

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 November 2023

PRESENT:

Chair: Mary McLaren (Chair)

Councillors:	Terence Carter	James Caston
	Kathryn Grandon	Leigh Jamieson
	Dr Ross Piper	Janet Pearson
	Keith Scarff	Brian Riley
	John Whyman	Laura Smith

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Jessie Carter – BDC Cabinet Member for Housing
John Ward
Elisabeth Malvisi
John Matthissen

Officers: Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions (AAY)
Assistant Manager – Housing Solutions (VB)
Housing Strategy and Policy Officer (RW)
Team Manager – Housing Solutions (RF)
Housing Solutions Officer (SA)
Housing Solutions Accommodation Officer (MHP)
Team Manager – Central Suffolk Lettings (SL)
Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny (AN)

46 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

46.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Miles Row.

47 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

47.1 Councillor Caston and Councillor Whyman declared an interest in item JOS/23/27 due to being private landlords.

47.2 Councillor Riley declared an interest in item JOS/23/27 due to being a director of a company which operates as a private landlord.

47.3 Councillor Scarff declared an interest in item JOS/23/27 due to being a trustee of the Stowmarket Relief Trust and his wife being a private landlord.

47.4 The Monitoring Officer granted all Councillors a dispensation to deal with housing matters. Therefore, all Members who declared an interest could remain on the Committee and participate in the debate and vote.

48 JOS/23/26 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2023

48.1 Councillor Jamieson proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2023 as detailed in the tabled papers be confirmed and signed as a true record.

48.2 Councillor Smith seconded the proposal.

By a vote of 9 For and 1 Abstention

It was RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

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

49.1 None received.

50 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

50.1 None received.

51 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

51.1 None received.

52 JOS/23/27 HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2024

52.1 Councillor Jessie Carter – Babergh Cabinet Member for Housing – introduced the report to the Committee outlining before Members the Councils' commitment to reducing instances of rough sleeping, the mandates issued as part of the Homelessness Act (2002), the review of the previous 2019 – 2014 homelessness strategy, the factors which can result in people becoming homeless, the visions of the strategy, the development of a multi-agency approach, and thanked officers involved in the development and delivery of the strategy.

52.2 The Housing Strategy and Policy Officer provided a presentation to the Committee outlining before Members details of the previous strategy, the upcoming consultation period, the strategy's core vision, the delivery plan underpinning the strategy, and provided details on the work achieved and upcoming targets for each of the strategy's five priorities.

52.3 Councillor Scarff raised the requirement for senior leadership to agree and support the Councils becoming Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accredited and queried if the same agreement was required from the

authorities involved in the delivery of the strategy. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that becoming DAHA accredited had been presented to senior leadership and that commitment from various authorities would be sought at the Good Start Project Board.

- 52.4 Councillor Grandon queried what type of accommodation were rough sleepers often referred to. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that the Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund provided the Councils with step-beds, either in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) or self-contained units, where individuals were kept until their needs could be assessed and the appropriate long-term accommodation identified.
- 52.5 Councillor Grandon further questioned regarding the geography of rough sleepers across both Districts. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that incidental rough sleepers were often found in urban areas and towns and that more entrenched rough sleepers were located in isolated rural areas.
- 52.6 Councillor Scarff questioned what plans had been put in place to continue funding the delivery of the strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeping Initiative funding in 2025. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that a review of staffing and the delivery of the strategy would be undertaken to ensure that the Councils can afford to continue enacting the service at its current level sustainably.
- 52.7 Councillor Terence Carter questioned whether the strategy permitted rough sleepers to keep their pets when being rehoused into temporary accommodation. The Housing Solutions Accommodation Officer responded that a pet policy was currently being devised and that pets were permitted in a majority of temporary accommodation units where it can be supervised.
- 52.8 Councillor Caston queried how much impact the cost of living crisis, coupled with a lack of available rental properties at affordable prices and the rural geography of the districts, was having on meeting targets and being able to deliver an effective strategy. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that it was likely impossible to end rough sleeping as a whole due to the number of factors leading people to become homeless, but that delivery of the strategy was still effective in ending entrenched rough sleeping.
- 52.9 Councillor Malvisi queried what proportion of rough sleepers were fleeing domestic and sexual violence. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that 15.47% of rough sleepers in Babergh and 18.22% in Mid Suffolk listed domestic abuse as their primary reason for becoming homeless.
- 52.10 Councillor Matthissen questioned if there had been a local increase in no fault evictions due to the national increase in mortgage rates and whether the Council had explored buying properties to prevent tenants from being evicted in the case of property sale. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that the Councils did get approached by private landlords to purchase properties and that these were assessed on a case by case basis.

