

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Virtual Meeting on Monday, 21 September 2020

PRESENT:

Councillor: Keith Welham (Chair)

Councillors:	Terence Carter	Paul Ekpenyong (Substitute)
	Jane Gould	Kathryn Grandon
	Alastair McCraw (Co-Chair)	David Muller
	Adrian Osborne	Keith Scarff

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Jan Osborne

Officers: Assistant Director – Planning and Communities (TB)
Assistant Director - Housing (GF)
Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer (EY)
Corporate Manager - Housing Solutions (HT)
Corporate Manager - Strategic Planning (RH)
Professional Lead - Key Sites and Infrastructure (CT)
Senior Governance Support Officer (HH)

Apologies:

Lavinia Hadingham
Mary McLaren

70 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

71.1 Councillor Carter declared a local non-pecuniary interest in item 13 as a tenant of the Council.

71 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2020

71.1 The minutes of the meeting held on the 4 September 2020 was deferred to the next Committee meeting.

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

72.1 None received.

73 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

73.1 None received.

74 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

74.1 None received.

75 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

76.1 The Chair informed Members that the Forthcoming Decisions List would be discussed in conjunction with items 10 and 11.

76 JOS/19/39 SCRUTINY AND FIRST REVIEW OF THE BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLANS (SEPARATE DOCUMENTS)

76.1 Christine Thurlow, Professional Lead - Key Sites and Infrastructure introduce the report and explained that the Housing Deliver Test Action Plan had been an introduced by Government, as detailed in the introduction of the report. Both Councils were to review the Action Plans in early 2020, however due to the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown period this had been delayed.

76.2 She drew Members attention to paragraph 4.21 to 4.23, which detailed the key facts for the report.

76.3 Councillor Ekpenyong referred to paragraph 4.21 and asked what the relationship between the outstanding planning permissions, the deliverable site and the figure in the list were.

76.4 Robert Hobbs, the Corporate Manager - Strategic Planning, explained that for the purpose of the Five-year Housing Land Supply, sites had to be deliverable for development within five years. Planning permission, which were outstanding would not necessarily be completed within five years, as this depended the developers.

76.5 Councillor Carter referred to section 3 in the report and asked if the themes were in order of priority. He then referred to section 11 and asked at what point would the environmental impact assessment be undertaken.

76.6 The Assistant Director - Sustainable Communities, responded that the themes were not in any order and were all equally important and that section 11 applied solely for the implication of the delivery of this report rather the wider housing issues.

76.7 Councillor McCraw queried if the evidence base used to produce the figures in the report and appendices were also the figures used to respond to Government consultations and if these figures were still applicable.

76.8 The Corporate Manager for Strategic Planning responded that the figures used as evidence was validated and would not be discarded.

- 76.9 Councillor Scarff referred to page 55 -56, Appendix A and that due to the Covid-19 Lockdown, it had not been possible to conduct an effective engagement with stakeholders. He thought that a better engagement process was needed and asked when these would now take place.
- 76.10 The Professional Lead - Key Sties and Infrastructure responded that engagement with lead stakeholders would take place in January 2021 before the new Housing Test figures were issued.
- 76.11 In response to Councillor Grandon's questions, the Assistant Director - Sustainable Communities explained that engagement with the housing industry was ongoing on a permanent basis and that many developers preferred virtual meetings. This had been apparent during the past few months.
- 76.12 Councillor Welham queried how completion figures were recorded when they were either below or above the year on year target figures. He asked with regards to market requirements in the Districts what the Council could do to ensure that smaller houses and bungalow were built.
- 76.13 The Corporate Manager - Strategic Planning, explained that the figures for completions include a caveat to excluded non completed sites for the target figures and that the Hosing Delivery Test were recorded over a three-year period.
- 76.14 The Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions explained that it was a matter of negotiating with developers with regards to bungalows, but that developers were reluctant to included them. The Suffolk Housing Board were in the process of developing a strategy based on needs and availability for the elderly, to understand future development requirements.
- 76.15 In response to Councillor Ekpenyong's comments, the Assistant Director – Sustainable Communities, responded that there were other options for the Councils to develop accommodation for elderly people, such as multi tenancy options.
- 76.16 Members debated the issues, including:
- That it was not just the elderly, who wished to live in bungalows, but that the cost of bungalows often made a less attractive options for families.
 - That the new planning regulations announcements from Central Government were out for consultation between the 1st and 20th of October 2020.
 - That the report did not include, how the Councils dealt with stalled development sites.
 - That Appendix F and G detailed the 'Unblocking Stalled Site' project
 - That there were several reasons for why sites may not come forward for planning permissions. However, if a developer decided not to bring a site forward then there was little the Council could do.

