

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Frink Room (Elisabeth) - Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 18 March 2019

PRESENT:

Councillor: Keith Welham - Chair

Councillors:	Sue Ayres	Melanie Barrett
	James Caston	John Field
	Barry Gasper	Elizabeth Gibson-Harries
	Lavinia Hadingham	Bryn Hurren
	Lesley Mayes	Alastair McCraw (Co-Chair)
	Derek Osborne	Keith Welham (Co-Chair)
	Kevin Welsby	

In attendance:

Witness(es): Nick Gowrley, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments
Gavin Fisk – Assistant Director for Housing
Heather Tucker – Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions

Officers: Assistant Director – Housing
Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions
Corporate Manager – Democratic Services
Acting Senior Governance Support Officer

Apologies:

Adrian Osborne

67 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

67.1 There were no declarations of interests.

68 JOS/18/35 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 14 FEBRUARY 2019

It was **RESOLVED: -**

That the minutes from the meeting held on the 14 February 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

69 JOS/18/36 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MID SUFFOLK MEETING HELD ON THE 17 JANUARY 2019

It was **RESOLVED: -**

That the minutes of the Mid Suffolk meeting held on the 17 January 2019 be confirmed as a correct record with the following amendment:

Minute number 54.6 to be amended to:

Councillor Field asked why it was economical to purchase new build properties when the rental income from these properties did not cover the purchase cost.

70 JOS/18/37 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE BABERGH MEETING HELD ON THE 21 JANUARY 2019

It was RESOLVED: -

That the minutes of the Babergh meeting held on the 21 January 2019 be conformed as a correct record.

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

71.1 There were no petitions received.

72 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

72.1 There were no questions received from the public.

73 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

73.1 There were no questions received from Councillors.

74 JOS/18/38 INFORMATION BULLETIN

74.1 Heather Tucker, Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions, informed Members that the voids for February were down to 21 days for Babergh and 20 day for Mid Suffolk.

74.2 There was a new voids project plan in place to continue working the reduction of voids.

74.3 She outlined the new referencing system and how tenants were to be assessed before going on the housing registry and that inspection of tenants' properties were being conducted to ensure that the properties were up to standard before rehousing could take place. Tenants were also put into different banding for their requirements before rehousing.

74.4 In a response to Councillor Barrett's question the Officer explained that the teams were all aware of the performance targets including the cost per void and there was regular meeting to update the team on the state of each void.

- 74.5 Councillor Hurren enquired if there was the right kind of properties available.
- 74.6 The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions explained that hard to let properties were few and that a project to use these for general rental was being undertaken. However, each case was evaluated on a case by case basis.
- 74.7 Councillor McCraw ask how Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Service (BMBS) feed into voids.
- 74.8 The Officer responded that the Housing team was pleased with the service they received as a client of the service. BMBS has turned around 41 voids in January 2019.
- 74.9 Councillor Gasper commented that the reduction of voids was now half way through a long-term plan and that the work undertaken by the Corporate Manager and the housing team had improved the voids figures tremendously.
- 74.10 Councillor McCraw proposed that the Committee included their thanks in the resolution, and which was seconded by Councillor Hadingham.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Information Bulletin 'Voids Performance' be noted and that the Committee thanked the Housing Solution team for the work undertaken.

75 JOS/18/39 REVIEW OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2018/19

- 75.1 The Chair began by outlining the purpose of the review and invited Councillor Nick Gowrley to contribute to the review in his role as Leader of the Mid Suffolk Council.
- 75.2 Councillor Gowrley said the role of scrutiny was vitally important and that he was grateful for the work the Committee had conducted during the past year. Since the Cabinet system had been introduced scrutiny had provided a valuable function for the decision-making process and had provided Cabinet with some significant success including scrutiny of the Disabled Facilities Grant, voids and Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Service.
- 75.3 The Assistant Director for Housing provided his personal reflection on the Committee's work in relation to housing issues. He felt that there had been a change in attitude amongst officers towards scrutiny. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had instigated this change by showing officers how the Committee could provide support by enabling an on-going conversation between officers and Members. The work of the Committee was an attitude of 'let's work together'.

