

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 20 September 2021 -09:30

PRESENT:

Councillor: Chair – Cllr Keith Welham

Councillors: Susan Maria Ayres B.Ed Hons Melanie Barrett
Terence Carter Siân Dawson
Paul Ekpenyong Margaret Maybury
David Muller Keith Scarff

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Suzie Morley (Leader of MSDC)
Jan Osborne (Cabinet Member for Housing -BDC)
Alastair McCraw (Cabinet Member for Customers and Digital Transformation (BDC)

Officers: Housing Needs and Standards Manager
Corporate Manager – Customer Services
Assistant Director – Customer Services
Community Safety Project Manager
Community Safety Officer
Monitoring Officer
Governance Officer

Apologies:

James Caston
Jane Gould
Kathryn Grandon
Mary McLaren (Co-Chair)

90 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from James Caston, Mary McLaren, Kathryn Grandon, and Jane Gould.

Councillors Sue Ayres substituted for Councillor Mary McLaren.

91 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Margaret Maybury declared a Local Non-pecuniary interest as a director of Sudbury Citizens Advice.

Councillor Dave Muller declared a Local Non-pecuniary interest as a Trustee of MSDC Citizens Advice.

92 JOS/21/6 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 2021

It was Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on the 19 July 2021 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

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

None received.

94 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

95 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

96 JOS/21/7 ANNUAL REVIEW OF JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY AND HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING REDUCTION STRATEGY 2019-2024

96.1 Councillor Jan Osborne – Cabinet Member for Housing (BDC) introduced the report to the Committee outlining the history of the strategy, what the aim of the document was and that it was agreed that the report would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny on an annual basis.

96.2 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager gave a presentation to Members of the Committee on the progress to date, the actions that are currently underway, and the future action planned over the remaining two and a half years of the strategy.

96.3 Councillor Muller asked whether tenants who currently rented garages would be accommodated by alternative arrangements if existing units were demolished.

96.4 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that a full consultation would take place and that alternative arrangements would be considered for customers.

96.5 Councillor Dave Muller enquired whether the identified 5 properties for rough sleepers would be similar to the converted shipping containers that were being used by Ipswich Borough Council.

- 96.6 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager confirmed that they would be modular units but would not be the same as the former shipping containers but that the detail of the exact models could be provided after the meeting.
- 96.7 Councillor Sue Ayres asked about possibly working together with Officers in the Housing Needs team and Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Group to get training for other Councillors.
- 96.8 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that he would welcome the opportunity and work with the group to provide the training as required.
- 96.9 Councillor Terence Carter asked about the Councils' Development Acquisitions and why MSDC had 71 less than BDC.
- 96.10 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that the supply of new affordable housing varied year upon year and that an average would provide a better representation over a 2-5 year period.
- 96.11 Councillor Carter enquired about internet supply to tenants and what advice would be supplied with regards to securing a better deal for tenants. The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that he was unable to answer the question but would consult with the relevant officer and provide a response outside of the meeting.
- 96.12 Councillor Carter questioned whether the Council would be working with partners to ensure that the modular rough sleeper units would be wheelchair accessible and have access to medical supplies.
- 96.13 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that there were different levels of accessibility throughout the planning process and that he did not know what level there would be for these units but that Officers would work with any individual user to meet any accessibility needs to ensure that they had adequate housing.
- 96.14 The Cabinet Member for Housing responded to a point that had been raised earlier regarding the acquisition of homes for housing stock and confirmed that it varied from month to month and that BDC's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was in a better position than MSDC's so could make more acquisitions at this time.
- 96.15 Councillor Keith Welham (Chair) asked about the supply of affordable housing and whether the Council was meeting the District's needs and whether there would be enough dwellings to ensure that there would be no homelessness or rough sleeping, and to reduce the amount of time families spend in B&B's.
- 96.16 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that the numbers were included in the Draft Joint Local Plan and that these were being kept under review to ensure that they met the future demand, and that the service

had been flexible in responding to demand in the past 18 months,

96.17 Councillor Welham enquired whether there would be any review of the number of affordable units and rented units as a result of the pandemic compared with the Joint Local Plan.

96.18 The Cabinet Member for Housing outlined that housing need was monitored through the housing register which included the type of properties needed and that the team would be working to ensure that people who haven't got a home is as low as possible, which included sofa surfers and rough sleepers. She reassured the Committee that the use of temporary accommodation was being constantly monitored and minimised where possible.