- That it was difficult to find buyers for affordable housing development sites.

76.17 Councillor Scarff commended the officers on the report and thought that progress had been made. Developers had their reasons for not bringing sites forward to be developed, often to avoid flooding the market with too many houses of the same kind. The White Paper would not be able to prevent this. He thought that there were quite a few planning applications brought to the planning committees, which would help the Housing Delivery Test during the next three years.

76.18 Councillor McCraw referred to the Babergh Housing Delivery Test Action Plan, page 60, which was similar for Mid Suffolk. There was a clear structure of the analysis conducted, and that the action plan was well constructed. He thought that it would be difficult for the Committee to make any recommendations. The White Paper still required primary legislation, and this was a transitional period. There were serious issues still to be addressed, which Central Government was addressing. He was satisfied that the figures and methodology were robust, and commended officers on the work undertaken.

76.19 Councillor Carter stated that more bungalows were required for adaptation for the disabled. He then referred to the environmental impact assessment for development in relation to the use of cars and whether the Council would be able to produce a report on the subject.

76.20 The Chair reminded Members that the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan was not a vehicle for an environmental impact assessment, and that this was a question for planning developments and the Joint Local Plan.

76.21 Councillor Muller proposed recommendation 3.1 and 3.2 in the report.

76.22 The Chair suggested that recommendation 3.1 be amended to:

That the contents of this report and appendices together with verbal contributions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted and taken forward as part of the HDT Action Plan review (for both Councils) so that new HDTAPs produced for 2021 are informed in part by this scrutiny process.

76.23 Councillor Muller accepted the proposed amendment.

76.24 Councillor McCraw seconded the amended recommendations.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

That the contents of this report and appendices together with verbal contributions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted and taken

forward as part of the HDT Action Plan review (for both Councils) so that new HDTAPs produced for 2021 are informed in part by this scrutiny process.

77 JOS/19/40 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY AND HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING REDUCTION STRATEGY, 2019-2024

- 77.1 Councillor Jan Osborne, the Babergh Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report and explained that in March 2017 the Councils adopted both the Joint Home and Housing Strategy and Homeless Reduction and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy. The strategies' committed the Councils to be open and transparent and to report how the Councils were performing against the strategic aims set out in the strategies. Part of this commitment was to present an annual review to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 77.2 Heather Tucker, the Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions then provided a presentation to Members.
- 77.3 The Chair thanked the Corporate Manager for the excellent report.
- 77.4 Councillor Grandon asked why the Council suddenly required extra accommodation during the Covid-19 Pandemic, when there were no rough sleepers in Babergh.
- 77.5 The Corporate Manager - Housing Solutions, explained that there had been an increase in people staying with friends and family (Sofa Surfers) or living with elderly relatives in the beginning of the year and who had been asked to leave as a result of the pandemic. This had created a high number of rough sleepers in the area and had increased the need for single accommodation. The Government were to cover support costs. The Councils were furthermore applying for additional funding from Central Government to enable further support for this group.
- 77.6 Councillor Grandon enquired what kind of support were referred to, as homeless and rough sleepers often had other issues.
- 77.7 The Corporate Manager - Housing Solutions, responded there were many aspects of support for drugs, alcohol and health related issues. Many rough sleepers did not have access to primary care support due to their transient lifestyle. If the Councils were successful in the application for further funding, then the Councils would be able to provide 24 hours support, to limit people to return to the streets.
- 77.8 Gavin Fisk, the Assistant Director for Housing, added that during the Covid-19 pandemic all Suffolk Councils and partner agencies housed more than 200 rough sleepers. They were now working with the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders on developing policies and strategies to eradicate rough sleeping in the area.
- 77.9 In response to Councillor McCraw's questions, the Corporate Manager –

Housing Solutions clarified that there were differences between homeless, sofa suffers and rough sleepers. Sofa surfers was not included in the rough sleeper statistics, which was provided to Government and collected on one dedicated night each year for those who 'bedded down outside'.

