

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN ROSE ROOM - ENDEAVOUR HOUSE, 8 RUSSELL ROAD,
IPSWICH ON MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2018

PRESENT: Barry Gasper - Chair

Melanie Barrett	Peter Burgoyne
John Hinton	Bryn Hurren
Jennie Jenkins	Alastair McCraw
Fenella Swan	

71 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Hinton was substituting for Councillor Barrett.

72 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests received.

73 BOS/17/35 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22
JANUARY 2018

It was RESOLVED: -

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 22 January 2018 be confirmed as a true record.

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

None received.

75 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

76 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

77 BOS/17/36 FIVE-YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY

77.1 The Corporate Manager – Strategic Planning introduced report BOS/17/36 and explained that the calculation of the Five-year Housing Land Supply was a complex and time-consuming exercise.

77.2 Planning permissions granted for developments did not always indicate that

building would commence within the timeframe to be included in the calculation for the Five-year Housing Land Supply.

- 77.3 Members queried the role of Councillors in relation to developments in their areas. Officers explained that it was in a response to questions raised during the scoping exercise that they had outlined the possible actions councillor could take. If councillors choose to they could contact developers and liaise about the developments in their communities as long as maintained a professional attitude and worked within their code of conduct to the benefit of their constituency. It was not a recommendation from officers, but it was an option for Members if they felt it was appropriate.
- 77.4 Members raised the concern that the Five-year Land supply was only calculated on an annual basis and would like to receive a regular review of the Five-Year Housing Land Supply to obtain an indication of how the Council was performing throughout the year. They were not expecting a full review but a professional judgement to ensure that the Housing Land Supply was heading in the right direction. This was a sensitive subject in the community and Members felt that a regular review would improve the broader understanding for planning issues in the community.
- 77.5 Officers explained that it was the time it took to accurately validate the date available, and that each development had to be validated individually to provide a robust judgement of deliverable housing. Information had to be gathered from various sources and these were not always up to date. The Council had to rely on this information as developers were not required to supply the council with date on completed housing developments.
- 77.6 Members asked for clarification of which of the two calculations, the Core Strategy calculation of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (page 12-13) and which was used by the Government to set targets for the Council. Officers respond that the Government use the most up to date calculation and in this instance, it was the calculation for SHMA
- 77.7 Questioning continued, and officers was asked to explain the 20% buffer on the Five-year Land Supply, which in effect added another year to the land supply requirement and what the criteria for only having a 5% buffer were. Officer responded that the Council needed to achieve the annual target of 350 completed houses for a minimum of one year for the buffer to be lowered, as it was a question of actual deliverable houses. This was a simplified explanation of what had to be achieved to meet the required targets set by the Government.
- 77.8 Some of the target were likely to change once the new National Planning Policy Framework was published. Currently the policy was undergoing a consultation process, but the understanding was that the target was going to be reset and that some of the backlog would be readjusted but that the annual target for deliverable houses would be increased. Some Members felt that subjective judgment by experienced officers and appropriate risk assessment of the date provided should be sufficient enough to provide a review of the

Housing Land Supply on a more frequent basis.

- 77.9 The total planning permission of 2,320 dwellings were queried in relation to the figure for the land supply between 2017 and 2022, which was 1699 dwellings (page 12 -13). Officers explained that the granting of planning permissions was not the same as the availability of the Housing land supply within the five-year period and that the 1699 was the number of houses judged by officers to be deliverable within the five-year period, whereas 2,320 was the total number of planning permissions granted. Developments required a great deal of time to be completed and often only part of the larger developments were completed within the five-year period. It was this form of transparency which the Committee was keen to scrutinise.
- 77.10 The Annual Monitoring report contained the total number of planning permission granted but not yet commenced. The difficulty was that developments did not commence once planning permission had been granted but had to undergo various planning requirements to receive full approval. This process could be lengthy process, depending on the requirements and how quickly the developers responded to the planning conditions. Therefore, commencement of actual building could be up to 24 months or longer after the planning permission had been granted.
- 77.11 Clarification was given for the information available for the calculation for the Five-year Housing Land Supply (page 16, point 10.23). Some of the sources released information up to 3 months later and some only released the information annually. It was therefore a challenge and a time-consuming exercise to gather robust data for regular review of the housing supply.
- 77.12 The Chair then allowed a question from Mr Nigel Farr, a member of the public, and he asked for a breakdown of the 2,320 granted planning permissions and the reason for why they were viable or not and if that information was available to the public.
- 77.13 The Assistant Director – Planning for Growth responded that the figure of 1,699 for the Housing Land Supply was published in the Monitoring Report in June 2017 and this was available on the Council's website included an explanation of how this number was achieved.
- 77.14 The Chair asked if it was possible to respond to individual cases outside the Committee and both Mr Farr and the Assistant Director – Planning for Growth agreed to this.
- 77.15 Members discussed the importance of the Local Plan and this would impact on the Five-year Housing Land Supply. The Local plan was currently at the consultation stage and carried some weight in relation to the Five-year Housing Land Supply, as the Local Plan progressed through the consultation and examination stages next year it would increasingly carry more weight with the Five-year Housing Land supply. However, officers advised Members that it was not wise at this early stage of the Local Plan to take it into consideration when deciding planning permissions.

