

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, 17 August 2017

PRESENT:

Councillors	Rachel Eburne - Chair	Lesley Mayes
	Derek Osborne – Vice Chairman	Suzie Morley*
	John Field	Kevin Welsby
	Lavinia Hadingham	

*Denotes a substitute

In attendance:

Councillor Robert Everitt
Councillor Nick Gowrley
Councillor Jill Wilshaw
Strategic Director
Assistant Director – Communities and Public Access
Assistant Director – Law and Governance
Senior Development Management Planning Officer
Corporate Manager – Housing Options
Governance Support Officer

28 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/SUBSTITUTIONS**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor James Caston. Councillor Suzie Morley was substituting for Councillor Elizabeth Gibson – Harries.

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

None received.

30 **MOS/17/8 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JULY 2017**

The minutes from the meeting held on the 20 July 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

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

None received.

32 **MOS/17/9 REVIEW OF WESTERN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (WSCSP)**

Jonathan Free, Assistant Director – Communities and Public Access, introduced

Councillor Robert Everitt for St. Edmundsbury Borough Council and Chairman for Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) and Melanie Yolland, Communities Officer (Safe) and Safeguarding Lead and Prevent Lead with responsibility for Mid Suffolk District.

Councillor Robert Everitt explained the structural organisation of the WSCSP and how the councils in Western Suffolk co-operated across the districts to address issues within the area. Similarities often existed between the issues raised and it was beneficial to the Districts to share experiences and practices.

Melanie Yolland said that the WSCSP conducted an annual strategic assessment which was required as a statutory responsibility. The assessment investigated crime and disorder issues across the four districts and was compiled by Suffolk County Council. The data was collected from sources such as crime and disorder services, ambulance and public health Services. An analysis of the different types of crime was undertaken to identify current issues and emerging trends. Once these were established the WSCSP worked with partnership groups to establish the best way to address these.

Based on the strategic assessment, a three-year partnership plan was produced and a workable action plan was created to identify priorities and how these were to be addressed by the partners. The WSCSP did not receive any funding, but worked actively with voluntary and community groups to help them manage applications for funding for projects in the community.

Members wanted to know how the relationship between the WSCSP and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) worked and Councillor Everitt responded this was a well-established and supportive relationship. Reports were produced in co-operation with the PCC and were especially relevant when the WSCSP was applying for funding from the PCC for partnership groups in the community. An example of how this worked in the community was given for high risk domestic abuse cases and the process for implementing Target Hardening, a term used for providing security for victims. Melanie Yolland worked with Safe Partnership, a charity, to assess the need for Target Hardening across West Suffolk and together they produced a secure funding bid from Suffolk Community Foundation, obtained funding of £6000 for Safe Partnership to install safety equipment in identified properties across Mid Suffolk District. This success led to a standardised Target Hardening policy across the Districts and funds were being shared from all of the Districts including the PCC and Suffolk County Council to address this need.

The Assistant Director – Communities and Public Access explained the process for how a Domestic Homicidal Review was conducted. It was the obligation of each district or borough to conduct the review and this was costly in terms of both time, planning and financial implications because it was difficult to plan for this kind of reactive response. It was the responsibility of the WSCSP to initiate the review and for the individual district to take the lead in the review process. The cost of the reviews was shared equally across the four districts to alleviate the cost for the individual district or borough.

The Domestic Homicide Review generated an action plan and it was the

responsibility of the WSCSP to monitor that the recommendations within the action plan was carried out by the principle agency. The action plan was forwarded both to the Home Office and the relevant district and was published on their websites respectively. The action plan often identified areas of improvement and the WSCSP take the lead in the implementation of such improvements. As the WSCSP had a strategic function the panel organised the involvement of the relevant community groups, but it was up to the individual councils and community groups to implement the required action.

Members questioned the need for updates on the outcomes of projects and reviews. They felt that here was a lot of focus on the input into such cases, and not enough focus of what had been achieved. Members felt it would be useful to have examples of successful cases included in the next annual report. Councillor Everitt suggested that the Member, who represented the District at the WSCSP should report back to all Members in the District Council.

Members then inquired about the progress of mental health issues in relation to Domestic Homicide Reviews. The response was that a representative from the Clinical Commissioning Group attended the WSCSP Committee and that any outcome from a Domestic Homicide review would be discussed at committee meetings.

Questions were then raised regarding the accountability of the funding provided by the Suffolk Community Foundation to community groups. Officers explained that as a statutory partnership, the WSCSP could not directly apply for funds but they contacted the appropriate community groups and provided support for the application process to enable a successful bid for funding. Community groups were required to produce regular quarterly reports and statistics of how the funding was spent to the WSCSP. Adjustments could be made to the funding if it was deemed necessary. The PCC also monitored how the funding was spent.

Councillor Rachel Eburne said that a lot of work was being done with limited resources and Members appreciated how many community groups were involved in the WSCSP and the work done by the panel.

Councillor Eburne suggested two amendments to the recommendations:

- That the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership's annual report includes an outcome summary.
- The designated WSCSP Member to report annually to the Council on the work of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.

Councillors Rachel Eburne and Lesley Mayes proposed and seconded the recommendations respectively.