- 75.4 The best way forward for the work of the Committee was to provide examples of how overview and scrutiny could help by provided value to projects and work undertaken for the Council. Promotion of the benefits of scrutiny to officers would also be helpful.
- 75.5 The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions based her review of the reports for the Homelessness Reduction Act and voids. She felt that the two Chairs' briefings were very beneficial, as officers could have an informal discussion about reports. It was good for officers to know what the Committee was expecting and to be able to discuss the topic in detail before writing the report. Historically, scrutiny was considered as a negative experience, but now it could be a positive one and supportive.
- 75.6 Councillor Gowrley believed that it was the role of scrutiny as 'a critical friend' which had changed the officers' mindset.
- 75.7 Councillor Gibson-Harries said that Members brought the voice of the community to the committee and to the officers who attended.
- 75.8 In response to other Members questions, Councillor Caston stated that it was not appropriate for officers to provide any suggestion on how the Committee could improve scrutiny as it was important that scrutiny remained individual and separate. He felt that currently reports were responding to the demand of the committee.
- 75.9 Councillor Field thought that the if reports were open, honest and had the right level of detail it would be enable the Committee to conduct proper scrutiny.
- 75.10 The Assistant Director for Housing added that the Chairs' briefings had been really helpful to improve the quality of reports. A well written report would improve the quality of the debate at committee. He added that the Information Bulletins were also very helpful and could maintain focus on on-going topics.
- 75.11 Members agreed that there been good cross-party challenges and that the Chairs had encouraged good quality scrutiny.
- 75.12 Councillor Welsby stated that he was not comfortable with the pre-committee meetings, as he felt there was a risk of debating topics before the committee.
- 75.13 Members did not agree on the usefulness of pre-committee meetings and the Corporate Manager for Democratic Services informed Members that the pre-committee meetings were for the Committee to establish the line of questioning to ensure a cohesive debate.
- 75.14 Councillor McCraw reminded Members that pre-committee meetings were recommended at the scrutiny training sessions earlier in the year.
- 75.15 Some Members felt that pre-committee meetings were useful for the Chair to

manage complicated lines of questioning and inform Members of witnesses who would be addressing the Committee.

- 75.16 Members agreed that the use of witnesses had improved the scrutiny process and that the Witnesses had been appropriate for the topics they were invited to, especially for Community Infrastructure Levy and West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.
- 75.17 The working relationship with Cabinet Members had improved and generally Cabinet Members attended Committees to introduce reports and to respond to questions.
- 75.18 Councillor Gowrley informed the Committee that recommendations received from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were useful and most of them had been taken into consideration in the decision-making process. He suggested that a quarterly report be produced to follow up on the recommendations to Cabinet and if they had been implemented.
- 75.19 Members discussed training and all agreed that the training received both from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and internal training had been beneficial and informative. Internal training would be provided at the first committee and throughout the year.
- 75.20 Working groups was thought to be effective.
- 75.21 Scoping was mostly conducted at the Chairs' briefings but was occasionally undertaken at committees.
- 75.22 Members agreed that the length of committee meetings should be no longer than 2.5 to 3 hours long.
- 75.23 The Forthcoming Decisions List was essential for planning the workplan.
- 75.24 The Scrutiny Chairs always attended Cabinet meetings and both they and Cabinet found this good working practice. Chairs had also provided written reports to Council meetings and been prepared to answer questions.
- 75.25 Members discussed the possible recommendation to the future Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and it was agreed that the minutes and Annual Report should be provided to the incoming Committee.

By 11 votes to 1

It was RESOLVED: -

That the minute from the Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the accompanying Annual Report for each Council be provided to the incoming Members of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Forthcoming Decision List be noted

77 JOS/18/41 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Babergh Work Plan be noted

78 JOS/18/42 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

78.1 The Chair of the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggested that the following topics be added to the list of Topics Identified for Review but not yet Currently Timetabled:

- Underspending of grants for bringing empty homes back into use.
- Needham Market Lake Development

78.2 The Mid Suffolk Members agreed.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Mid Suffolk Work Plan be noted and to include the items identified above.

Before Members voted on the Resolution to exclude the Public, the Chair and the Committee expressed thanks to the Jan Robinson, Corporate Manager for Democratic Services and Henriette Holloway, Acting Senior Governance Support Officer for their support to the Committee.

79 RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC (WHICH IN TERMS INCLUDED 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 this item, it is likely that there would be the disclosure to them of exempt information as indicated against the item.

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

The Mid Suffolk Members left the meeting.

80 JOS/18/43 CONFIRMATION OF THE CONFIDENTIAL MINUTE FROM THE BABERGH MEETING HELD ON THE 21 JANUARY 2019 (EXEMPT INFORMATION BY VIRTUE OF PARAGRAPH(S) 3 OF PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972)

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That the confidential minute from the Babergh meeting held on the 21 January 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 3.25 pm.

.....
Chair