

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN KING EDMUND CHAMBER - ENDEAVOUR HOUSE, 8 RUSSELL
ROAD, IPSWICH ON MONDAY, 18 JUNE 2018

PRESENT: Alastair McCraw - Chairman

Councillors Sue Ayres Simon Barrett
Barry Gasper Bryn Hurren
Adrian Osborne Fenella Swan
Stephen Williams

In attendance

Councillors Cabinet Member for Economy (JW)
Cabinet Member for Housing (JO)

Officers Chief Executive (AC)
Strategic Director (KN)
Assistant Director – Corporate Resources (KS)
Assistant Director – Housing (GF)
Corporate Manager – BMBS (JWN)
Corporate Manager – Open for Business (LC)
Corporate Manager – Democratic Services (JR)
Governance Support Officer (HH)

1 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies received.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

3 BOS/18/1 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

It was RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 19 March 2018 be confirmed as a true record.

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

None received.

5 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

6 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING FOR MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

The meeting was adjourned between at 2.30 pm and 2.40 pm for Member training.

8 BOS/18/2 INFORMATION BULLETIN

Information Bulletin 1

Staff Turnover and Welfare

- 91.1 The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources, forwarded an apology of absence for the Corporate Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD) and drew Members' attention to the table paper, which replaced the table for the 'Reason for Absence', page 12 to 13.
- 91.2 Members raised questions and officers responded that there was no evidence that the move to Endeavour House had caused the increase in stress and anxiety. It was established that the Staff Survey did not show any indication that that staff was unhappy with the environment.
- 91.3 Staff, who had been absent due to sickness, were offered a gradual phased return as agreed in the Return to Work Policy. The HR Business Partner liaised with management regarding staff's return and agreed with returning staff any adjustments required. Management were also trained in recognising signs of mental health issues and a campaign to recruit Mental Health First Aider had been undertaken. Staff had access to a variety of options to obtain help for mental health issues including a 24/7 helpline, advertised in numerous places in the work places.
- 91.4 The Chief Executive said that the stigma surrounding mental health had diminished during the last years, which may account for the increase in the mental health figures, so that it was a positive increase because staff recognised and acknowledged that they needed help.
- 91.5 Member ask how the Council performed in the ability to recruit and retain quality staff and what was the perceptions of working for the council.
- 91.6 The Chief Executive responded that the staff Survey had clearly indicated that agile working and flexible hours were attracting staff, as it was possible for them to get a better work/home balance. The aspiration was that the Council became an employer of choice because of the environment, the benefit package, the development and training, which would attract people to work for the Council.
- 91.7 Some Members disagreed as they thought the difficulties of travelling to the

workplace for some member of staff was difficult due to the traffic and that this may account for the difficulties to recruit and retain staff in the Planning Department.

91.8 The Chief Executive responded that most staff could claim Disturbance Allowance and that all staff had received compensation for having lost the benefit of free parking. He then explained that recruitment of Planners was an issue across all Public Sector Authorities.

91.9 Members agreed that it was a concern that stress and anxiety figures were going up and that an Information Bulletin regarding this issue should be presented to the Committee in six months' time. It was agreed that the information Bulletin should include a breakdown of stress related absence for staff working in Ipswich and elsewhere in the district.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That an updated Information Bulletin for Staff Turnover and Welfare be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2018 and to include a breakdown of place of work for staff being absent with stress.

Information Bulletin 2

Off Payroll Costs Review

92.10 The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources, explained the updated figures since the last information bulletin on the subject.

92.11 Members noted that the Off-payroll cost was going down. In response the Chief Executive said that it had been his intention since he began working for both Councils to reduce the Off-payroll costs, as he felt that the use of Off payroll staff could have a demoralising effect on staff.

92.12 Members discussed if further updates should be provided to the Committee and when such updates should be brought. A discussion ensued round triggers for updates be it the number of Off-payroll staff or a financial threshold. However, it was agreed it was unlikely that the Senior Leadership Team and Chief Executive would increase the use of Off-payroll Staff in the near future.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Information Bulletin be noted.

Voids in Council Properties

92.13 The Assistant Director – Housing informed Members that the six months Recovery Plan put in place earlier in the year was coming to an end. A report was due to Cabinet in August 2018 on the project.

92.14 Members discussed the monthly Voids Information bulletin and since the voids figures were improving, it was agreed that the Void Information Bulletin should be presented to the Committee every quarter.

92.15 The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked the Assistant Director - Housing for the work the team had undertaken to reduce the void times.

It was Resolved: -

1.1 That the Voids in Council Properties Information Bulletin be presented quarterly to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 BOS/18/3 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TIMETABLE 2018/19

92.1 Members discussed the timetable and whether the Committee should begin at an earlier time or later in the afternoon.

92.2 The Chair suggested that Members forwarded their preferred start time to him and the Committee could then make a decision at the meeting in August 2018.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Time table be agreed.