- 77.16 Members asked why the Appeal Decision had been included in the papers and officers drew Members attention to the appeal decision page 25, bullet point 12. This was an appeal ruling on an expert judgement exercised by a council and it was felt that the statement highlighted the issues debated at the Committee.
- 77.17 The Cabinet Member for Housing suggested that the report was circulated to all Members as she thought they would find it useful.
- 77.18 She then raised her concern about Members getting involved with development and though it could lead to challenges for the planning decision made by the council and expressed her concern for members getting involved in this process.
- 77.19 The Chair proposed four recommendations to the Committee to enable transparency and indication of the level performance of the Five-year Housing Land Supply.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 **That the Five-year Housing Land Supply was formally published yearly unless it was shown that the requirements had been met earlier.**
- 1.2 **That the Five-year Housing Land Supply be reviewed half yearly and a report be provided to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
- 1.3 **That the Five-year Housing Land Supply subjecting and objecting variables be monitored regularly throughout the year**
- 1.4 **That the Five-year Housing Land Supply report was recalculated in April/May and be forwarded to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review.**
- 1.5 **That Report BOS/17/36 be circulated to all Members.**

78 BOS/17/37 ALL TOGETHER PROGRAMME

- 78.1 The Chair and Members of the Committee began by congratulating the Chief Executive and the Council staff on achieving the 'Council of the Year' and 'Working Together' silver awards.
- 78.2 The Chief Executive introduced report BOS/17/37 and explained that over 10 years the approximate saving would be £5.8 million split between Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council.
- 78.3 There now existed seven Touchdown Points and two Depots across the two

Districts, Creeting Road and Great Wenham, and three public access points in Stowmarket, Sudbury and Hadleigh. The Stowmarket office also housed the call centre. It was possible for officers to book desks at the Touchdown Points and at the Customer Access Points.

- 78.4 Members asked for clarification on the increase in the Recurring Costs (page 37, point 4.3.1) and the difference between £268,000 in 2017/18 and £680,000 in 2020/21. Officers explained that for the first couple of years an upfront discount deal had been negotiated with Suffolk County Council (SSC), which terminated in 2020/21, this accounted for the increase in the recurring costs. In 2021/22 the contractual Disturbance Allowance for the Councils' staff would come to an end and this explained the zero entries for mileage disturbance and car parking permits.
- 78.5 Stowmarket had managed to negotiate a better deal for the rent and service charge for the Customer Access Point with Stowmarket Town Council, but this was partly because the Customer Access Point in Sudbury was a different set-up to Stowmarket.
- 78.6 The Committee gave thanks to Members and Staff for producing the report.
- 78.7 The Chief Executive explained in response to Members' questions that there was a Touchdown point in Hadleigh and that negotiations with Hadleigh Town Council were taking place to broaden the 'front of house' services, which they already provided. Officers responded that this would include access for the public to use computers with limited staff to support them. The Assistant Director – Customer Services was looking at other opportunities for Customer access such as in libraries.
- 78.8 Members were concerned about the capital cost for the remodelling of the two headquarters sites (page 36, point 2.1), which was just over £6 million for the two sites. This was the estimated cost if the Councils had remained at their respective headquarters, including any work for updating the existing buildings and ICT to enable the Council to run effectively. This cost was the original cost proposed in the 2016 Business Plan proposal for the move to Endeavour House.
- 78.9 Members wanted to know what was included in the above estimate, as they felt the saving of £290,000 per year was not significant. It was clarified that the headquarters (HQ) had required a large amount of capital expenditure for substantial repair work and remodelling over the next 10 years and in light of this, the annual saving of £290,000 was a better business decision. Some Members felt that the estimated capital cost for running and maintaining the old HQ was deceptive, as repair work would have been undertaken regularly, had the Council remained there and therefore reduced the cost for 'Catch-up' repairs (point 2.1 page 26)
- 78.10 The Chief Executive responded that this was a historical discussion, which could no longer be changed as the Business Plans had been agreed in 2016.

