

BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 13 MAY 2024

Present:

Councillor Suzy Cornwell (Chair) (in the Chair)
Councillor Stephen Clough (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Christine Gare
Councillor Tony Lacey

Councillor Lee Hartshorne
Councillor Richard Spooner

Also Present:

D Johnson	Assistant Director - Property, Estates and Assets
A Bashir	Improvement Officer
J Hayden	Senior Scrutiny Officer
T Scott	Governance and Scrutiny Officer
I Stoddart	Digital Connectivity Manager (Derbyshire County Council)

BSC Apologies for Absence

41/2

3-24 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Fletcher and S Reed.

BSC Declarations of Interest

42/2

3-24 There were no interests declared at this meeting.

BSC Minutes of Last Meeting

43/2

3-24 RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Business Scrutiny Committee held on 26 February 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

BSC Internet Connectivity across the District

44/2

3-24 The Digital Connectivity Manager (Derbyshire County Council) delivered a presentation to Members providing further information on digital connectivity and internet access across North East Derbyshire. The presentation included a number of maps and graphs which set out superfast and fibre coverage, broadband availability, mobile phone coverage and projects to increase internet speed in certain areas. The presentation also detailed the Digital Connectivity Strategy, which was currently being developed by County Council and would be approved in the coming months.

Members referred to incidents in Dronfield where power cuts had occurred and there had been no backup power sources for the mobile phone masts. The Digital Connectivity Manager assured Members that new types of phone masts were being installed to prevent this happening again.

Members enquired how the funds for the areas with poor mobile coverage were

found. The Digital Connectivity Manager explained that Central Government had set up a Shared Rural Network with a number of mobile networks to distribute funds towards places with poor coverage, and in terms of North East Derbyshire, Derbyshire County Council used the areas of lowest coverage ('not spots') to identify specific District areas to allocate the funding.

Members were informed that work was currently underway to procure equipment that will test connectivity in areas across the County. This will need to go through the Cabinet at Derbyshire County for approval for funds.

The Digital Connectivity Manager informed Members that he would come back to the Committee with another update once the procurement process for the specialised equipment had taken place, assuming it gets approved. The Chair requested that this be added to the Committee's Work Programme for 2024/25.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the update be noted.
- (2) That the Derbyshire County Council Digital Connectivity Strategy be added to the Work Programme 2024/25 for 6 months' time.

BSC Performance Management

45/2

3-24

The Improvement Officer presented a report setting out progress on the strategies underpinning the Council Plan objective 'A great place to work' for the period ending 31 March 2024.

Members were updated on progress under the following objective sub-categories in Appendix 1 of the report:

- 1) Community with a diverse range of commutable employment that match the skills of residents.
- 2) Community with growing commutable employment opportunities.

The Chair did not feel there was enough detail in the report about the things the Council had achieved. The Improvement Officer responded that the Council Plan Objective reports to full Council included more detail.

Members discussed the part of the Appendix which stated "Town Centre retail audits carried out for the four town centres: Clay Cross, Eckington, Dronfield and Killamarsh" and asked to receive more detail on precisely what took place as part of these audits. Members also requested information on if the Council still operated Business Innovation Centres for startup businesses. The Improvement Officer agreed to ask these questions to the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager.

The Chair referred to the Tourism Hospitality Charter and how the Appendix stated it "may not go forward." The Chair requested that she would like to see the Charter (and hear about why it might not go forward) on the Committee's 2024/25 Work Programme.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the update be noted.

(2) That the Tourism Hospitality Charter be added to the Work Programme 2024/25 for a future Committee meeting.

BSC **Cabinet Business**

46/2

3-24

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented a digest of Cabinet decisions taken since 29 February 2024. The digest set out key information for each decision.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that the digest was now presented in a new format, so that Members are now only seeing decisions made since the last round of Scrutiny meetings.

The Chair stated that the Managing Director would be providing the Committee with an update in July 2024 regarding the Combined Authority.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

BSC **Policy Development**

47/2

3-24

The Committee agreed to swap the order of the agenda and have Policy Development before Cabinet Business.

The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets presented the Asset Management Strategy 2024 to Members. He advised that this was an emerging document and work was still to be done to finalise it.

The Chair stated that she liked the layout of the Strategy and that it highlighted the documents to which each area relates to. However, the Chair stated that it would be useful that within the Delivery and Action Plan it showed what parts of the Local Plan each area related to.

The Chair referred to the Figure 1 table and asked for progress updates on some of the documents mentioned. The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets explained that the People Strategy was in place, and the Housing Strategy was in draft form.

Members referred to the ‘Assets in Numbers’ section of the document, and asked if there were any other potential development sites being considered aside from the 50 quoted. The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets advised that the exact number of sites was not yet known, because officers were undertaking a piece of work to find more.

Members referred to the mentions in the document about increasing biodiversity, and felt this appeared in conflict with the “frequent grass cutting” in the ‘Our Assets’ section. The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets agreed to ask Streetscene about this.

Members discussed the asset register and asked if the values of all the individual parcels of land could be disclosed. The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets explained that he didn't think this would be beneficial, as some of the values in the asset register were not the market value and some of the figures used were for capital accounting purposes only. Members also raised the question as to how they could identify Council land within their own ward boundaries. The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets advised that they could access the Council's mapping system (MyMaps) which had a limited amount of information on the parcels of land in Council ownership. Any specific queries in relation to land ownership should be directed to the Estates Team.

The Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets informed the Committee that he would be presenting something to the Asset Management Board regarding Member consultation, and he would update the Committee on this after the Board meeting.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

BSC **Work Programme**

48/2

3-24

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented the draft Work Programme 2023/24 for the Committee to consider. The Work Programme had now come to the end of the municipal year, and the Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that the Committee must confirm the Programme has been completed.

Members were informed that at the end of the Work Programme document, there were a list of suggested topics for the Committee to include in its new Work Programme, which would be discussed further with the Chair and Vice Chair, and then presented to the Committee for approval.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme 2023/24 be approved and signed off.

BSC **Reflection on the Council Plan**

49/2

3-24

The Chair asked Members to reflect on if the work of the Committee at the meeting had added value to the Council Plan objectives.

The Chair also asked the Committee to reflect on how Members wished to approach the issue of Connectivity in the future, and what the Committee would ask the Digital Connectivity Manager (Derbyshire County Council) at future meetings. The Chair agreed to discuss this with the Senior Scrutiny Officer.

BSC **Additional Urgent Items**

50/2

3-24

None.

BSC **Date of Next Meeting**

51/2

3-24

The next meeting of the Business Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place in the new Municipal Year.