10 BOS/18/4 MEMBERS TO AGREE THE BDC WORK PLAN FOR 2018/19

93.1 Members discussed the Work Plan including the role of the police and Community Grants.

93.2 It was suggested by the Chair that each Member considered an item to place on the Work Plan for the next meeting.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Babergh Work Plan be agreed

11 BOS/18/5 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Forthcoming Decisions List be noted.

12 BOS/18/6 MSDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

13 BOS/18/7 BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK BUILDING SERVICES (BMBS) - A REVIEW OF FIRST YEAR TRADING AND NEXT STEPS

NOTE: At the meeting 18 July 2018 the Committee Members and Officers agreed to exclude the public for the Confidential minute for BMBS – A Review of the First Year of Trading and next Steps, however during the discussed it was agreed that the minute should be made public.

13.1 The Assistant Director – Housing, introduced the report and said the report and the updated Business Plan was an honest account of what had been achieved and the challenges ahead.

13.2 Councillor Barrett raised questions regarding the less than expected income for the BMBS case scenario for the year 2017/18 (page 64) and if it was possible that the figures could be updated in relation to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). In reality the BMBS service did not lose money, as the BMBS budget was covered by the HRA was hence a loss on paper. Members wanted to know if the updated costs base was a more accurate cost base to work on and the officer responded that this was the case.

13.3 The Assistant Director – Housing reminded Members that the original Business Plan was flawed and that the inherited income and expenditure had affected the first six months of the implementation of BMBS. The Corporate Manager – BMBS had only joined the team last year and other factors such as the service becoming an in-house service had influenced the implementation stage in various ways, but now enabled BMBS to deliver a good service to the tenants. There were challenges ahead such as getting all the relevant paperwork into the Total Mobile Programme and it was detailed how significant efficiencies were to be undertaken to save resources.

13.4 Councillor Gasper was concerned with the lack of tracking of paper work and workloads between departments and that this was important if searching for efficiencies. It was considered necessary to have a clear route for processes both within the department and with other departments to enable an effective audit to take place.

13.5 The Assistant Director – Housing confirmed that auditing was on-going, and he referred to Appendix C, page 103, which showed the outturn figures up to 12 April 2018 compared with the original Business Plan. The total Expenditure was nearly the same figures, however, the income from Capital Maintenance had been unrealistic in the original Business Plan. The new

figure of £276,239 was based on the outturn figures.

- 13.6 A process for internal accounting was being implemented to determine efficiencies, similar to the voids project. The team was working with the Accounting team to reflect the process and the outturn figures were robust based on this process.
- 13.7 Questions were raised regarding the Legal Implications of the report, Paragraph 11, page 65. Councillor Williams enquired if there were not legal implications if BMBS undertook work in houses belonging to the public and would include Health and Safety in properties which were being maintained. The officers responded that this kind of work was being undertaken with the Property Service Team and that the team worked with other services to ensure that the Health and Safety regulations was strictly adhered to.
- 13.8 BMBS conducted an annual 20% Housing Stock Survey to maintain the housing stock.
- 13.9 Members asked if any risks had been identified, and officers responded that an external agency had reviewed BMBS as part of the set-up of BMBS and an action plan had been generated as part of that review. The Internal Audit Team also audited the service regularly.
- 13.10 In response to Members' concern over the day to day management of BMBS, officers referred to pages 59 to 62, which detailed the actions completed and actions which had yet to be undertaken. The Chair stressed that these would be an important measure of performance. It was clarified that most IT issues had been resolved and that the Total Mobile System had gone live within the last few days. The day to day operations were improving, but there were still some issues regarding the administration team. The service delivered to the tenants was satisfactory and there had not been an increase in complaints received.
- 13.11 The main point of focus was to enable the trades teams to have access to mobile technology and it was hoped this would be delivered within the next 4 to 6 weeks. Staff needed to receive training to ensure the teams were up to date with the Total Mobile System.
- 13.12 There now existed a full competent team of Team Leaders and contact to suppliers had been established and could be utilised if needed.

NOTE: Councillor Barrett left the meeting at 4.20 pm.

13.13 The Cabinet Member for Housing said that the Business Plan was well presented and robust. It would provide a better service to tenants. There had been a problem of communicating with tenants when work was going to be completed, but this was being resolved by sending a letter to those tenants with this information.

13.14 Members discussed if further reports were required by the Committee to

review BMBS in the future and it was suggested that review every six months would be appropriate. Some Members felt this was not necessary and that an option to refer a review of BMBS back to the Committee if any matters arose for concern should be included in the recommendations.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 That the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Service continue to be monitored and should any issues be identified the matter be referred back to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review.**
- 1.2 That a review of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Service be presented to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.**

14 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (WHICH TERM INCLUDES THE PRESS)

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That pursuant to Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the business specified below on the grounds that if the public were present during the items, it is likely that there would be the disclosure to them of exempt information as indicated against the items.

The Committee was also satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

15 BOS/18/8 INTERIM UPDATE FOR BDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - TOURISM STRATEGY (LAVENHAM INFORMATION POINT UPDATE)

The Corporate Manager – Open for Business, presented the update.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 4.50 pm.

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Chair (& Date)