

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

From: Bill Newman - Corporate Manager, Strategic Planning	Report Number: MOS/17/17
To: Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date of meeting: 19 October 2017

UPDATE ON JOINT SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS - NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the actions and recommendations arising from the 'Task & Finish Group' review of the Councils role and duties with regards to neighbourhood planning.

2. Recommendation:
2.1 That the Committee note that progress has been made on delivering against the actions arising from the Task & Finish Group.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is currently supported by Government grants. This consists of grant payments (up to specified limits) for groups preparing such plans and a separate payment claimable by Babergh and Mid Suffolk once a local referendum date has been set.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The Councils have a statutory duty to support the preparation of neighbourhood plans.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 This report most closely links with Strategic Risk no. 3a - *Failure to deliver Neighbourhood Plans*. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Failure to provide adequate support for NP will damage relationships with Parish Councils.	Unlikely (2)	Noticeable (2)	Provide additional staff support. Manage expectations through use of a 'Memorandum of Understanding'. Monitor and adapt internal processes.

6. Consultations

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7. Equality Analysis

7.1 Not applicable

8. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

8.1 Not applicable

9. Key Information

Background

9.1 In December 2016, Joint Scrutiny Committee (JSC) were presented with a report that outlined the [then] current position in respect of neighbourhood planning across the Babergh and Mid Suffolk districts, and of the Councils' role in supporting the production of neighbourhood plans.

9.2 In February 2017, representatives from four parishes addressed JSC about their experiences and the level of support provided. Subsequently, JSC set up a 'Task & Finish Group' to look at the ideas put forward, and to carry out their own research. The outcomes of this work were a number of specific recommendations.

9.3 The table in **Appendix 1** records these recommendations and summarises what actions have been taken to date.

10. Background Documents

10.1 A copy of the Joint Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group report dated 19 April 2017 can be found at:

Link: <http://baberghmidsuffolk.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s4593/JSC1616.pdf>

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Task & Finish Group Action	Progress Report
<p>The Strategic Planning service gives priority to providing an in-house critical friend service to groups that enter into the neighbourhood plan process. This service to aim to provide continuity of contact for the groups and to give a holistic approach to the support and guidance provided. In order to achieve this SLT be requested to explore if an additional post in the team is required and how this can be funded.</p>	<p>Senior Planning Officers have already started working with Neighbourhood Planning (NP) Groups and further linkages are being made as follow-up's to the consultation events connected with the new Joint Local Plan. More specifically, NP Groups are being offered 1-to-1 meetings with officers to look at how their emerging NPs and our Joint Local Plan will work together.</p> <p>Resources for an additional Senior Planning Policy Officer post have been safeguarded and SLT have been asked to approve the recruitment to this post to help share the team workload and, specifically, to provide an additional internal 'critical friend' resource. Until that post has been advertised and filled, the main support work continues to be provided by two officers (one full time and one part time) and a mix of existing staff and consultants acting for the Council as critical friends.</p>
<p>The Councils should complete the planned development of a 'Memorandum of Understanding' to be used to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Councils and the Neighbourhood Plan Groups when a plan is being planned or developed.</p>	<p>A Memorandum of Understanding is now in place with one NP group (Long Melford) and draft MoUs have been shared with a number of others. We will continue to roll these out on a case by case basis, and keep the document updated as appropriate.</p>
<p>To assist with the above, officers continue developing the neighbourhood planning websites including providing a map of the neighbourhood planning process.</p>	<p>Officers continue to keep the NP webpages updated. However, a Babergh / Mid Suffolk specific 'process map' has not been added as it is felt that this is readily covered elsewhere. Website viewers and those making enquiries through other means are being directed to the My Communities website which contains information and resource guides covering all aspects of neighbourhood planning. In particular the Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap Guide / Roadmap Worksheets are highlighted which contain helpful and clear instructions on the process.</p> <p>Discussions continue to take place with individual groups on a case by case basis re the timelines and critical dates associated with the stage that they have reached.</p>

<p>To facilitate Members being able to provide maximum support to groups that wish to complete neighbourhood plans, a members' briefing be used to provide training on how they can best do this and enable them to signpost to the appropriate resource or officer.</p>	<p>A Joint Member Briefing session has been scheduled for Wednesday 29 November 2017 (at Endeavour House). The exact details and content of the briefing are being developed at present.</p>
<p>Members note that smaller villages tend to be put off starting a neighbourhood plan by a combination of uncertainty about funding and the lack of resources. Members found that funding is available for a lot of the costs of completing a neighbourhood plan. Members ask that officers look at how the development of neighbourhood plans by small villages can be encouraged through the new Local Plan and how the Councils can provide support to small villages investigating whether to complete a neighbourhood plan.</p>	<p>Meetings and conversations continue to take place with parishes about all aspects of neighbourhood planning, including encouraging smaller parishes to talk to their neighbours to see if they have any shared / common grounds of interest which might enable them to deliver a multi-parish NP. One such conversation is currently taking place with Stutton, Holbrook and Tattingstone but none of the parishes have reached a firm decision yet one way or the other.</p> <p>The one question that keeps coming up relates to grant funding. Guidelines on this are set out on the My Community website, under its 'Funding Options' section. At present, the most any one group can apply for is a £9k basic payment with an additional £6k worth of support being available <u>if</u> they meet certain criteria. A new grant funding programme will come into effect from 1 April 2018, the details of which have yet to be announced.</p>