

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, High Street, Needham Market on Thursday, 15 June 2017 at 9:30am

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Rachel Eburne (Chair)	James Caston
	John Field	Jessica Fleming*
	Lavinia Hadingham	Kevin Welsby

*Denotes a substitute

In attendance:

Councillors John Levantis and Jill Wilshaw
Mike Evans – Strategic Director
Kevin Jones – Interim Strategic Director
Emily Yule – Assistant Director - Law and Governance
Ben Staines – Research and Project Officer
Ian Winslet – Investment and Development Consultant
Val Last - Governance Support Officer
Henriette Holloway – Governance Support Officer

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Councillors Elizabeth Gibson-Harries and Lesley Mayes.

Councillor Jessica Fleming was substituting for Councillor Derek Osborne, however as notification of the substitution had not been received in accordance with the timescale set out in the constitution, Councillor Fleming was not able to vote on any item.

9 TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

10 MOS/17/1 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MID SUFFOLK SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 MARCH 2017

RESOLUTION

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 15 March 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

11 MOS/17/2 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 APRIL 2017

RESOLUTION

That the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 April 2017 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Planning Consultant Paul Munson to be added to the list of attendees.

Page 7 paragraph 26. The following to be included:

- Need for flexibility (e.g.: using sheltered housing to support a discharge)
- Process for adaptations to be managed quickly
- Need for stronger links regarding preventing admissions

It was also noted that an improvement plan was in place for spending the (disabled adaptations) grant and that progress would be reported back to the Committee.

Page 7, paragraph 27 to read: Paul Bryant, Business Support Officer Officer responded...

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

None received.

13 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

14 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

15 WAY OF WORKING FOR THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Emily Yule, Assistant Director of Law and Governance, gave a presentation on the Way of Working for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and outlined the following points:

The responsibility of the Committee was to provide a critical 'friend' challenge to executive policy and decision makers in a constructive and purposeful way. The Committee could give a strategic review of corporate policies, plans, performances, and budgets in an apolitical atmosphere. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee enabled the voice and concerns of the public to be heard by conducting public meetings and by using innovative public communication, consultation, and feedback. It was important that both Members and Officers were well prepared to answer questions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

The types of Scrutiny were outlined as Pre-Scrutiny, Scrutiny of Services/Projects, Joint Scrutiny, and Call-in:

- Pre-Scrutiny could be initiated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet or Officers. It was important that Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitored the Forthcoming Decisions List, to identify any areas the Committee wished to look at.
- Scrutiny of Services/Projects could include reviews of service areas or projects, periodic reviews and standing items or the scrutiny of something which had gone wrong.
- Joint Scrutiny, not only included Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils working together, but also other partners and external scrutiny.
- A Cabinet Decision could be 'called-in' by five or more Members if it was felt that the proper decision making process had not been followed. At least one of the Members who called in the decision had to be from a different political group. The Monitoring Officer and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would determine whether or not the call-in request was valid and make the necessary arrangements for the Committee to hear the call-in.

A Call-in form and a check list was available on the website for Members to use. The Call-in could be submitted in hard copy or by e-mail from the Lead Member and supported by emails from the four additional Members.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would construct a Forward Plan which would include items for future scrutiny and could be updated as the municipal year progressed. Each review would include a scoping exercise and a scoping template would be available for Members to use. It was suggested that Members could set up Task and Finish Groups to develop a deeper understanding of the topic and items under scrutiny where appropriate.

16

MOS/17/3 FOLLOW UP OF JOINT SCRUTINY ITEMS

Ben Staines, Project and Research Officer, presented the report which detailed updates on the recommendations from previous reviews and items that had been carried forward from the former Joint Scrutiny Committee.

Members considered the items and discussed various issues including:

- Void (empty) properties
- Poverty strategy and the possibility for an Officer to provide a summary update to the Committee
- Waste Service
- Small and micro businesses and how Mid Suffolk District Council was supporting businesses in the District. This item had been part of the Open For Business Initiative and it was suggested that a summary was given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.
- Performance reports
- The rise in placing residents in Bed and Breakfast accommodation (requested by Cabinet)
- Neighbourhood Plans, it was suggested that the outcome from the Task and Finish Group be reported at a future Committee meeting.

- Community Housing Fund
- Home Ownership Review
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which was introduced in April 2016 and the Scrutiny Committee decided then that a review should take place after a year
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS)
- Leisure Strategy – Chris Fry – Assistant Director Environment and Projects, to bring the Overview and Strategy Committee up to date.

In response to the consideration of the Leisure Strategy the Strategic Director informed Members that the Leisure Strategy consisted of two parts, the Leisure and Activity Strategy and the Leisure Facilities Strategy. It was suggested that any questions on how the Stradbroke and Stowmarket swimming pools were managed should be directed directly to Chris Fry, Assistant Director - Environment and Projects. Members were concerned that Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre continued to take an appropriate approach to make an impact on public fitness and to encourage schools to use the swimming pools.