By a unanimous vote

RESOLUTION

The Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership's annual report includes an outcome summary.

The designated WSCSP Member to report annually to the Council on the work of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.

To review and scrutinise the community safety activity of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) from April 2016 to July 2017

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents.

33

MOS/17/10 SCOPING A REVIEW OF VOIDS

Councillor Rachel Eburne asked Members to consider the Scoping Review Document MOS/17/10.

Some Members felt that the voids report was a challenge to read and that it was not always clear how the voids was being measured. The Officer explained the measuring of voids was the time it took to re-let a property and properties which were deemed to be demolished and they would not be included in the voids lists. Members asked to have a list of the explanations of the abbreviation used in the reports.

It was agreed that to compare voids statistics with statistics from other similar councils, it was necessary to understand what was being included in the voids lists and what exactly was being measured. Comparison was not easy as the method of dealing with voids varied in different councils.

The Corporate Manager – Housing Options said that during the last three years the voids time had been reduced on all properties by just under a half. However, the introduction in April of Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Service (BMBS) had increased the turnaround time for voids. The Senior Leadership Team acknowledged this and it was understood that the BMBS team was now fully operational, but still had a few issues to solve. In 2015/16 the turnaround time for voids in Mid Suffolk was 31 days compared with the median figured of 29 days supplied by Housemark, a benchmarking provider. The team was continuously working towards improving performance.

The Committee discussed the differences between the operation of BMBS and a privately operating repair service for housing. The Strategic Director said that it was not possible to make this comparison, because the Councils was not able to evict tenants in the same way as a private organisation could. The Council was not a profit-making operation and worked within different parameters than an organisation in the private sector.

Generally, members were satisfied with the Scoping Document and the Committee discussed the time scale for the Voids Report. Councillor Eburne suggested that a draft be provide to the Chair, Vice-chair and the Strategic Director recommended

this was done in cooperation with the Chairman of Babergh District Council. He also said it was important to include a way forward to issues raised in the report, so that it was possible to measure progress in next year's voids review.

RESOLUTION

The Voids report be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny on 19 October 2017 and that a draft report be circulated to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Mid Suffolk District Council and to the Chair of Babergh District Council before the final report was produced.

34

UPDATE FROM DEVELOPMENT CONTROL ON PLANNING APPEALS

John Pateman-Gee - Senior Development Management Planning Officer, provided the update, and directed Members to the tabled papers for Mid Suffolk Planning Appeals. He said that there were consequences for the Council if the thresholds set out in the Performance Charter were not observed, so it was important that the Council performed above the designated thresholds.

He then explained Table 1 of the tabled papers and said there were two thresholds which had to be met:

- The time it took for an application to be processed, which depending on the type of application was between eight to sixteen weeks.
- The quality of decision making, which was a statistical term for how many appeals were permitted.

In terms of timing for major and non-major applications the Council performed above the threshold. But although the Council performed above the threshold for quality, it was important to improve on the current level as the percentage of major applications allowed to go to appeal was 5.6%, which only left a margin of 4.4% before the threshold was reached (Table 2, page 2). For the 2500 non-major applications only 25 or 1% of these applications went to appeal and this was well below the 25% threshold.

The Senior Development Management Planning Officer then explained the 2016 statistics obtained from the Planning Inspectorate website for the appeals in Mid Suffolk District. Members questioned him on the figures provided and it was agreed that the officer would forward the latest statistics to Members of the Committee.

Councillor Eburne reminded members that they needed to consider the effect of the planning applications appeals process and if there were any areas that Members felt should be scrutinised.

Some Members suggested that it would be useful to divide the performance statistics up between Mid Suffolk District and Babergh District, as the difference between the two councils would influence the overall results.

The Officer continued to say that in the last two years there had been many changes to the planning department and to policy. The loss of a five-year land supply also

had an effect on the appeal process. The challenge was to determine how to improve the appeal process to remain within the required threshold.

Members questioned the Senior Development Management Planning Officer including:

- If there existed a common trend between the successful appeals;
- How often Members overturned officers' recommendations and what kind of appeals did Members overturn;
- The difference between major and non-major appeals;
- Increases in charges for major planning applications and appeals;
- Increases in applications without pre-applications advice, as a result of the introduction of charges for pre-application advice;
- The need to change the overall process as the appeals process performance was well within the threshold.

Councillor Eburne ask that it be noted that if the Committee had the assurance that the Planning Department monitored the performance of appeals and that the performance was maintained above the threshold, no further scrutiny was necessary unless the performance fell below the threshold.

Councillor Eburne asked what element of the performance was recorded in the Performance Report as the latest performance figures would be included and Members could then decide if further scrutiny was required.

Emily Yule, Assistant Director – Law and Governance confirmed that the performance for appeals was available in the Performance Report.

The latest performance figures from the Planning Inspectorate to be forwarded to Members.

RESOLUTION

The update be noted

35 **INFORMATION BULLETIN**

The was no item for the bulletin.

36 **MOS/17/11 MSDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FORWARD PLAN**

The Overview and Scrutiny Forward Plan was noted with the following amendments:

The Void Review to be presented on 19 October and the Neighbourhood Plan to moved forward to the 14 September.

The business of the meeting concluded at 11.15am.

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Chairman