

SCRUTINY ASSEMBLY

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Assembly held on Thursday, 24 October 2019 at 6.00 pm in Meeting Rooms G3/G4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors M Boylan, E M Callear, C Cassar, A R H England, I T W Fletcher, A S Jhawar, J Jones, J E Lavery, J Loveridge, A D McClements, K Middleton, L A Murray, T J Nelson, G C W Reynolds, J M Seymour, M J Smith, C R Turley and D R W White (Chair).

Co-optees:

Also Present: Councillor Cllr S Davies (Leader)

In Attendance: A Lowe (Director: Policy & Governance) and J Rowe (Executive Director: Adults Social Care, Health Integration & Wellbeing)

Apologies: Councillors N A M England, V A Fletcher, E J Greenaway, V J Holt, T L B Janke, C Morgan and P J Scott

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 The Council's Programme to Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough

At the invitation of the Chair, the Leader reminded Assembly Members that in May 2019, Cabinet had adopted a series of community commitments as the Council's strategic focus through to 2023. A subsequent report had been presented to Cabinet and Council in July 2019 which set out a refreshed high level Council programme to drive the delivery of those community commitments:-

1. Continuing to fight the closure of 24/7 A&E and Consultant led Women and Children's Centre.
2. Continuing to keep Council Tax amongst the lowest in the Midlands.
3. Continuing to invest £80m per year in protecting the most vulnerable adults and children in our community including victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.
4. Investing £50m in roads and footpaths across Telford and Wrekin and continuing to invest in creating new jobs for residents.
5. Continuing to fight any proposed merger with Shropshire Council or other authorities as it was believed that the Borough was best served by retaining its own council.

Underpinning the delivery of these community commitments, was the ambition for Telford and Wrekin to be a family friendly borough and that Telford & Wrekin Council would seek to protect, care and continue to invest in services.

To drive delivery of the commitments and this ambition, the Council's strategic programme had been revised, setting out a borough vision and 8 priorities as set out in the report.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions with a view to identifying topics for the work programme which would add value to the work of the Council in the context of the priorities set out in the report.

Members noted that several suggestions on the work programme and reflected by the priorities focussed on early intervention work but that with cuts to grants and other funding, this was more difficult to provide. The stress on CSE and Domestic Abuse was also welcomed. Questions were raised about capacity for the work in terms of finance and resource. The Leader noted that the £120m savings the Council had made was a per year figure, not a one off, and that funding was also pressured within the NHS, resulting in reduced budgets available for prevention. However he was delighted that £2m government funding had been secured for preventative work and early help and support, although this sum had to be viewed in the context of wider cuts. He was of the belief that when an issue was made a political priority, resources followed. The Council's status as a White Ribbon town made clear the commitment to tackle domestic abuse and violence and invest in these areas. He believed this was key to breaking the cycle of mental health and unemployment as research showed that both CSE and Domestic Abuse were triggers for these issues.

Welcoming the Council's recent recognition of a climate change emergency, Members asked whether there were resources for the associated work to take place in relation to the impact on the senior management team? The Leader noted that the Council was one of the first to declare a climate emergency and that whilst it was important that the Council made a worthwhile contribution to the cause, support in place from the government was needed. As an organisation and an employer, the Council was on a journey to reduce and remove single use plastics from its business. Across the borough, food waste kerb side collection had been successfully introduced. From a Cabinet perspective, Councillors Rhodes and Healy were involved in a member officer group (led by one of the Council's 'Future Leaders') set up to drive change. The Chief Operating Officer noted that two Assistant Directors were tasked to work on the project and recognising the point about resourcing such a large project, he acknowledged that there needed to be a view taken about how to take the project forward. To this end, it was intended to bring an update on the issue to Cabinet early in new year which would map out capacity and resources issues to achieve targets and bring partners and businesses on this important journey. The Leader welcomed recognition by Friends of the Earth and noted the Council's green credentials in terms of the solar farm, LED lighting scheme and 100% tariff through renewable energies.

Members reflected on the level of mental health problems in the borough, noting that a replacement for CAMHS had taken a long time and since there was a link between children with mental illness dropping into the exclusion zone, this had led to more exclusions to be dealt with. Members also

reflected on recruitment issues in the mental health sector and the lack of GP surgeries limiting access to mental health support. The Leader expressed the opinion that mental health services suffered as a 'cinderella service' due to the illness' invisibility. He believed that there was a need for a culture change in the health services and felt that a push for change could come from the Health and Wellbeing Board which now had a dedicated chair to hold to account and scrutinise partners. He believed that there was a need to go back to basics with more signposting and social prescription and less focus on medication. He noted that the index of multiple deprivation figures released at the end of September saw an increase in the number of deprived neighbourhoods in the borough (18, up from 15) and he saw a clear link between benefit change and welfare reform and mental health due to the impact of debt.

