

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES, CORKS LANE, HADLEIGH ON MONDAY, 24 JULY 2017

PRESENT: Barry Gasper (Chairman)

Melanie Barrett
Alastair McCraw

Bryn Hurren
Fenella Swan

Clive Arthey and Peter Burgoyne were unable to be present.

11 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None declared.

12 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2017 be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to the second paragraph of Minute No 10 being amended by the addition of the words in italics, as set out below:-

... Officers explained that the Chartered Institute of Housing model had been used and that it provided a stress tested verification process – further information about the *assessment of the verification and validation process used in the model* to be provided outside the meeting.

13 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

None received.

14 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

15 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

16 BOS/17/6 OUTSTANDING ITEMS FROM JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2016/17

Ben Staines, Project and Research Officer, introduced Paper BOS/17/6 which outlined the current position on items previously considered by the Joint Scrutiny Committee.

Members were asked to decide which of those items should be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Forward Plan for 2017/18.

RESOLVED

That the following items be included in the Committee's Forward Plan at the appropriate time:-

Supporting Business Growth

Use of Interim staff

Waste Services – brief update after one year

Fuel poverty – to report any changes

17 SCOPING FOR HOMELESSNESS / BED AND BREAKFAST ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

Members had before them the following documents:-

- copies of the slide presentation 'Preparing for the Homelessness Reduction Act' by Andy Gale (circulated prior to the day of the meeting)
- Homelessness Statistics 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 (circulated at the meeting)
- Review Scoping Document – Homelessness and Bed and Breakfast placements (circulated with the agenda for the meeting)

Jan Osborne, Cabinet Member for Housing, was present at the meeting and referred to the work being done by Andy Gale in the areas of prevention and the focus on delivery, together with creative and proactive solutions.

Heather Sparrow, Corporate Manager – Homelessness Prevention and Older Persons, gave the background to the proposed Review, and outlined some key points, including the following:-

- Obligation to respond to applications / timescales for processing
- Eligibility / Priority need – legal/medical etc /Intentional homelessness / Local connection
- Discretionary – advice and assistance, with requirement to provide interim accommodation in some circumstances
- The impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – to be implemented from 3 April 2018
- Code of Guidance to be the subject of consultation from September
- Workload is anticipated to double to provide personal housing plans, legal notices and letters – 4.5 FTEs to be appointed across the 2 Districts - some costs might be covered from Government funding of £61m
- Challenges to new legislation via the courts – impact of Case Law
- Effect of Benefits Cap / Universal Credit (from Oct 2017) / potential increase in length of stay in B&B accommodation

The Corporate Manager also referred to issues around rough sleeping and domestic abuse, and to the Homelessness Statistics for the 3 years to the end of March 2017. Members then considered the way forward, as a result of which the Corporate Manager was asked to make an updated version of her report available to Members, prior to their further consideration at the August meeting.

RESOLVED

That Members' views as expressed at the meeting be reflected in a detailed scoping document to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee, with the Review to be carried out in September/October 2017.

Note:-

Subsequent to the meeting, and the cancellation of the August Committee, this item was re-scheduled for 20 November as part of the review of the effectiveness of preparations for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

18 SCOPING A REVIEW OF VOIDS

Members had before them the Review Scoping Document – Voids which was circulated with the agenda for the meeting. Justin Wright-Newton, Corporate Manager – BMBS, introduced the item.

The following were among the issues raised during the discussion:-

- Need to improve on the 28 day gap between tenants
- Reduction to 21 days [from 28] seems to be a rather modest target – should we be more ambitious? Financial implications of different void periods
- What are the hidden problems when trying to reduce void times – eg notification timescales; management; backlog in carrying out the necessary works, due to changeover from Morrisons' contract to BMBS
- Breakdown of the turnaround times for different types of repair etc which have to be done before properties can be re-let (Ben Staines, Project and Research Officer to supply)
- The potential for an earlier start for some types of work – eg while the existing tenants remain in occupation

RESOLVED

That the Review of Voids for consideration at the September meeting proceeds on the basis of the Scoping Document together with regard to the aspects identified by Members at the meeting.

19 DISCUSSION ON RISK AND PERFORMANCE AND WHERE THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CAN ADD VALUE

Karen Coll, Corporate Business Improvement Manager and Evacuation Assistant together with John Snell, Corporate Manager – Internal Audit were present for this item.

The Chairman referred to the need for uniformity across the Council in a robust and auditable process, and the importance of Performance Reporting in the context of identifying items for scrutiny.

Karen Coll explained the new ways of working under the Cabinet system, which would include closer interaction with Portfolio Holders, and outlined the use of the Significant Risk Register to focus scrutiny on the areas of highest likelihood or impact.

John Snell was asked to look at strengthening the evidence base in terms of the likelihood and impacts risk scores.

20 TRAINING UPDATE

Emily Yule, Assistant Director Law and Governance, circulated information on the types of areas and subjects for which training could be provided.

Members were aware that they could select elements of the training on offer, although there was general acceptance on the need for some particular areas to be addressed, including the following:-

- Specific requirements for scrutiny
- Member role and how it fits with, and does not duplicate, the role of the Joint Audit Committee

RESOLVED

That the Assistant Director – Law and Governance proceeds to identify training opportunities in line with the steer given at the meeting.

21 BOS/17/7 BDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DRAFT FORWARD PLAN

Members had before them a Draft Forward Plan for 2017/2018 – Paper BOS/17/7.

It was noted that the Review of Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) item would be brought forward shortly and that the officers together with the Chairman would give further thought to the scheduling of items, for an updated draft to be considered at the next meeting.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 11.35 a.m.

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Chairman