The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings further responded that the Councils were able to offer landlords a five year plan to provide them with more security to mitigate the rise in mortgage rates and that this increase was resulting in more properties being put up for sale.

- 52.11 Councillor Carter questioned if improvements had been made to temporary accommodation units to make them more accessible to those with disabilities or mobility difficulties. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that improvements had been made across the board and that bespoke units that are fully accessible are now part of the stock and are offered to rough sleepers with disabilities.
- 52.12 Councillor Grandon questioned the reasons for implementing a charge for private landlords to let their properties through Central Suffolk Lettings as part of the homelessness strategy. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that all landlords who wished to manage their properties through an agency would have to pay fees and that the cost of using Central Suffolk Lettings would be small and not for profit.
- 52.13 Councillor Jamieson queried if there was mixing of different kinds of tenants in temporary accommodation units of multiple occupation. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that often families were housed in self-contained units with no mixing and that service users were assessed for their needs before placing them in the most appropriate accommodation.
- 52.14 Councillor Smith questioned if residents who were being moved out of temporary accommodation into long term accommodation were being placed in Band A council tax properties. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that the council tax banding was determined by the information provided in a homelessness application, that Band B was determined as the appropriate type of housing to refer residents into, and that Band A properties were used in exceptional circumstances.
- 52.15 Councillor Whyman questioned if there were plans to extend the profile of Central Suffolk Lettings and further communicate their service to private landlords. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that there was a degree of budget limitation in terms of publicity and marketing but that there were plans to raise Central Suffolk Lettings' corporate profile internally.
- 52.16 Councillor Jamieson questioned if single men were at a disadvantage when it came to homelessness and rehousing in permanent accommodation. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that single men were the demographic most likely to be homeless but that the strategy's processes treat everyone equally regardless of circumstances.

A short break was held between 12:52pm and 13:06pm.

52.17 Members debated the item on issues including:

- The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation;
- Funding beyond the Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund ending in 2025;
- The breadth of services provided under the strategy's delivery plan;
- The changes between the 2019 – 2023 strategy and the 2024 – 2019 strategy;
- Further communication of the services provided by the strategy and Central Suffolk Lettings;
- Support for under 25s to become adequately housed in the Districts;

52.18 The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny put forward the following recommendations based on the questions and debate from Members:

- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends the housing department for the work they are conducting to help reduce homelessness in the Districts and requests that officers take on board the comments made at the meeting.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the vision and priorities of the draft Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and ensures that the Delivery Plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the Districts.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly supports the work being undertaken to meet the domestic abuse housing alliance accreditation.
- That Cabinet makes further plans to provide financial support for the services provided under the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding in 2025.
- That Cabinet explores further means of providing assistance to those under 25 with becoming adequately housed in order to avoid an influx of young people becoming homeless.
- That Cabinet explores providing more resources to the housing department to assist with communicating about the services available from the Councils and Central Suffolk Lettings to those who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.

52.19 Councillor Jamieson proposed the recommendations as read out by the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny.

52.20 Councillor Scarff seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends the housing department for the work they are conducting to help reduce homelessness in the Districts and requests that officers take on board the comments made at the meeting.
- 1.2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the vision and priorities of the draft Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and ensures that the Delivery Plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the Districts.
- 1.3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly supports the work being undertaken to meet the domestic abuse housing alliance accreditation.
- 1.4. That Cabinet makes further plans to provide financial support for the services provided under the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding in 2025.
- 1.5. That Cabinet explores further means of providing assistance to those under 25 with becoming adequately housed in order to avoid an influx of young people becoming homeless.
- 1.6. That Cabinet explores providing more resources to the housing department to assist with communicating about the services available from the Councils and Central Suffolk Lettings to those who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.

53 JOS/23/28 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

- 53.1 Councillor Jamieson queried the reasons why some recommendations for Item JOS/23/15 were listed as “not started”. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that recommendation 1.2. and 1.6. had been completed, that this would be rectified on the action tracker, and that discussions were being had with the appropriate officers regarding getting the other outstanding actions progressed.
- 53.2 Councillor Riley requested if the date for the annual review of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership in 2024 could be added to the action tracker to suitably advise members of when these actions would be reported back to the Committee. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that this would be included in the tracker as requested.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 13:33pm.

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Chair