

Minutes of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
of the **Test Valley Borough Council**  
held in Conference Room 1, Beech Hurst, Weyhill Road, Andover  
on Wednesday 7 February 2024 at 5.30 pm

Attendance:

**Councillor I Jeffrey (Chairman)**

Councillor G Bailey

Councillor C Borg-Neal

Councillor D Cattell

Councillor S Gidley

Councillor A Gillies

Councillor L Gregori

**Councillor J Neal (Vice-Chairman)**

Councillor N Gwynne

Councillor S Hasselmann

Councillor S MacDonald

Councillor L Matthews

Councillor J Parker

Councillor A Warnes

Also in attendance:

Councillor Z Brooks

Councillor M Flood

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**Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors K Brooks, Hughes, Leech and Yalden.

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**Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

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**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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**Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

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**Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 January 2024 were proposed by Councillor Jeffrey and seconded by Councillor Neal.

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 January 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.**

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### **Call in Items**

There were no call in items.

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### **Urgent decisions taken since last meeting**

There were no urgent decisions.

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### **Improvement and Sustainability to Listed Buildings**

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Planning and Building who explained that the Government had commissioned a report to look at the issues related to listed buildings and premises in conservation areas regarding the potential to improve the energy performance of historic buildings and generation of low carbon energy. This report entitled “Adapting historic homes for energy efficiency: a review of the barriers” was published in January and linked these matters back to reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. The report highlighted a range of areas which constrain the ability of property owners to improve the energy performance of their premises and generate green energy. Planning controls and resources were one area highlighted.

The report noted that there is a lot of guidance some of which is helpful and some less so (they do not all align). There are also resource and funding issues around this sector particularly in relation to skills shortages in knowledge of how to deal with works to historic buildings.

A consultation by Historic England, mentioned in the Government report, called ‘Climate Change and Historic Building Adaptation’ is being developed with the intention of consolidating guidance to support decision making in this sector in relation to works to historic buildings including on what should and what should not need listed building consent and what types of alterations should generally be acceptable.

Members felt that this was a complicated area and that they would like something more specific instead of links to Government and other guidance and would like more details which includes the environmental impact. The Head of Planning and Building explained that this was a complex area and some of this can be looked at corporately in relation to the wider action the Council is taking in response to the Climate Emergency.

It was felt that some of the guidance is too technical and not easily understood by residents. Guidance could be more practical for residents to be able to make their buildings more sustainable. It is understood that there will be some Pathfinder local authorities and funding for training will be extremely helpful. The Head of Planning and Building responded that with the right additional resources being identified it would be possible to deliver bespoke training for owners of listed buildings, Parish Councils and Councillors.

A Member asked about the impact of any changes on planning applications and what help and support Councillors will get when approving or not approving applications. The Head of Planning and Building explained that conservation officer advice is provided for applications which affect historic buildings/conservations areas to assist with decision making and there are some changes to buildings that do not require permission. The draft note by Historic England will also give advice to the Council regarding what should and what shouldn't require consent.

The draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) is out for consultation and will provide policy against which applications would be assessed in future. There is training already scheduled for Councillors on historic buildings and conservation and the Head of Planning and Building will also investigate whether a specialist could attend or organise a sperate session to give some advice and training specifically regarding this area.

Additional resource will be required to deliver specialist training and support and possibly provide a bespoke guide for Test Valley, relating to the scope to carryout improvements to listed buildings, as some other Local Authorities have done.

In summary there are themes associated with guidance and training for applicants, Councillors and officers regarding enhancement to historic asserts and it would be useful to link this to wider corporate work around the climate emergency programme.

There is concern that passing it over to the Climate Emergency Working Group will delay the process and suggested that officers follow up on the actions in parallel with passing the actions to the Climate Emergency Working Group and report back to a future meeting.

The recommendation as set out below was proposed by Councillor Jeffrey and seconded by Councillor Neal. Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That the key issues and comments from this meeting be forwarded to the Climate Emergency Working Group for further consideration.**
- 2. That the Head of Planning and Building reviews the actions raised and brings back an update to a future meeting.**

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**Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26**

Councillor Flood, Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder introduced the report and explained that the Government had abolished Council Tax Benefit in 2013 and asked Councils to produce their own scheme, which was done and mirrored the previous scheme. The Council has reviewed its scheme annually to take into account other benefit increases. The proposal is to consider options that could make the scheme simpler and easier to understand.

The Revenues and Welfare Manager explained that the current Council Tax Scheme is complicated and based on old rules and now is a good time to review the way our support is calculated. He explained that housing benefit and Council Tax Support is calculated at the same time. Housing benefit is being abolished and households are being transitioned to Universal Credit. As this progresses, there will be fewer housing benefit applicants, reducing the need to keep the two calculations on the same basis.

It was recommended that a small panel of OSCOM members be established to help develop options for any new scheme.

The report contained a timeline for how a new scheme could be implemented for 2024/25 and it was noted that there was a very short timeline for the panel to report back to the Committee. The timetable sets out a report to the June meeting to agree recommendations to Cabinet in July for a draft scheme to consult on. He explained that in 2019 a panel was established to review the Council Tax Scheme and requested the Committee to set up a similar panel. The Head of Finance and Revenues suggested that the panel could consider the impact on the Council's budget when considering a new scheme.

It was agreed that a panel will be set up to look at the options for the 2025/26 scheme and interest will be requested from the Committee members.

The recommendation as set out below was proposed by Councillor Jeffrey and seconded by Councillor Macdonald.

**Resolved:**

**That a panel be established to develop options for any new scheme.**

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**Updates on Panels**

**Regeneration Panel** – Councillor Gwynne, Lead Member explained that the first meeting will take place virtually on Friday at 7pm.

**Budget Panel** – Councillor Neal, Lead Member reported that the Budget Panel had met on 11 January 2024 to discuss the position of the budget for the next financial year, the provisional Local Government financial settlement and updates on various budget. Overall progress was good and a balanced budget has provisionally been made. The panel also discussed the proposed increase to the Council Tax charge for the coming year.

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

The Chairman requested the Committee to consider an Away Day in 2024. Dates will be circulated in due course.

The Chairman took the Committee through the work programme and the Head of Strategy reported that the new Corporate Action Plan is due to go to Cabinet in April and the Leader is keen to give a briefing to the Committee prior to going to Cabinet. Dates and times will be discussed.

**Resolved:**

- 1. The Committee is requested to approve the future work programme.**
- 2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees to hold an annual Away Day in 2024.**

(The meeting terminated at 6.46 pm)