

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 on Thursday, 14 March 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Terence Carter	James Caston
	Kathryn Grandon	Leigh Jamieson
	Mary McLaren	Janet Pearson
	Dr Ross Piper	Brian Riley
	Miles Row	Keith Scarff
	John Whyman	

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Derek Davis – BDC Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
Teresa Davis – MSDC Cabinet Member for Thriving Towns

Officers: Interim Monitoring Officer (JR)
Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change (FD)
Director – Corporate Services (SW)
Head of Economy and Business (MG)
Head of Customer Experience (SL)
Arts and Culture Lead (ZB)
Lead Officer – Overview and Scrutiny (AN)

Apologies:

Councillor(s): Laura Smith

54 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

54.1 Councillor Row declared an Other Registrable Interest (ORI) in Item JOS/23/32 as an employee of Suffolk Libraries and Suffolk Artlink.

54.2 Councillor Scarff declared that he was a member of the cross party member working group for the development of the Culture, Heritage, and Visitor Economy Strategy and the corresponding action plan.

55 JOS/23/29 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2023

55.1 Councillor McLaren proposed that the minutes be approved and signed as a true record of the meeting.

55.2 Councillor Carter seconded the proposal.

By a vote of 10 For and 1 Abstention

It was RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the joint meeting held on 20th November 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

56 JOS/23/30 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE BABERGH MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2024

56.1 Councillor Whyman proposed that the minutes be approved and signed as a true record of the meeting.

56.2 Councillor Jamieson seconded the proposal.

By a vote of 4 For and 1 Abstention

It was RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Babergh meeting held on 22nd January 2024 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

57 JOS/23/31 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MID SUFFOLK MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2024

57.1 Councillor Scarff proposed that the minutes be approved and signed as a true record of the meeting.

57.2 Councillor Carter seconded the proposal.

By a vote of 6 For

It was RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Mid Suffolk meeting held on 22nd January 2024 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

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

58.1 None received.

59 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

59.1 None received.

60 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

60.1 None received.

JOS/23/32 REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURE, HERITAGE, AND VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY

- 61.1 Councillor Teresa Davis, Mid Suffolk's Cabinet Member for Thriving Towns and Rural Communities, introduced the report to the Committee outlining before Members including the 12-month progress update on the delivery of the Strategy, the creation of the Strategy in March 2023, the dissection of the action plan into three key themes: cultural habits, accelerating progress by developing the sector, and encouraging collaboration; and the 52 individual actions and their relation to the key themes.
- 61.2 Councillor Row questioned how the Strategy was being developed to attract a more diverse audience and range of talent on offer. The Arts and Culture Lead responded the action plan was already reasonably diverse but that steps had been, and will continue to be, taken in order to make improvements.
- 61.3 Councillor Row further questioned if measures had been taken to offer more accessible shows to customers, i.e. audio-described performances, and British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters. The Arts and Culture Lead responded that the Strategy does encourage events and performance organisers to ensure provisions are made so that they are accessible to a wide range of people and that the options as set out by Councillor Row would be explored further.
- 61.4 Councillor Carter queried if consultations had been undertaken with operators of affordable or sustainable travel. The Director for Economic Growth responded that the Councils' Sustainable Travel Officer had been consulted and was assisting with the delivery of the Strategy, particularly within Mid Suffolk.
- 61.5 Councillor McLaren questioned what work was being undertaken in collaboration with schools to assist with young people's cultural development. The Arts and Culture Lead responded that this was being addressed through the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) that linked local authorities, arts organisations, and education providers, and that a key aim was to make arts and culture venues more accessible and appealing to young people.
- 61.6 Councillor McLaren raised that it might be beneficial for officers to utilise the Town and Parish Liaison meetings as a way of communicating the Strategy and what is on offer to parish councils.
- 61.7 Councillor Grandon queried who the Strategy's main audience was and how it fit in with Suffolk-wide tourism campaigns. The Director for Economic Growth responded that the Strategy was designed for those providing culture and tourism experiences, and was a necessary document intended to respond to a culture gap across the Districts and collate different council policy and schemes into one place for better overview. The Head of Economy and Business further added that campaigns and improved marketing were taking place in collaboration with Visit Suffolk to better the visibility of our areas.

