

# SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022**

**2.00 pm in the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

**Responsible Officer:** Amanda Holyoak

Email: amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 257714

### **Present**

Councillor Claire Wild (Chairman)

Councillors Joyce Barrow (Vice Chairman), Julia Buckley, Steve Charmley, Roger Evans, Vince, Hunt, Peggy Mullock and David Vasmer

### **10 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies had been received from Councillor Robert Macey (substituted by Councillor Vince Hunt).

### **11 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

None declared.

### **12 Minutes of the meetings held on 13 July 2022 and 14 September 2022**

Minutes of the meetings held on 13 July 2022 and 14 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **13 Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

### **14 Member Question Time**

There were no members questions.

### **15 ICT & Digital Strategy Green Paper**

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Digital presented the report which set out the principles of a 'Digital First' approach and the key considerations in adopting this approach.

It was acknowledged that a digital approach would not be suitable for all and therefore traditional methods were not being precluded as a potential delivery channel. Members expressed the importance of safeguarding the most vulnerable and retaining full access to the council if digital access was not available.

Concerns were raised regarding equality and security issues around the use of the Cloud. It was felt that an "equality" heading should be included in the report as per

other reports. Members were advised that back up systems were in place and that an audit reviews of the Cloud system were carried out.

The Executive Director of Resources acknowledged the concerns raised and advised that there would be a focus on improving the experience when using digital first to encourage more of those who are able to access it to use digital over traditional methods.

It was suggested that a member of the Connecting Shropshire team would be invited to a future meeting.

It was agreed that the following should be added to the considerations for a digital first approach:

1. There must be safeguards in place to protect the most vulnerable.
2. There needs to be a better uptake of broadband and improved phone coverage.
3. It is important that committee meetings continue to be held in public and that the democratic process is not eroded.

The recommendation proposed in the report to recommend to Council a Digital First approach to Council for delivering and commissioning services now and in the future was agreed.

## **16 Review of Charging Policy for Second Homes and Empty Properties Green Paper**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Resources presented the report which provided an overview of the powers Shropshire Council had with regards to increasing council tax on second homes and long term empty properties and the further charging options which could be implemented from 1 April 2024.

Members' attention was drawn to para 7.10 and the effects the council tax premium had on first time buyers. It was questioned whether there should be some leniency on the policy for first time buyers with a local connection if the property required work before it became habitable. It was noted that currently searches did not show whether the property was subject to the premium. Members expressed the importance of doing all they can to help first time buyers to bring properties back into use; however it was acknowledged that this would need further investigation. Members were advised that there was an appeals process, and that Shropshire Council are able to offer a discretionary discount under exceptional circumstances.

It was felt that it would be useful to understand how many properties are registered for business rates due to being holiday lets as they may be under threshold and therefore apply for business rate relief. It was acknowledged that this would require further resource to investigate.

Members expressed a desire to see as many empty properties brought back into residential use as possible.

A request was received for the number of appeals that are received, how many succeed or are refused and how many progress to a General Appeals Panel.

Concern was raised that first time buyers are not necessarily aware that an appeals process is available to them. It was asked that this information was included as part of the council tax bill.

A suggestion was received that there could be a six-month amnesty on charges which could incentivise people to take on empty properties before they are required to pay the premium, rather than be faced with a charge on a property that they did not know about.

It was agreed that the process for appeals and an exception process for first time buyers with a local connection be investigated, acknowledging and understanding any associated legalities.

## **17 Financial Monitoring 2022/23 Quarter 2**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Resources presented the report which estimated the Council's year end position based on information over the period 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022. Members' attention was drawn to the ongoing issues with adults and children's social care but also inflationary pressures.

A request was made for data from other authorities on the ratio of direct employees to agency staff with a suggestion that an agreement/memorandum of understanding could be set up across neighbouring authorities to offer the same salary and terms and conditions. It was stated that a comparison may not be that simple due to differing pay scales, however West Midlands Employers were looking to rationalise this.

Concern was raised regarding the forecast for income from Shrewsbury shopping centres with talks of a recession on the horizon. Members were advised that the income target would be adjusted according to market pressures.

It was felt that this report should have been brought to scrutiny prior to Cabinet.

The Executive Director of Resources advised that they were looking at a more robust, long term solution to address the issues being faced.

Members noted the report.

## **18 Financial Strategy Mid Year Review**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Resources introduced the report which provided an update on Shropshire Council's financial outlook previously reported to Cabinet in July, setting out the current view of the next 5 years and the steps in place to secure financial sustainability.

Members queried “TOMs” (Target Operating Models). A briefing at Backbenchers was requested to help members understand what a TOM is and how they work.

Concern was raised with the amount of detail which was not available, when a decision will be taken at Cabinet in the next two weeks.

Members were reminded of the Financial Peer Review which had recently taken place. Members queried whether the action plan from this review had been published and were advised that this would be confirmed following the meeting. A follow up of the review would be taking place in March.

Members noted the report.

**19 Date/Time of next meeting of the Committee**

Members noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 11 January 2023 at 10.00 am.

Signed ..... (Chairman)

Date: .....