96.19 Councillor Keith Scarff questioned whether the dates and timescales in the report were the most up to date version and what relation did this have on the Councils current position.

96.20 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that the delivery plan was as at July 2021 and the committee presentation was up to date. A further annual review would take place next year in September.

96.21 Councillor Scarff enquired what work was planned with Citizens Advice with regards to actions in the plan. The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that this point would be taken away and followed up with Stowmarket Citizens Advice and that the action would be re-prioritised.

96.22 The Cabinet Member for Housing commented that BDC had a very good working relationship with Sudbury CA and that work could be undertaken to review and improve the relationship in both districts.

96.23 Councillor Ekpenyong questioned the large number of actions and how they are managed with 38 of the 92 being ongoing with many being the day to day work of the department rather than specific projects or actions, and whether a more concise set of actions and their timeliness should be reviewed. Further to this Cllr Ekpenyong highlighted:

- item 1.8 of the action plan regarding affordable housing and the number of affordable houses.
- Item 1.14 of the action plan regarding self and custom build and what conditions would be attached and;
- Item 1.10 which related to the number of stalled sites and the situation regarding them.

96.24 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager agreed with regards to the actions being reviewed especially with regard to ongoing/ completed actions, that it was difficult to predict the timings of supply, that the Council maintained a stalled site register and that the actions for stalled sites would be responded to outside of the meeting.

96.25 Councillor Sian Dawson asked why under paragraph 2.1 the reviews were

proposed to be annually instead of bi-annually and that this information is not communicated to Councillors.

- 96.26 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that 2.1 related to an annual review of the strategy and which had been agreed by Overview and Scrutiny at a previous meeting.
- 96.27 The Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council, Councillor Suzie Morley responded that the acquisition of housing came under the Housing Revenue Account in the Assets and Investments Portfolio and that there was a target of 214 new Council Houses to be added to Babergh and 200 for Mid Suffolk.
- 96.28 The Cabinet Member for Housing (BDC) responded that there was a waiting list for affordable homes and that the action plan was reported at monthly meetings with the portfolio holders.
- 96.29 Councillor Margaret Maybury questioned the size of existing properties and those proposed in the future, including their private amenity space.
- 96.30 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that there were minimum space standards and that there was a draft design specification for new Council developments and associated outdoor amenity space.
- 96.31 Councillor Margaret Maybury questioned private amenity space for an individual property as well as the placement of homes close to drainage basins.
- 96.32 The Chair noted that some of the issues raised were planning matters and should be raised with the appropriate department.
- 96.33 Councillor Margaret Maybury questioned the statements at 5.16 in the report (p16) and the aims of the strategy as well as grants that could be provided to landlords to provide central heating.
- 96.34 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that the installation of heat pumps was taken on a case by case basis after assessing the thermal efficiency of a property, and that if a landlord did not provide suitable heating it could lead to a category 1 hazard. Grants had been issued to landlords to improve the heating of properties.
- 96.35 Councillor Maybury questioned the responses from the Tenant forum whereby 500 respondents replied with 42% being satisfied with repairs and outlined her concern with affordable housing and the right to buy programme and whether the Council be overrun by requests for Affordable Housing.
- 96.36 The Chair responded that the scope of the question was too large to be answered in the meeting and asked that it be responded to outside of the meeting.
- 96.37 The Cabinet Member for Housing (BDC) clarified that the Council was bound by Government Policy but there was a banding process in deciding the

allocations.

96.38 Councillor Terence Carter declared an interest that he was a Council House Tenant and outlined his view that how there were a growing number of rough sleepers and whether the council used any translators for those who did not speak English.

96.39 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager and Cabinet Member for Housing (BDC) responded that the Council had a dedicated team for supporting individual reports out of hours and was also beneficial in terms of prevention of rough sleeping taking into account the diverse needs where they want to engage with Officers.

96.40 Councillor Paul Ekpenyong endorsed the comments from the Officer and the Cabinet Member and questioned the aims and how they read more like statements and asked how many people on average were homeless at a given time.

96.41 The Housing Needs and Standards Manager responded that he would feedback the comments on the aims and that number of people who were homeless at any given time varied but information on this could be provided to Members.

96.42 Councillor Keith Scarff proposed the following recommendation for the MSDC O&S committee only:

- In relation to 3.13, this committee recommends that urgent action is taken, to build improved joined up working with Citizens Advice and recommends that this is a top priority. Furthermore, that consideration is given to creating a jointly funded post by Cabinet, in order to move this priority and critical area forward.

