

SCRUTINY ASSEMBLY

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Assembly held on Wednesday 8 November 2023 at 6.00 pm in Telford Minster, Meeting Point House, Southwater Square, Telford, TF3 4HS

Present: Councillors E Aston, M Boylan, S Davies, P Davis, F Doran, S Handley, Z Hannington, A S Jhawar, L Lewis, G Luter, A D McClements, H Morgan, I Preece, H Rhodes, G Thomas, C R Turley, J Urey and D R W White (Chair).

Co-optees: S Fogell

Also Present: Councillor S Davies (Leader of the Council)

In Attendance: L Gordon (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), A Lowe (Director: Policy & Governance), R Phillips (Legal & Democracy Service Delivery Manager), D Sidaway (Chief Executive), P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)) and S Yarnall (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny))

Apologies: Councillors K T Blundell, A J Burford, E Davies, A J Eade, T L B Janke, J Jones, G C W Latham-Reynolds, T J Nelson, G L Offland, S J Reynolds, R Sahota, P J Scott, P Thomas, J Thompson, W L Tomlinson, K T Tomlinson and R Tyrrell

SA1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Karen Blundell, Andy Burford, Elise Davies, Andrew Eade, Thomas Janke, Janice Jones, Gilly Latham-Reynolds, Tim Nelson, Gemma Offland, Peter Scott, Paul Thomas, John Thompson, Bill Tomlinson, Karen Tomlinson and Rachel Tyrrell.

SA2 Declarations of Interest

None.

SA3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

SA4 The Council's Programme for 2023/2024

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive presented the Council's programme for 2023-2024.

The presentation set out the Council's five priorities and vision to protect, care and invest to create a better Borough. The Leader also touched on the work

that had been delivered so far for those living and working in Telford and Wrekin since the local elections in May 2023.

As an organisation, the five priorities underpin everything the local authority has done and continues to do. The Council's 10 year vision was created with the support of external partners to build a more inclusive borough and tackle inequalities.

Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community:

The Council have worked to provide continued support to communities through the Cost of Living Crisis with 1,000s of residents taking part in free or low cost activities including free swimming for under 25s and free swimming lessons for children. The Council also provided support to 3,000 households with the cost of food and 35 warm and welcoming spaces during the last winter. Among the projects highlighted was the '10 by 10' initiative, a national first, which has seen 2,100 children encouraged to take part in ten life-enhancing activities before the age of 10.

Members were also informed of the £25m investment into the continued expansion of school capacities across the Borough including Holy Trinity Academy and the creation of a new primary school in Allscott to meet the increased demand of growing population.

The Council were continuing to work with partners to develop support for the Armed Forces community and recently hosted a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh around the Borough's local veteran's cafes and the opening of the Veteran Trail by Queen Camilia earlier in the year.

Everyone benefits from a thriving economy:

This priority was a major focus of the Council as a business supporting local authority. The Telford Land Deal was signed in 2015 and has continued to deliver 1,530 new homes with 684 being affordable and 2,250 new jobs with many in engineering and manufacturing. The Land Deal has also supported the establishment of the first regional high tech food park NiPark and has delivered 15 council-owned starter units at Leasowes Court.

The Growth Fund has invested £100m into Telford and Wrekin's economy enabling the Council to own £1b in assets and delivering a further 1,450 new jobs. The Station Quarter development has been a strong example of a partnership model with support from the Government's Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund. The development will see a much needed extension of the town centre providing education facilities, hotels and housing.

In 2019, the Council had previously committed itself to improving the Borough's high streets and has provided numerous grants through the Pride in Our High Streets Programme, introduced to enliven, modernise and diversify Telford and Wrekin's high street offer.

More recently, the Council have delivered a new Work Express bus link, providing affordable, direct and fast routes between South Telford and the

main industrial estates where local transport providers have made a reduction in services available.

The Launch of the Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Scheme has provided support to local employers and has aided in the reduction of levels of youth unemployment across the Borough, with the proportion of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training at 4.9% compared to the national average for England at 7%.

