

Minutes of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
of the **Test Valley Borough Council**
held in The Annexe, Crosfield Hall, Broadwater Road, Romsey
on 14 December 2022 at 5.30 pm

Attendance:

Councillor N Lodge (Chairman)

Councillor G Bailey

Councillor D Baverstock

Councillor C Borg-Neal

Councillor Z Brooks

Councillor T Burley

Councillor J Neal (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Cooper

Councillor J Parker

Councillor T Swain

Councillor A Warnes

Also in attendance

Councillor P Bundy

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Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Coole, Donnelly, Gwynne, Hamilton, and Maltby.

372

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

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Declarations of Interest

There was no public participation.

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Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

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Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

376

Call in Items

There were no call in items.

377 **Urgent decisions taken since last meeting**

There were no urgent decisions.

378 **Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

Resolved:

That Councillor Neal be appointed as Vice-Chairman until the first meeting after Annual Council in 2023.

379 **Referral of Planning Applications to Committee**

At the Committee's Away Day in July Councillor Burley requested a discussion around the call in process for planning applications specifically around the flexibility of the call in process.

The Head of Planning and Building gave a presentation on referral of planning applications to Committee.

The presentation covered:

- How planning decisions making works.
- Delegations to the Head of Planning and Building Services.
- Committee triggers.
- Code for Members and Officers/Member and Officer Interests Protocol/Officers Code of Conduct.

The Scheme of Delegations enables most decisions to be made by officers. They are delegated unless a trigger point applies. This is typical of most district/borough councils but the trigger points for referring items to committee for a decision will vary.

Members discussed the following:

- Call in time for Members.
- Scheme of Delegations to officers.
- Applications from members of staff.

The main concerns with the call-in process are that the precise period allowed for Members to call-in an application to committee is fixed to 21-days from the date the application is recorded on the Weekly List. Given that members of the public could submit their comments after that date the current Scheme of Delegation does not provide sufficient flexibility for Councillors to consider these representations before

deciding whether to call an item to Committee, or not, outside of that initial period. The other issue is where a member calls-in an application that is not in their ward and there is no communication with the ward member.

Councillor Burley will meet separately with the Head of Planning and Building and Legal officers together with any members that wish to join him. It was also suggested that the Chairmen of Northern Area Planning Committee and the Chairmen of Southern Area Planning Committee be invited to join the discussion.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Planning and Building for his presentation.

380 **Authority's Monitoring Report 2021-2022**

Consideration was given to a report which considered the findings from this year's Authority Monitoring Report 2021/22. The document also includes relevant summary updates where appropriate on planning policy documents and data that have occurred between 1 April 2022 and 31 October 2022.

The Planning Portfolio Holder, Councillor Bundy, introduced the presentation and the Principal Planning Officer – Strategy took the Committee through the report.

In conclusion;

- Housing completions have exceeded the Revised Local Plan the annualised average requirement.
- The Borough has seen an increase in the number of affordable housing completed during the reporting year, this figure also remains above target.
- The Borough is performing well in terms of employment land and development.
- For ground floor units, there has been a decrease in vacancy in Romsey Town Centre and a small increase in vacancy in Andover town centre since 2018, with vacancy peaking in both town centres in October 2020.

Members discussed the following:

- Comparison of CO2 emission figures in Test Valley compared to Hampshire and Nationally.
- Empty residential properties brought back into use in Test Valley (2014-2022)
- Water quality actions.
- Proposed Government changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Affordable housing completion figures split between northern and southern areas – already circulated.
- Self-build and custom house building.
- Vacant shop units.
- Recycling rates.

The Borough is continuing to perform well in a number of areas, in context of Output Indicators as shown in Appendix 1 to the report. The Principal Planning Officer – Strategy explained that he was still waiting for the information in the highlighted text in the Report and this will be circulated once this is received. The Authority’s Monitoring Report will be published on the Council’s website prior to Christmas.

Resolved:

That the Test Valley Borough Council’s Authority Monitoring Report for 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 as attached as Annex 1 to the report, be noted and endorsed.

381

New Ways of Working

Consideration was given to a presentation by the Innovation and Business Change Manager which updated the Committee on New Ways of Working. The New Ways of Working project aims to deliver a modernisation programme across the organisation, review/rescope focused on meeting the demands of our residents and communities and designed around strategic influences which meet strategic priorities.

The presentation explained the background to the project, looking at the strategic influences, what new ways of working covers and lessons learnt.

Moving forwards the project will look at:

- Exploring customer expectations
- Reviewing service standards
- Utilising insight data
- Customer digital experience platforms
- Rebrand and reflect in the corporate plan
- Strengthen internal and external communications

New Ways of Working is delivering a modernisation programme across the organisation which focuses on meeting the demands of residents and communities and is designed around strategic influences which meet strategic priorities.

Members discussed:

- Broadband connections
- Screens in reception
- Signing in and out of the building
- Difficulty for the public and members to contact officers
- Paperless office
- Voice over IP
- Website
- Office accommodation

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Updates on Panels

Budget Panel – The next meeting will be held on 17 January 2023.

Enforcement Panel – Councillor Burley reported that there had been a significant delay in the panel due to the retirement of the Head of Planning and Building and the start of the new one. He had met with the new Head of Planning and Building, the Head of Strategy and Innovation and the Democratic Services Officer to discuss the next meeting. The Head of Strategy and Innovation held a session with the Test Valley Association of Town and Parish Councils and will circulate a copy of the questions asked at the meeting. The next meeting will be held on 24 January 2023 in Conference Room 3 at 5.30pm. It is anticipated that the panel's final report will be considered at the meeting in April 2023.

Communications Panel – Councillor Brooks updated the Committee on the work of the Communications Panel. Since the previous update the panel have progressed a number of actions.

- A focus group was held on 17 November to look at communications and the services the Council provides.
- A briefing session on the proposed new website will be held for the panel on 18 January 2023.
- Officers are currently updating the key letters reviewed by the panel in line with the feedback they provided.
- Officers are identifying where the issues lie in respect of officer contact since the authority adopted agile working.

The remaining focus groups and website briefing session will be held in January and the panel will then meet at the end of January to finalise its thinking and shape its report to the committee in March 2023.

383 **Programme of Work for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee reviewed the work programme as follows:

- Move Communications Panel report to March.
- Move Green Economy to March.
- Add Update on the Corporate Plan (outcomes from public engagement) to January.

The Chairman reported that he will look at updating the Overview and Scrutiny handbook in the New Year. He will put a scoping report together and bring it back to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the future work programme be approved.

(The meeting terminated at 7.34 pm)