The Leader was asked what discussions taken place between the Council and local businesses in relation to Brexit. He advised that the Council was in dialogue with companies across the borough with a mixed response: those which would not be impacted, those who wanted to stay but would not if there was a bad deal or no deal Brexit, and those who were making real plans (ie spending significant amounts of money) to leave the UK in the event of a bad or no deal Brexit. The common link was that businesses were not making investment decisions due to the climate of uncertainty. There was also an issue of European employees leaving the UK, putting huge pressures on companies. The Leader did not want to unduly concern residents and the Council had not yet taken public view but he said that undoubtedly, there was an impact on business confidence.

Noting the success of the solar farm, Southwater and NuPlace, Members asked if there were any new initiatives coming forward for income generation purposes? The Leader expressed the view that projects needed to be judged against social value as well as profit. He was committed to reopening the housing revenue account, looking at expansion of the Property Investment Portfolio, expanding the offer at Southwater. It was important to adapt to the changes in the high street, to not simply invest in buildings but also invest in young people and adults so that they can change career/transition careers and unlock the benefits of being close to rural Shropshire and the urban areas of the West Midlands through the transformation of transport links. He noted that these were clear ambitions that required freedom and resources from government or the Combined Authority to deliver.

Members reflected on the local housing situation and problems in specific areas where it was considered that social housing providers were withdrawing and more homes were being let by private landlords or as HMOs. What could the Council do to take tackle the situation. The Leader noted that there had been a change in the laws on regulation for HMOs and expressed the opinion that a fit and proper test for landlords should be introduced. He believed that local provider, Wrekin Housing Trust, was investing in the borough and wanted to do more but there were challenges in the financial model. It was noted that WHT was not only demolishing in the borough but also building. WHT was, however, not the only RSL in the area and the Council was also working with other groups to complement NuPlace and the Accredited

Landlord offer. He noted that there were some fantastic private landlords but others were bad: this Council was the first in the country to secure a banning order. In some areas, it was tough but not impossible to bring on new build housing – for instance NuPlace was the first new build development in Dawley and Malinslee Ward for 35 years. NuPlace offered good value for tenants, drove up standards in the sector and pre-interest in new developments was high.

Some Members felt more could be done in terms of housing and mental health through community centres: for instance patients needed help and support after counselling to help signpost and progress their future and this could be done through community centres. The Leader noted that the Council had partnered with the voluntary sector to keep community centres open and that it was important that they were supported and empowered to build on their success.

Members discussed the political climate in the Council and the non-political role of Scrutiny.

The Leader and Chief Operating Officer (Interim) left at 7.09pm.

3 Scrutiny Structure and Work Programme 2019/20 and 2020/21

Members received a report which consulted the Assembly on potential amendments to the structure of Scrutiny and proposals for the Scrutiny work programme for the municipal years 2019/20 and 2020/21.

The proposals, detailed in full in the report, sought to provide clarity and simplification to the remit of each Committee in order to provide a clear focus and limit the potential for overlap. Scrutiny Chairs had proposed a structure which comprised of Scrutiny Management Board and five Scrutiny Committees: Children & Young People, Communities, Environment, Business and Finance and Health & Adult Care (from which the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee drew its Membership). The report also included proposed terms of reference for the Committees (set out at Appendix 1 to the report) and indicated the provisions for the retention of existing co-optees.

Members welcomed the clarity offered by the proposals and sought a small change to the remit of the proposed Environment Committee to remove reference to the “Development Plan”.

In terms of the suggestions for the work programme, further clarity was offered to the suggestion for Housing and Homeless to include the affected populations and in terms of Plastic Free and Climate Emergency it was suggested that the Committee engage with residents about the barriers to plastic free and recycling in order to influence current policy and also act as a resource body to bring forward ideas over the next four years; it was also considered that the suggestion on waste receptacles could be incorporated in this topic. Members noted the suggestion to consider the Home to School

Transport Policy that was currently being consulted upon and it was agreed that a timeline for the consultation would be sought in order to identify appropriate involvement for Scrutiny.

Members suggested that issues around blocked beds and the cancellation of a contract for Red Cross aftercare in Telford be picked up at Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Members discussed the need for timely action to be taken to improve issues in the community. This meant that Scrutiny was not always the most suitable vehicle for change to take place when direct approaches to partners or Officers would be of greater benefit.

Members discussed the desire to increase the involvement of service users and partners in reviews, including the potential to hold meetings in the community.

RESOLVED –

(a) Scrutiny Management Board be informed of the Assembly's support for the replacement of the current scrutiny committees with five committees comprising Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee, Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, Communities Scrutiny Committee, Environment Scrutiny Committee, and Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee and the proposed terms of reference for each Committee as set out in Appendix 1 to to the report.

(b) the suggestions set out in Appendix 2 to the report be endorsed for prioritisation by Scrutiny Management Board.

The meeting ended at 7.39 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday, 16 June 2022