All neighbourhoods are a great place to live:

The Council have invested £2.5m in their Safer Stronger Communities programme focused on tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. The programme has delivered an increased presence from PCSO and investment in street lighting and CCTV security.

Members were informed that the Council were continuing to raise housing standards in the private rental sector under the Better Homes for All Programme. Over the past twelve months, over 500 requests for service have been received from tenants living in poor housing conditions with over 300 inspections carried out. A total of 12 civil penalty notices were given to landlords as an alternative to prosecution with a total of 3 landlords prosecuted for serious failures of housing health and safety laws.

Members also heard about NuPlace, the Council's property development company. The company had developed 485 homes across 10 sites, providing a 'home for life' for 1,350 residents with an additional 411 homes planned or in current delivery.

The Council have also recently launched a £750,000 investment package for the council owned play areas across the Borough and have secured 6 Green Flag awards.

Our natural environment is protected – we take a leading role in the climate emergency:

Since it was declared in 2019, the Council have taken a leading role around climate emergency with a commitment to becoming carbon net zero by 2030. In 2018/19 the Authority had made significant progress towards this goal with a 60% reduction in carbon emissions from operations. The achievement of this reduction is a result of a £1m investment into an air source heat pump and thermal insulation at Newport Leisure Centre, which has delivered 579,000 kWh a year electricity reduction and 41% reduction in gas consumption. Further decarbonisation works have commenced at other Leisure sites including Oakengates.

Members were informed that the second round of the Climate Change Fund was launched in June 2022, to encourage organisations to take action to reduce their carbon footprint. To date, 28 successful applicants have been awarded funding totalling £218,000.

An additional 6 local nature reserves have been formed, providing a total of 23 reserves across the Borough covering 700 hectares. A further 107 Green Guarantee sites have been secured, providing more than 2.5 times the Natural England standard for hectares of accessible green space per 1,000 population.

A community-focused, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services:

The Leader highlighted the Council's success in being awarded MJ Local Authority of the Year 2022, noting that the award was the highest accolade for any local authority to achieve. A recent peer review conducted by the Local Government Association had highlighted the Council's commitment to 'getting things right for residents'.

To combat the economic challenges faced by residents, the Council have continued to freeze Council Tax for two consecutive years, with the Authority having the lowest Council Tax rates in the West Midlands.

The Council was also pleased that the resident satisfaction rates had remained high following the 2020 residents' survey with 92% of residents satisfied with recycling and waste collection. The Council's Customer Strategy has also seen compliments increase by 19% in the last year and a 95% total increase over the last four years. Complaints have fallen by 13% in the last 12 months. The Council launched its new digital assistant 'Ask Tom' in 2021 providing 24/7 support to the most frequently asked questions and the Customer Contact Centre has extended its opening hours, running from 8am – 7pm.

The key challenges the Council faced were set out for Members. Financial pressures was a major challenge for the Borough and the Council, especially with the impact of inflation and the rising demand on children and adult social care. Health service provision was another significant challenge for the Borough with residents facing delays in ambulances, admissions and treatments. Also noted were the anticipated regeneration changes to the South Telford estates which would see new housing built and communities redeveloped if Local Growth funding was to be provided by Local Government.

A discussion followed with Members posing a number of questions:

The Muxton Local Plan refers to 2,700 houses to be built onto green field areas. There is a great concern that the current population of Telford and Wrekin is growing and limited school places are available for children. Should the Council be concentrating on current residents' needs rather than increasing the Borough's population?

Residents are encouraged to respond to the Local Plan Consultation. The Local Authority advised that majority of land within the Borough is green field and has been designated for building prior to the consultation as part of the New Town designation. Areas that are not designated have been factored into

the consultation process. The Authority also highlighted the challenges concerning infrastructure and Telford being one of the fastest growing Borough's in the country at the time. The Borough has seen areas of success of new housing developments including Lightmoor and Dawley with primary school and GP provision considered prior to the expansion of developmental phases.

If a Local Plan was not in place, would the Council lose control over Planning?