- 77.10 Councillor Mullers asked if he could be provided with figures for rough sleeper for Stowmarket outside the meeting.
- 77.11 Councillor Carter queried how many people had been alleviated during the pandemic and how long the effect of the work undertaken during this period would last before the problems resurfaced again. He thought that some of the issues with rough sleeping were due to the absence of a half-way house in Suffolk.
- 77.12 The Assistant Director - Housing, responded that pre-Covid-19 the lack of outreach services had already been identified. However, accommodation was finite and the balance between housing demands and the number of homes available was an issue. The Councils were working with registered providers to activate their supply for accommodations. He added that during the past few years temporary accommodation had doubled.
- 77.13 In response to Councillor A. Osborne's question regarding the interaction with rough sleepers. the Corporate Manager explained that it took a long time to build up a relationship with rough sleepers. Other areas in the District had not seen an increase in rough sleepers except Ipswich.
- 77.14 Councillor Gould referred to the eviction ban during the Covid-19 lock-down for private landlords and when this would end. She asked whether the current strategy was robust enough to cope with the demand once the ban ended and if there were any advantages to keep people in private accommodation.
- 77.15 The Corporate Manager - Housing Solutions, responded that the eviction ban ended on the 20 September 2020. The legislation was complicated and in preparation, the team had worked with any known cases of impending evictions. The team was actively engaging with the individuals and had been successful to date, but there might be further unidentified cases. Private landlords were not able to share tenant information with the Council and could therefore not inform the Council if their tenants were at risk of being evicted. Both Councils had made commitments not to evict any of their own tenants during the Covid-10 Pandemic.
- 77.16 Councillor Gould remarked that small landlords could also be in financial difficulties, as they depended on income from tenants.
- 77.17 Councillor Carter asked if Members should engage with rough sleepers and if that would be a benefit.
- 77.18 The Corporate Manager responded that she would look into this, but if any Members noticed any rough sleepers, they should contact Street Link and a

report would be forwarded to the team with 24 hours.

- 77.19 Councillor Grandon queried the de-sheltering of housing and that some existing tenants had not been able to live a quiet life due to accommodation being use for new tenants. She asked if the allocation policy could be reviewed.
- 77.20 The Corporate Manager explained the process for tenant allocation of accommodation and the local letting polices across the Districts. The individual cases were assessed on a case by case basis before they were referred to the Housing Team. There was also the Breach of Tenancy policy, which could be implemented in certain cases. It was the intentions to review and update all letting policies across the Districts in due course.
- 77.21 Councillor McCraw referred to the risk management section 8 in the report, which had identified the lack of outside support and unforeseen pressures.
- 77.22 He proposed that the Committee recognised the importance of these strategies and stressed that housing continued to be recognised by Cabinets and Council as primary function.
- 77.23 Councillor Carter seconded the recommendation.
- 77.24 In response to Councillor Carters questions the Assistant Director clarified that the Councils did not house rough sleepers in Commercial properties in the Districts.
- 77.25 He asked Members to be mindful that this Housing Strategy was for a 5-year period and underpinned the support for residents in relations to all housing requirements. Key members needed reassurance that the Council had robust strategies in place and that these Strategies worked in tandem and not in isolation.
- 77.26 Councillor Scarff commented that there was evidence that both strategies were working and that the overall housing strategies had progressed well.
- 77.27 Councillor Welham considered the effect of people moving into the area from outside the Districts and the increasing number of people working from home. He considered whether this was good or bad for the area, what kind of accommodation residents would be requiring in the future and how to encourage people to be engaged in their local communities. He thought it was important to encourage the communities to develop neighbourhood plans and get local people involved in the communities.
- 77.28 Members agreed that the report was excellent and commended the officers on the report.
- 77.29 Members considered the recommendations and agreed to add an additional recommendation that Members thanked the officers for the report, presentation and the work conducted, especially at the commencement of

Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions and the innovative approach to the work undertaken.

