

Report to MSDC Council September 2018

The aim of this report is to give Council Members a brief synopsis of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report covers the following reviews:

Shared Legal Service

Development of the Joint Housing Strategy

Void Re-let Times of Council Properties

Review of the Implementation of Charged Pre-Application Fees for Planning Advice

Shared Legal Service

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report and presentation on development of the service and Members agreed that significant progress had been made since the previous review in December 2017. The new case management system is enabling the service to deal with an increasing workload and provide progress reports. The system will be able to hold detailed case information which would enable provision of more timely and detailed information to Members.

Development of the Joint Housing Strategy

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the development of the Housing Strategy. Members made a number of comments and suggested that energy and water efficiency should be included as a key principle of the strategy. Reassurance was given in respect of the robustness of the strategy to accommodate future changes in Central Government legislation and staffing requirements for monitoring completions and assisting in bringing forward stalled sites. An Action Plan within the Strategy will cover the role of the Councils in ensuring new Council Housing developments are completed.

Void Re-let Times of Council Properties

A number of meetings have considered reports on progress made towards reducing the time between a property being vacated and a new tenant moving in. The target reduction in void time of 10 days from the September 2017 figure of 51 (54 in Babergh) has been achieved. In recent months the figure has been below 25. Officers were commended for their report to the Joint Committee on 3 September and for their work to bring about the improved performance.

Review of the Implementation of Charged Pre-Application Fees for Planning Advice

Fees for Pre-Application Advice were introduced in July 2017 and a report reviewing the first year was considered by the Joint Committee. Feedback from those who had sought and received advice had been reasonably positive. Some areas needing further attention in order to improve the service have been highlighted and, through training and monitoring, the service will seek to embed a 'right first time, on time' approach to providing pre-application advice.

Future Work Plans

The Joint Committee will meet on 20 September to review the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP). The work of the partners within WSCSP affect every ward and an invitation to attend the meeting has been sent to every ward member.

In October, Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review proposals for redevelopment of the Leisure Centres in Stowmarket and Stradbroke and receive an Information Bulletin on Staff Turnover and Welfare. The Work Plan also includes a review of the business plan for redevelopment of the former HQ site in Needham Market.