It was noted that monthly meetings would be held by the MSDC and BDC Scrutiny Chairs to discuss if a topic was relevant to both authorities and should be discussed by a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED

The Forward Plan to include:

- Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- The Home Ownership Review
- Community Infrastructure Levy
- Neighbour Plans
- Void properties
- BMBS Review after twelve month's implementation

17

TRAINING FOR MEMBERS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS SUPPORTING THE COMMITTEE

Emily Yule - Assistant Director – Law and Governance, informed Members of the training available for Members and Officers, and outlined this as follows:

- Introduction to Scrutiny (Officers and Members)
- Chaining Skills for Scrutiny (Chairs and Vice-Chairs)
- Questioning Skills (All Scrutiny Members)
- Dealing with Call-ins (All Scrutiny Members)
- Setting a Forward Plan for Scrutiny/ Scoping (All Scrutiny Members/ Cabinet Members/ Senior Leadership Team)

- Supporting Scrutiny (Senior Officers, Scrutiny Officers, and Policy Support)
- Responding to Scrutiny (Extended Leadership Team)

Councillor Rachel Eburne requested that all training was to be bespoke to Mid Suffolk District.

Members were informed that a successful Transformation Bid made at the beginning of the transition to Cabinet model would cover the cost of training.

18

MOS/17/4 THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 30 YEAR BUSINESS AND FINANCE PLAN UPDATE 2017

Kevin Jones – Interim Strategic Director, presented the report to Members and explained how the Housing Revenue Account Financial Plan (HRA) had been updated to adapt to the evolving needs and demands and to reflect legislative, financial and technological changes. The HRA Financial Plan included an outline for new homes in Mid Suffolk District and the financial changes brought about by the Government.

It was pointed out to Members that the model used for the HRA Financial Plan was from the Chartered Institute of Housing and that the Institute had been involved in the process to ensure consistency. The assumptions in the report had also been reviewed.

The assumptions made in respect of the surpluses in income that Babergh Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS) would generate had been revised, as it had previously been considered that the service would make a surplus after two years. However, it was now predicted that this process would take four to five years.

There had been a potential for the Government Debt Cap to be breached in year eight to ten and previously the Capital Programme would have been reduced to avoid this. However, the Interim Strategic Director did not believe this was a good way to manage the issue and that making efficiency improvements and savings was the appropriate way forward. Work had been undertaken by the Supported Living Team on the sustainability and reliability of the Plan and he was confident that the savings could be achieved.

It was noted that when the Council had taken on the additional debt under the Government's self-financing scheme, a formula for increasing rents had also been introduced. However, the Government had subsequently not only changed this to a lower figure, but advised in 2015 that rents must to be reduced by 1% per year each year from April 2015 until 2020, which had a substantial adverse impact on the HRA. The existing debt prior to the introduction of self-financing had been for the improvement of the housing stock to Decent Homes Standard.

Members inquired if it was possible to borrow from the General Fund and loan to the HRA. The Officer advised that monies within the General Fund were ring fenced and it was very difficult to move them elsewhere. The Interim Strategic Director pointed out to Members that the HRA Financial Plan concentrated on improving the HRA Budget to avoid breach of the Debt Cap.

Members questioned Officers on the BMBS and if it would be better to outsource the services. Officers said that contracted services often had constraints and that in-house services provided better service and other benefits to the tenants. The current plans for BMBS had taken into consideration a start-up period, training, and staffing and as a result the estimated profit period had been extended to four years.

The cost of running the BMBS was high for this kind of organisation and as indicated on page 55, bullet point 2 early considerations would be given to reduce this. It had been difficult to monitor similar services in the past but the BMBS had a new Corporate Manager and he would be responsible for the BMBS budget, timings, and performance monitoring. The Summary Improvement Plan on page 60, indicated that BMBS had the potential for the biggest savings.

The Summary Improvement Plan identified the best areas for significant efficiency improvements.

The turnaround time for VOIDS was discussed as Members felt that improvement should have been made to the current sixty-six days. It was hoped the turnaround time would improve as the BMBS became fully operational. Members decided that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were to scrutinise Voids performance and BMBS later in the Council year.

An amendment to the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Rachel Eburne and seconded by Councillor John Field, that a reporting framework for a performance monitoring system be put in place.

By a unanimous vote

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET AND FULL COUNCIL

1. That the updated HRA 30 year Business and Financial Plan (Appendix A to MOS/17/4) to be approved.
2. That a reporting framework for a performance monitoring system be put in place.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 11.35am

.....
The Chairman