders having moved into permanent new or refurbished units. Approximately 50% of the roof replacement and insulation programme had been completed, while Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the regeneration programme had been successfully delivered. New customer facilities had been installed within both the Market Hall and the Cow Shed, and the market had remained open and trading throughout the construction programme.

Members noted that Phase 1 had delivered 12 permanent internal and external trading units, together with modern customer toilet facilities, accessible provision and baby changing facilities. Phase 2 had resulted in the creation of the Cow Shed food and beverage destination, six new trading units, enhanced customer facilities, a larger replacement canopy and the first gondola-style trading unit for Top Fruits. Phase 3 had provided a further 13

new units, including bespoke deli counters, traditional lock-up stalls and a second gondola-style unit.

Members were advised that trader engagement had been integral to the design and delivery of the regeneration programme. This had included trader meetings, workshops and one-to-one discussions throughout the project. Bespoke planning had been undertaken with individual traders in relation to stall layouts, power requirements, fit-out works and any necessary relocations.

The Committee noted that traders had received regular communication through weekly WhatsApp and email progress updates, direct correspondence, a dedicated project email address and refreshed wayfinding information. In addition, support had been provided through trader marketing initiatives, social media training and business mentoring. The Head of Service: Regeneration & Investment commended the work of the Communications Team in delivering the 'Talking Heads' programme. Members were advised that the initiative had provided stall holders with an opportunity to share and publicise their experiences of relocation and to showcase their businesses.

The Committee heard that the immediate focus would be on progressing Phase 4, maintaining clear wayfinding arrangements and preparing for the remaining construction phases. Work would also continue to explore interest from prospective occupiers, develop future operating arrangements for the Cow Shed and bar facilities, considering the potential reconfiguration of 5 Market Street into smaller retail units, and prepare final opening and launch arrangements while ensuring the project remained within the approved capital funding envelope.

The Committee welcomed the update and commended officers for their efforts in supporting traders throughout the redevelopment process. In response to questions regarding eligibility for rental concessions and the future of the late-night market, the Head of Service Delivery r: Regeneration & Investment confirmed that rental concessions had been automatically applied to all stallholders. It was further noted that provision for the continuation of the late-night market had been considered as part of the market's design and redevelopment plans.

The update was noted.

BFSC12 <u>Work Programme Review</u>

The Lead Democracy Officer informed Committee that the updated Work Programme was circulated in advance and was available in the agenda pack. Members were informed that the Maintaining Accessible Leisure Services item was scheduled for the 4 November 2026 meeting and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy was scheduled for 6, 14 and 19 January 2027 meeting.

Members also noted that additional items could be scheduled upon request. It was emphasised that the Work Programme remained a live document and could be adapted to reflect areas of interest.

Members were encouraged to submit any further suggestions for future scrutiny topics through the Clerk or the Democratic Services Team.

The updated work programme was noted.

BFSC13 Chair's Update

None.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

Chairman: ----------

Date: Wednesday 4 November 2026