

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, 24 October 2022

PRESENT:

Councillors:	James Caston	Paul Ekpenyong
	Kathryn Grandon	John Hinton (Co-Chair)
	John Matthissen	David Muller BA (Open) MCMI RAFA (Councillor)
	Adrian Osborne	Keith Scarff
	Keith Welham (Co-Chair)	

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Jan Osborne – Cabinet Member for Housing

Officers: Housing Strategy and Policy Officer (RW)
Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions (AAY)
Corporate Manager for Tenant Services (RL)

Apologies:

Councillors: Terence Carter
Robert Lindsay

26 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

26.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Terence Carter and Councillor Robert Lindsay

26.2 Councillor John Matthissen substituted for Councillor Terence Carter.

27 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

27.1 Councillor Ekpenyong declared an Other Registerable Interest in respect of Item JOS/22/17 due to his position as Chairman of Mid Suffolk Growth Ltd. However, the item under discussion did not directly relate to the finances or wellbeing of that interest or affect the finances or wellbeing of that interest to a greater extent than the majority of inhabitants. Therefore, Councillor Ekpenyong was not prevented from participating in the debate and vote in respect of this item.

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

28.1 None received.

29 JOS/22/16 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2022

29.1 It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2022 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

30 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

30.1 None received.

31 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

31.1 None received.

32 JOS/22/17 ANNUAL REVIEW UPDATE OF THE JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY AND THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 - 2024

32.1 Councillor Jan Osborne – Babergh District Council’s Cabinet Member for Housing – introduced the report to the Committee outlining before Members the history of the strategy, the purpose of the document, and that the strategy’s delivery plan had been refocussed since its implementation.

32.2 The Housing Strategy and Policy Officer gave a presentation to the Committee outlining the progress of the strategy to date, the changes that have been made to the strategy, the refocussed delivery plan, the status of the 93 actions outlined in the delivery plan, and the 9 strategic aims that underpin the strategy.

32.3 Councillor Matthissen queried how many houses had been “self-built” or “custom-built” under the strategy. Councillor Hinton responded that Babergh had 47 self-builds and Mid Suffolk had 106 self-builds.

32.4 Councillor Hinton questioned the design of the houses and whether any were being designed as “homes for life”. The Cabinet Member for Housing responded that the Councils have a housing design guide that includes “homes for life” designs which would be used for upcoming developments when possible.

32.5 Councillor Ekpenyong followed up that external developers should be encouraged to use the housing design guide as much as possible.

32.6 Councillor Grandon questioned whether the need to downsize had been considered and if there were enough smaller properties being built. The Housing Strategy and Policy Officer responded that a downsizing policy was currently being explored. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions added that an Older Persons Housing Strategy was currently being developed that would also focus on downsizing and would ascertain the need for this through public consultation and engagement.

- 32.7 Councillor Grandon requested that the downsizing policy encompass the needs of all our residents rather than focussing exclusively on older people.
- 32.8 Councillor Matthissen noted that there needed to be more physical support, alongside the proposed financial incentives, to aid people in moving to smaller properties.
- 32.9 Councillor Grandon queried how many homeless people were currently within our Districts and what was being done to prevent there being a rise in the number of homeless people as a result of the cost of living crisis. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that within Babergh they have received 46 applications (19 Prevention and 9 Relief) and 47 applications (20 Prevention and 7 Relief) in Mid Suffolk by the end of September 2022. Also, that those involved in the strategy were taking a proactive approach in response to the cost of living crisis and have been making residents aware of the support that they can receive from the Councils in the event that their placement in their home is threatened.
- 32.10 The Cabinet Member for Housing followed up that in Babergh there were plans to increase the temporary housing stock so that those coming forward as homeless could be put into accommodation as quickly as possible.
- 32.11 Councillor Ekpenyong queried the status of the homelessness applications that were not classed as "Preventions" or "Relief". The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that these applications did not meet the statutory requirements to be accepted but that some advice was still provided.
- 32.12 Councillor Caston questioned whether there was sufficient refuge provision within Mid Suffolk and whether we should be providing refuge provision for other districts to use. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions answered that there are self-contained units that could be moved between Babergh and Mid Suffolk as appropriate and that the Councils were working in partnership with the other Councils in Suffolk to ensure there was enough temporary accommodation available for those fleeing domestic violence.
- 32.13 Councillor Grandon queried about the work to reduce anti-social behaviour and whether consideration was given to placing tenants within communities that align with their social needs. The Cabinet Member for Housing responded that this fell under the strategy's allocation policy and that "health checks" would be carried out to ensure that current arrangements continued to meet the needs of both the Councils and our residents.
- 32.14 Councillor Grandon questioned whether the proposed electric vehicle charging points would be installed on houses for individual use or in public areas for communal use. The Corporate Manager for Tenant Services responded that this would be explored through a viability assessment in the future.
- 32.15 Councillor Muller queried whether Ukrainian refugees within the districts who