77.30 The recommendations were proposed by Councillor McCraw and Seconded by Councillor Carter:

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1 **That Members had reviewed and noted the contents of this report and appendices, along with verbal contributions.**
- 1.2 **That Members thanked the officers for the report, presentation and the work conducted, especially at the commencement of Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions and the innovative approach to the work undertaken.**
- 1.3 **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognise the importance of these strategies and stresses that housing continues to be recognised by Cabinets and Council as primary functions.**

NOTE: The Committee was adjourned between 11:37am and 11:45am.

78 RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE 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 in the report on the grounds that if the public were present during the item, it is likely that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

79 JOS/19/42 BMSDC INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICE - A NEW MODEL FOR DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

- 79.1 Councillor Jan Osborne introduced the report and thanked the Assistant Director - Housing, the Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions and Justin King – Parkside Housing for working on the delivery of this strategy.
- 79.2 In response to Councillor Carters questions, the Corporate Manager responded that the Disability Facilities Grant did not cover council properties, which were covered by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 79.3 The Disability Facilities Grant was intended to be applied for by private tenants, owner-occupiers and registered providers. Adjustment to these properties was based on assessments undertaken by Occupational

Therapists (OT), who provided specific measurements to ensure that any changes were appropriate for the property. As a service provider, Orbit was only allowed to make adjustment to properties based on these assessments.

- 79.4 Councillor Carter referred to the OT backlog and the long waiting times for assessments and asked why OT services had not been brought in-house.
- 79.5 The Chair reminded Members that the Committee had scrutinised the service delivery and contract of Orbit a couple of years ago and it had been agreed then that the best course of actions was to let the contract run to the end before reorganising the service.
- 79.6 The Corporate Manager responded that discussions with Suffolk County Council regarding the OT back-log and related issues were taking place to resolve this for the future. The Regulatory Reform Order passed earlier in the year enabled DGS to be rewarded up to £7,500, which was not means tested. This grant was intended to be used for smaller grants, which could be fast-tracked and processed faster. Performance had therefore improved.
- 79.7 Councillor Scarff was concerned that SCC would not be able to provide enough OTs to be able to support the service and asked if the current business model had any options for provision of funding for additional OTs. He asked if it would be possible for the Councils to have a dedicate in-house OT for both Districts.
- 79.8 The Corporate Manager explained that an in-house OT had been considered, however there was several challenges for such a service and it was not currently considered a viable option. SCC did provide a designated OT for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, which enabled the Council to go back to SCC to ensure that SCC provided a proper service to residents. Negotiations were ongoing to resolve the resource issues and reserves in the budget had been ring fenced for this.
- 79.9 Counsellor Welham referred to page 158 and queried the risks highlighted in red. He asked for a progress update on the these which the Corporate Manager provided including that the Operation model had been approved by Ipswich Borough Council and that West Suffolk would be operating a different model. She assured Members that by the time the report was presented to Cabinet the issues would have been resolved.
- 79.10 Members debated the issues including
- That the report was good and could be adopted with little amendments.
 - That Option 3 was the preferred option for both Councils.
 - That communication and information to all Members and the wider public was important when the Service was launched in December, including social media and leaflets in libraries.
 - That residents in hospitals should be informed of the services available and that work with hospitals was an important part of the new service.

79.11 Councillor Welham referred to the draft list of recommendations on page 162 of the report and suggested that the Committee endorsed Options 3 and the list of recommendations in Appendix A to Cabinet.

79.12 Councillor Scarff proposed the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Ekpenyong.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Committee endorses Option 3, and the recommendations listed in Appendix 3, to create an in-house Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Independent Living Service.

The Committee voted on the resolution to return to open session, and the vote was unanimous.

80 JOS/19/41 /BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

Note: Councillor Ekpenyong left the meeting at 12:30pm.

80.1 The Chair referred to Items 7, 10 and 11 on the Agenda and informed Members that the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2021, would take place on Monday the 18 January and not on the 14 January as stated in the workplans.

80.2 He asked if Members had many comments and Councillor McCraw asked Members to note that the Joint Committee Meeting on the 19 October 2020 had been cancelled by agreement of both Chairs.

80.3 Members were informed by the Chair that the meetings in February, March, April and May 2021 were likely to be joint meetings.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

That with the above amendments, the Forthcoming Decisions List, the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan be noted.

81 JOS/19/42 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

81.1 See minute number 80.

The business of the meeting was concluded at Time Not Specified.

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Chair