96.43 Councillor Terence Carter seconded the motion.

96.44 Members debated the benefits and disbenefits of the proposal including: the value for money and the prioritisation for other areas in the service.

96.45 Councillor Paul Ekpenyong proposed that there be an overhaul of the presentation and action plan to provide further clarity in any subsequent report.

96.46 Councillor Margaret Maybury proposed that there be additional recommendations to planning regarding pre-application advice and private amenity space.

96.47 A short break was taken for the Governance Officer and the Monitoring Officer to collate the wording for the recommendations.

96.48 After the break the Governance Officer read out the list of proposals as follows

for the recommendations that had been proposed:

1. (MSDC only) In relation to 3.13, this committee recommends that urgent action is taken, to build improved joined up working with Citizens Advice and recommends that this is a top priority. Furthermore, that consideration is given to creating a jointly funded post by Cabinet, in order to move this priority and critical area forward.
2. That the content of the action plan was noted and the Committee asked for further information on the day to day activities of the action plan.
3. That the homes and housing strategy and homelessness and rough sleeping strategy be reviewed twice yearly.

The Governance officer clarified that the matters relating to the planning function were outside the remit of the committee but would be recorded in the minutes.

96.49

It was **RESOLVED** by the **Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee**:

By 3 votes to 2 that;

In relation to 3.13, this committee recommends that urgent action is taken, to build improved joined up working with Citizens Advice and recommends that this is a top priority. Furthermore, that consideration is given to creating a jointly funded post by Cabinet, in order to move this priority and critical area forward.

It was RESOLVED by the **Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee** :

By a unanimous vote that;

That the content of the action plan was noted and the Committee asked for further information on the day to day activities of the action plan.

It was RESOLVED :

By 7 votes to 2 that;

That the homes and housing strategy and homelessness and rough sleeping strategy be reviewed twice yearly.

Two information Bulletins were reported to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee as detailed below:

98 INFORMATION BULLETIN - CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE

98.1 The Corporate Manager for Customer services introduced the information bulletin to the committee and the headline details contained within it and updated Members that the pop-up services in Shotley and Hadleigh would be taking place from the 4 October 2021.

98.2 Councillor Sue Ayres asked what measures were being undertaken to inform Members of the public that the Town Hall was no longer a customer access point as there were on average 10 people a day who were trying to access services from there and what additional communication services were available to residents when they entered the Customer Access Points.

98.3 The Corporate Manager for Customer Services responded that more advertising would be undertaken if this continued and that other forms of communication including sign language would be explored for communicating with residents where required.

98.4 Councillor Melanie Barrett queried the number of residents who had visited the Sudbury Customer Access Point and the Stowmarket Customer Access Point and the reasons for the relative difference in numbers.

98.5 The Corporate Manager for Customer Services responded that historically there had been a higher demand for face-to-face services in Babergh but there had been a greater uptake in telephone appointments in Mid Suffolk and Stowmarket.

In response to a follow-up question from Cllr Barrett the Corporate Manager for Customer Services confirmed that the face-to-face services were always under review and that the council would be bringing back its pop-up services and that in Sudbury 2 days a week and would measure demand in the future.

98.6 Councillor Paul Ekpenyong suggested that in future the number of telephone appointments also be included within the information presented before Committee and questioned what work was being done on the website to help customers upload information through the website and whether the digital skills support had been launched and what effect it was having.

98.7 The Corporate Manager for Customer Services responded that the telephone appointments would be included in any future information bulletins, and outlined that the website was reviewed regularly especially with regards to feedback which was received, and the digital skills would be launching shortly and would be online training which would be supported by a face to face offer and that a survey regarding this had been sent to the Councils tenants.

98.8 Councillor Alastair McCraw – Cabinet Member for Customers and Digital Transformation (BDC) commented that the average time spent with each

customer during a face to face meeting was 30 minutes , and that the Councils' were providing 4 times as much officer time as was used currently and that this was the right level of service provision for customers.