- 61.8 Councillor Whyman queried whether the Strategy was being tied into the formulation of planning documents and helping to steer policy to better protect culture and heritage assets. Councillor Derek Davis, Babergh's Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, responded that the Councils' heritage team were actively working with the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) to regenerate and retain local rural heritage assets. The Director for Economic Growth further responded that the development and delivery of the Strategy had been collaborative across all areas of the Councils.
- 61.9 Councillor Carter raised concerns about lack of access to appropriate facilities for disabled people within venues where events were being held and highlighted the concept of mobile changing places. The Director for Economic Growth responded that there were plans in action to increase the number of accessible changing places and bathrooms across the district and that the idea of utilising a mobile service would also be considered.
- 61.10 Councillor Caston queried what measures were being considered to attract the "purple pound" (the financial spending of disabled individuals) into the districts. The Arts and Culture Lead responded that work was being undertaken with Suffolk Growth in light of the purple pound report, that progress was being made on implementing these findings into the proposed action plan, and that all cultural and tourist events that approach the Councils through the Strategy are provided with assistance to help make their events as accessible as possible to a wide range of people.
- 61.11 Councillor Row questioned how integrated grassroots organisations were into the Strategy and its delivery. The Arts and Culture Lead responded that grassroots organisations were one of the key beneficiaries of the Strategy and that one of the Strategy's core aims was to ensure that these organisations received adequate funding and support to host events and performances.
- 61.12 Councillor Caston queried how the "farm to fork" scheme was integrated into the delivery of the Strategy. The Arts and Culture Lead responded that it was a key aim to make tourism relating to farming the districts' unique selling point (USP) and that a project co-ordinator was being employed primarily to assist with the delivery of this scheme.
- 61.13 Councillor Piper questioned if the Strategy could be used to protect the districts from overdevelopment, especially in the countryside. Both Cabinet Members responded that this Strategy was readily used by the Councils' planning and heritage teams to best inform decisions and highlight potential impact of any development on cultural and heritage assets.
- 61.14 Councillor Carter queried whether financial support was provided to schools to assist with getting groups of young people to attend performances and events. The Arts and Culture Lead responded that this was a key aim of the Strategy, that the Councils had approached many schools with the means of

delivering on this aim, and that unfortunately many barriers, such as timings and an extensive curriculum, existed which were preventing schools from utilising these opportunities.

61.15 Members debated the item on issues including:

- The ability for Councillors to fund the cultural development of young people from locality budgets;
- Communications with the public and town/parish councils;
- The marketing of the Strategy and encouraging tourism;
- Protection of rural heritage assets;
- Concerns about overdevelopment;
- Accessibility of venues and information put in public domain;
- Links to the Joint Local Plan and upcoming SPDs;
- Diversity of talent being offered;

61.16 The Lead Officer proposed the following recommendations based on the questions and debate from Members:

- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and commends the Officers for the work undertaken in delivering the Strategy.
- That Officers take on board the comments made by the Committee, particularly regarding accessibility, marketing, and public consultation, and incorporate these into the future delivery of the Strategy.
- That the Cultural Working Group, in conjunction with the Community Grants Review, are requested to explore expanding the scope of locality grants to incorporate funding support for young people looking to engage with culture and the arts.
- That Officers explore various methods of further communicating the Strategy and its aims to a wider audience.
- That the Cabinet Member for Planning be asked to note the committee's concerns towards the potential for overdevelopment of the districts and that the SPD for Heritage and Culture be examined to better protect the tourism and culture offer that is currently available.

61.17 Councillor Row proposed the recommendations as read out by the Lead Officer.

61.18 Councillor Carter seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and commends the Officers for the work undertaken in delivering the Strategy.**
- 1.2. That Officers take on board the comments made by the Committee, particularly regarding accessibility, marketing, and public consultation, and incorporate these into the future delivery of the Strategy.**
- 1.3. That the Cultural Working Group, in conjunction with the Community Grants Review, are requested to explore expanding the scope of locality grants to incorporate funding support for young people looking to engage with culture and the arts.**
- 1.4. That Officers explore various methods of further communicating the Strategy and its aims to a wider audience.**
- 1.5. That the Cabinet Member for Planning be asked to note the committee's concerns towards the potential for overdevelopment of the districts and that the SPD for Heritage and Culture be examined to better protect the tourism and culture offer that is currently available.**