The Authority informed Members that if a Local Plan was not in place, the Council would not be able to use their own planning policies and applications would be decided in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Due to the housing shortages experienced in the South of England, particularly the London Borough Councils, we have seen an influx of communities resettling in other authority areas. How has the Council responded to this in Telford and Wrekin?

The Authority confirmed that it would look to work closer with London Borough Councils to support the current housing shortages and schemes such as Nuplace and Telford & Wrekin Homes would be available for communities moving into Telford and Wrekin.

How are Telford and Wrekin tackling issues with Private Landlords?

The Authority were aware of an increase in concern around eviction when reporting poor conditions for rented properties across the Borough. Members were informed that Local Councils are granted powers to regulate landlords and the Council praised those private Landlords within the Borough whom provided homes of a good standard. The Council were also continuing to work with the Wrekin Housing Trust to continue to invest in properties as part of the Telford & Wrekin Homes scheme.

Can the Council advise what support is in place for schools in Telford and Wrekin for children with SEMH needs?

The Council recognised that there had been a significant rise in the number of children with SEN provision and highlighted the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children's mental health. The Council had continued to work with academies and mental health trusts to better understand how schools could be supported to deal with additional needs. There had also been ongoing work to monitor the number of managed moves and an update on SEN provision within the Borough was due to come to the Council's Cabinet meeting in the near future.

Significant work has taken place to invest into the Town's High Streets including the purchase of Wellington Market. What are the Council's next steps?

The Council were continuing to work with traders of Wellington Market following its purchase to increase levels of footfall into the Town. Investment into the Borough's Market Towns would also continue in order to provide a bespoke high street experience for visitors.

A number of small businesses including chemists and food banks provided support during the COVID-19 pandemic. How can these businesses be recognised?

The Council's High Street Hero award scheme recognises local independent businesses who have made a real difference to their local high street and communities. Nominations can be made online by local residents.

What are the Council's plans to support small businesses continue to grow and create revenue within Telford and Wrekin?

The Authority confirmed that Council Teams have continued to work with small businesses across the Borough and in particular those who had applied for the business start-up investment.

The Hospital Transformation Programme and the resulting closure of the A&E service at the Princess Royal Hospital in Telford continues to be a concern to residents. What are the Council's next steps in their campaign against this?

The Council launched a petition around the closure of A&E services in Telford in 2022 which had been hand-delivered to Downing Street earlier in the year. The Council Leader informed Members that a further letter had been sent to the Secretary of State setting out further concerns around the downgrading of emergency care at the Princess Royal Hospital and consideration for health inequalities within the Borough.

There are a significant number of residents who have been unable to complete the recent Healthwatch Survey around GP Services. Can the Council provide printable copies to residents who have limited IT resources?

Residents who are unable to complete the questionnaire online are able to complete the survey at their local GP Practice. The Council informed Members that they would continue to work with Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin to ensure downloadable surveys were made available to residents.

How will the increased pressures as a result of the Virtual Wards scheme affect the Council?

The Authority advised that the principal of virtual wards should be considered positively with the correct safeguards in place. As a result of the continued pressures on the NHS, residents who require hospital treatment were being discharged and subsequently require additional care at home, which has previously resulted in increased costs for the Council.

Following an increase in concerns around the provision of healthcare in Telford and Wrekin, both at GP and Hospital level, does the Council feel that services have improved since the move to an Integrated Care System?

The Council advised that it was part of one of the smallest Integrated Care Partnerships in the country, consisting of only two local authorities and one NHS system. Due to the current financial climate and acute setting, there is limited integration within the NHS in Telford and Wrekin.

SA5 Update on Scrutiny Work Programme

The Director: Policy & Governance provided a brief overview of the work undertaken so far as part of the two year Scrutiny work programme. In particular, the Council's scrutiny committees had looked at:

- Elections Review
- Corporate Catering
- Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Fly Tipping
- Annual Safeguarding Partnership Report
- Cost of Living

The programme allows for a degree of flexibility and could be adjusted to adapt to unforeseen priorities. Members were advised that the work programme is discussed at each scrutiny committee meeting and is available as part of the agenda pack.

The meeting ended at 7.59 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday 14 December 2023