- 78.11 Travel costs included both the Disturbance Travel costs and the costs incurred by staff for work. Agile working had actually reduced the estimated Disturbance costs as staff travel to work was less than expected.
- 78.12 Questions were raised about bullet point 4.3.3 (page 38) and officers clarified that there were two different elements in this estimate, the capital savings and then revenue year on year savings. On page 36 the total running cost of £1.084 million less the depreciation of £366,000 (page 37, at the top) produced a new running cost of £718,000.
- 78.13 It was clarified that the annual cost of security for the old HQ sites was £114,000 for each site, but that this cost was recorded in the budget for the redevelopment of the old HQ sites.
- 78.14 The entry for the Genesys licence (page 41) was for the single telephone line number, which was introduced to replace the old access telephone numbers.
- 78.15 The cost of remodelling the Customers Access points had been higher than the cost of remodelling the space in Endeavour House, because the Access Points needed much more physical renovation and installation than was required at Endeavour House.
- 78.16 The rent for Endeavour House did not include costs for car parking spaces, as this was a self-financing service, which were paid for by parking fees. The rent service charge allowed the use of the carparking facilities. Profits from the carparking scheme were ringfenced to finance the Green Travel Scheme.
- 78.17 Members questioned the room facilities in Endeavour House and it was clarified that the Service deal included access to meeting rooms, which could be booked via a centralised service system. There was no charge for the use of the meeting rooms, but a cost would be incurred if the booked room was not used. There was also a charge for keeping the building open longer in the evenings for meetings.
- 78.18 Report BOS/17/37 was going to be included in a report to Cabinet on the costs of the move to Endeavour House and would be presented by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Organisation Delivery.
- 78.19 Members agreed that further information was required and that the Capital expenditure costs in section 2, page 36 needed further details, which should be reported back to the Committee, as an Information Bulletin in May.

By 7 to 1 vote (note Councillor Hurren abstained)

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 That Report BOS/17/37 be circulated to Cabinet and all Members.**
- 1.2 That a breakdown of the Capital Expenditure cost in Table 2.1 in report**

BOS/17/37 be reported to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee as an Information Bulleting in May 2018.

79

PRESENTATION ON VOIDS

79.1 Councillor Gasper presented the Service Improvement Plan for the Void Improvement Project. He made Members aware that he had added extra slides, from the slide named 'Councillor Visits – Properties Visited'.

79.2 Members asked questions of the officers and the responses included:

- That the government had moved away from the Decent Home Standard. However, the standards were still high for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils;
- Education and training of tenants was important to maintain high housing standards;
- A 20% stock survey rolling over a five-year period would ensure all tenant houses were visited;
- The development of a Housing Engagement Model had been implemented;
- The support of individuals in fixed term tenancies to enable a better service;
- The Housing Service team was currently working on repairs in between 150 - 160 houses
- Tenants were to take more responsibility for the standard of housing through the new tenant agreement;
- Social care responsibility needed to be met too.

79.3 The number for voids in Babergh was as follows for the past three months:

December 2017 – 71 voids
January 2018 – 53 voids
February 2018 – 49 voids

As could be seen from above, void times were being reduced and it was predicted that by May 2018 the turnaround time for voids would be 33 days.

79.4 Officers said that the team were focussing on reducing voids, and it was the intention to reach a target of 10 working days for the turnaround time for most voids, this being the aim of the Service Improvement Plan.

79.5 The Cabinet Member for Housing said that she and the Assistant Director met monthly to discuss the way forward and that she was confident that the Housing Team was able to reach the original target for voids, which had been 21 – 22 days. However, there was still a lot of work to do, including:

- To achieve regular inspections;
- To enforce the tenant agreement, but also to provide support for those tenants who needed help;
- To deliver early intervention for tenants who were struggling;

- To ensure there were enough resources for the team to be able provide the above work.
- 79.6 The discussion continued on the areas which had an effect on the reduction of voids and it was recognised that there had been issues with the creation of BMBS and that these issues were still being addressed. Both Members and officers were in agreement that the reduction of the voids was a common goal for the Council.
- 79.7 Members discussed the process for repairs and it was clarified that the requisition of new houses was conducted by a different team and a different budget within the Council. The Right to Buy scheme could not be used to pay for housing repairs as these were paid for by the HRA budget. It was recognised that the BMBS team were responsible for repairing the houses but had no influence over the purchasing process. Therefore, the acquisition process was currently being reviewed by the relevant departments to allow for the capital purchase to includ consideration of the cost of repairs to properties. It was noted that this was a policy issue.

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 **That a monthly Information Bulletin on Voids will continue to be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
- 1.2 **That at the end of the Void Improvement Project to reduce void times, a report be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.**

80 **INFORMATION BULLETIN**

There was no Information Bulletin

81 **BOS/17/38 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST**

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Forthcoming Decisions List be noted.

82 **BOS/17/39 FORWARD PLAN**

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Forward Plan be noted.

83 **BOS/17/40 MSDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FORWARD PLAN**

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Forward Plan be noted

The business of the meeting was concluded at 12.30 pm.

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Chair (& Date)