62 JOS/23/33 INFORMATION BULLETIN - A REVIEW INTO THE USE OF CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES

- 62.1** The Head of Customer Experience introduced the report to the Committee outlining before Members the different services offered by the Customers team, the distribution of customer contact between different services, face-to-face customer contact points, the implementation of live chat website services, the number of compliments and complaints received, the results of the recent customer satisfaction survey, and proposed plans to improve customer facing services.
- 62.2** Councillor Grandon queried how the customer access points could be better advertised, specifically in Hadleigh. The Head of Customer Experience responded that the current advertisement posters for the service were being reviewed and that plans were being drawn up with Hadleigh Library to better promote what was available.
- 62.3** Councillor McLaren queried the provision of digital skills and inclusion sessions and how these could be set up across the District. The Head of Customer Experience responded that community mapping would be taking place in partnership with Suffolk County Council that would highlight areas in need of digital inclusion sessions and these would be delivered appropriately.

- 62.4 Councillor Jamieson questioned what provisions were in place to ensure that complaints were dealt with in a timely manner. The Head of Customer Experience responded that residents could log official complaints either through the online form, the designated telephone line, or via email to the feedback team, that these complaints would be logged on an official system, and that responses to the complaints were tracked through to completion.
- 62.5 Councillor Jamieson further queried if social media activity was monitored to pick up comments and complaints made online in public forum. The Director for Corporate Services responded that social media posts that tagged the Councils' profiles were responded to via direct message and that a trawl also took place using buzzwords relating to Babergh and Mid Suffolk to pick up comments and issues.
- 62.6 Councillor Carter queried what measures were in place to protect residents from scam calls and emails. The Head of Customer Experience responded that this was something covered in digital inclusion sessions so that residents were able to identify the signs of a scam contact but that it was difficult to highlight all the means in which scams are made due to the different methods used.
- 62.7 Councillor Carter commented that the visibility of the customer access point in Stowmarket was poor and that there were accessibility issues within the building. The Head of Customer Experience responded that the building had been reviewed by the Mid Suffolk Disability Forum and that appropriate adjustments had been made following feedback but that changes were limited by the space available.
- 62.8 Councillor Grandon questioned if there had been an impact on the services delivered and callback times due to more members of staff working from home due to the pandemic. The Head of Customer Experience responded that customer demand and preferred contact methods had shifted post-pandemic, that all members of staff were still expected to assist with face-to-face contact with residents, and that there had been no negative impact on response times due to agile working.
- 62.9 Councillor Caston questioned the reasons for the differences in resident satisfaction with individual services in comparison to their satisfaction with the Council as a whole. The Head of Customer Experience responded that a decrease in satisfaction with local government authorities could be seen across the sector, that a working group was being curated with staff across all departments in an effort to increase overall satisfaction ratings, and that the satisfaction survey was sent to a random group of residents who may be completing the questionnaire based on historic experiences rather than recent.
- 62.10 Councillor Pearson raised that the current method for sending compliments and complaints was not very distinguishable or easy to use. The Head of Customer Experience responded that a new complaints system was currently being developed and that the designated form for contacting the Council was

being adjusted to improve its usability.

62.11 Councillor Scarff questioned if any analysis had taken place to identify potential impacts of relocating the customer access point in Stowmarket into the library. The Head of Customer Experience responded that relocating to Stowmarket Library allowed for collaboration with Citizens Advice to deliver a joint service and that the space facilitated evening and weekend opening hours to offer a service to a wider range of people.

62.12 Members praised the Customer Services department, the work that they were undertaking, and the improved satisfaction ratings and response times.

63 JOS/23/34 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

63.1 No comments.

64 JOS/23/35 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

64.1 Councillor Caston queried the reasons why recommendation 3.3 for Item JOS/22/45 had been rejected by officers. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that a written reason would be requested from the key officer responsible and circulated to all Members.

64.2 Councillor Whyman questioned who was contacted to provide updates for recommendations. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that if a recommendation was directed to officers then the relevant Director and Corporate Manager would be approached, and that when the recommendation concerned Cabinet then the relevant portfolio holder would be contacted.

65 JOS/23/36 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

65.1 No comments.

66 JOS/23/37 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

66.1 No comments.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 12:40pm.

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Chair