- 98.9 Councillor Melanie Barrett commented queried the efficiency of telephone calls when compared with the face to face contact. The Cabinet Member for Customers and Digital Transformation confirmed that most queries were dealt with on first contact and that he would feed back any further information at any further meetings.
- 98.10 Councillor Keith Scarff commented that there was a general misunderstanding on the roles of each authority and what their responsibilities are and who should be contacted for each role.
- 98.11 Councillor Sue Ayres left the meeting at 12:20
- 98.11 Councillor Terence Carter queried the disabled access to the Stowmarket Customer Access point and whether it was possible to do teams meetings and whether monitors and sound setups could be used to increase accessibility to the service.
- 98.12 The Corporate Manager for Customer Services responded that in terms of the access for Stowmarket, the Disability forum had visited the site and had made some recommendations which were being planned to be put into place to improve access and that there was currently a limit of 1 person allowed in at a time due to the Pandemic Regulations to allow a 1 to 1 service with the officer. In term of the Teams appointments the Corporate Manager responded that the Council was working with Citizens Advice to provide that service.
- 98.13 Councillor Sian Dawson queried whether there would be a service provided to residents in Hadleigh Library and was something going to be coming back to Hadleigh. The Corporate Manager for Customer Services responded that this would be restarting from the 4 October with 2 officers attending.
- 98.14 Councillor Melanie Barrett queried what grade of officer would be attending the customer access points. The Corporate Manager for Customer Services responded that the Customer access points would be attended by a grade 4 officer and a grade 3 officer.
- 98.15 The information bulletin was noted by the Committee.

99 INFORMATION BULLETIN - ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

99.1 The Community Safety Project Manager and the Community Safety Officer presented the information Bulletin to the Committee outlining the key information in the bulletin which covered the last 9 months:

- Introduced a new case management system
- Training for Councillors
- The depth of subjects that ASB covered.
- What pro-active work could be undertaken by the Council.
- Engaged with external and internal partners in the public sector
- That Officers were trying to get their message out to young people and engaging through crucial crew, talking about online safety.
- Engineering an ASB Champion who is someone who has gone through the process.

99.2 Councillor Dave Muller enquired whether the Officers met up with the engagement officer for Mid Suffolk, PC Hendrickson. The Community Safety Officer responded that the team already worked with the engagement Officer during the compilation of the Information bulletin but would like to develop that further and raise awareness with street meets with the Police. The Community Safety Project Manager added that officers were a part of an Area Tactical Command Meeting which dealt with high risk crimes as well.

99.3 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned the officers about mediation that was offered. The Community Safety Project Manager responded that there was a structured and tiered approach when a situation is identified for mediation and a need for a conversation and that the Councils had a contract with Catch 22 (with effect from 5 August 2021 for a 12 month period) who are trained mediators who will engage, but emphasised the parties have to voluntarily engage in the process and if unsuccessful is taken to the next tier.

99.4 Councillor Paul Ekpenyong questioned whether the report included population growth into the statistics and why there had such a large shift in Suffolk's numbers. The Community Safety Project Manager responded that the data represented what was reported and outlined that some authorities were better than others in reporting information. The Officer responded that they would take this away and report back outside of the meeting.

99.5 Councillor Paul Ekpenyong queried the comments on the bottom of p78 in relation to the Mental Health Trust and comments on the victim focussed basis. The Community Safety Project Manager responded that Victim First was a golden thread promoted in legislation and mental health was a challenging area and there are different stages for that and measuring capacity under the Care Act when dealing with cases.

99.6 Councillor Margaret Maybury questioned how the officers dealt with motorbikes that were being anti social. The Community Safety Project Manager responded regarding of a PSPO (Public Spaces Protection Order) if the incidents were in

public spaces.

99.7 Councillor Sian Dawson questioned whether the council had ever evicted any tenants and whether mediation worked.

99.8 The Community Safety Project Manager responded that mediation was the way to look at all the options that were available to solve the issues.

99.9 Councillor Terence Carter commented that there was a victim first approach whereas he would prefer to see a mediation first approach and whether the Council was prepared to deal with a large amount of complaints.

99.10 The Community Safety Officer responded that an analysis of situations was undertaken and all factors were taken into account on a case by case basis and that the Council reviewed its capacity and capability whereby training had been undertaken and that the right structure was in place including the first point of contact at the Local Authority. In response to a further question the Officers responded that a Risk Assessment Matrix was undertaken whereby their case was assessed and that Officers engaged after the main process to ensure that all aspects were covered with appropriate and proportionate action taken.

99.11 Councillor Scarff asked that in future the CCTV segment in any report be expanded as it did not cover the complete picture of Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

99.12 The Report was noted.

100 JOS/21/9 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

The Forthcoming Decisions list was noted.

101 JOS/21/10 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Workplan was noted.

102 JOS/20/ MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Workplan was noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 12.43 pm.

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Chair