were coming to the end of their 6 month accommodation period had been rehoused. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions said that the team were experiencing difficulties due to a lack of supply within the private rental market and that they were working with other districts and hosts to sort out accommodation as a matter of priority.

- 32.16 Councillor Hinton highlighted that both Babergh and Mid Suffolk had a higher number of older people residing in the countryside in comparison to the national average and questioned how the strategy would ensure that older people retain access to well-connected communities. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions answered that the strategy would be consulting with older people to ascertain their needs and that partnership work with stakeholders such as health and social care would help deliver an appropriate housing supply.
- 32.17 Councillor Adrian Osborne questioned whether Gateway To Homechoice had been covered in the Housing Strategy. The Cabinet Member for Housing said that a health check would be carried out on the current Lettings and Allocation policy to ensure that the current arrangements continued to meet the needs of the Councils including Gateway To Homechoice.
- 32.18 Councillor Ekpenyong raised that there were seemingly conflicting requirements within the Homes and Housing Strategy and the Communities Strategy and questioned whether the proposed developments catered to all the strategies linked to housing. The Chair, Councillor Welham, responded that this point would be referred to Cabinet at an appropriate point.
- 32.19 Councillor Ekpenyong asked a further question concerning the number of garages available to rent in our districts and whether there were plans to remove excess garages and replace them with other developments. The Corporate Manager for Tenant Services responded that a number of reviews had already been carried out regarding the suitability of garage sites and what could potentially be done with the land should garages become low in demand. The Cabinet Member for Housing added that a comprehensive report on the garage review was planned to come to Cabinet in January 2023.
- 32.20 Members debated the report and raised the following points:
- That, when rehousing Ukrainian refugees, the Councils looked to house them in urban areas rather than rural areas to ensure that they would be placed in well-connected communities with access to multiple services.
 - Whether the new design guide for developments was ambitious enough and is encouraging the Councils to build homes to the highest standard possible.
 - What work was being done to increase the energy efficiency of the Councils' lowest rated homes.
- 32.21 Councillor Scarff and Councillor Osborne thanked the Officers for their presentation and recommended that future updates to the Committee on the

Homes and Housing Strategy be organised in a similar manner.

32.22 Councillor Welham suggested the following recommendations:

- 3.1 That Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Members have reviewed the contents of report JOS/22/17, including the appendices, and requests that the Portfolio Holders and Officers take account of verbal comments made by members of the committee. Also, that Cabinet bears these comments in mind when debating the refocussed delivery plan, the refreshed Joint Homes and Housing Strategy, and the Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 3.2 That the committee members support the strategic aims of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and agreed that the newly refocussed plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the housing sector whilst continuing to deliver the aims set out in the strategy.
- 3.3 To ask Portfolio Holders and Officers to consider further provision of financial and physical support to all residents wishing to downsize.

32.23 Councillor Matthissen proposed the recommendations as read out by Councillor Welham.

32.24 Councillor Grandon seconded the recommendations.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 3.1 That Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Members have reviewed the contents of report JOS/22/17, including the appendices, and requests that the Portfolio Holders and Officers take account of verbal comments made by members of the committee. Also, that Cabinet bears these comments in mind when debating the refocussed delivery plan, the refreshed Joint Homes and Housing Strategy, and the Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.**
- 3.2 That the committee members support the strategic aims of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and agreed that the newly refocussed plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the housing sector whilst continuing to deliver the aims set out in the strategy.**
- 3.3 To ask Portfolio Holders and Officers to consider further provision of financial and physical support to all residents wishing to downsize.**

33 JOS/22/18 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

33.1 The Forthcoming Decisions List was noted.

34 JOS/22/19 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

34.1 Councillor Welham advised that an updated version of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Action Tracker would be discussed at the next Joint Chairs' Briefing and brought to the next committee.

34.2 The Action Tracker was noted.

35 JOS/22/20 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

35.1 The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan was noted.

36 JOS/22/21 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

36.1 The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan was noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 11:25am.

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Chair