

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Britten Room - Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Thursday, 14 February 2019

PRESENT:

Councillor: Alastair McCraw - Chair

Councillors:	James Caston	Lavinia Hadingham
	John Hinton	Bryn Hurren
	Jennie Jenkins	Lesley Mayes
	Alastair McCraw (Co-Chair)	Adrian Osborne
	Derek Osborne	Fenella Swan
	Keith Welham (Co-Chair)	Kevin Welsby

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Jan Osborne

Witness(es): None

Officers: Governance Support Officer
Corporate Manager - Democratic Services
Corporate Manager - Private Sector Housing and Tenancy Services
Corporate Manager – Tenant Services
Senior Environment Health Officer
Governance Support Officer

Apologies:

Sue Ayres
Melanie Barrett
Barry Gasper
Elizabeth Gibson-Harries
Stephen Williams

53 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

53.1 There were no declarations of interests received.

54 JOS/18/27 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2018

54.1 The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 November 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

55 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE

COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

55.1 There were no petitions received.

56 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

56.1 None received.

57 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

57.1 None received.

58 JOS/18/29 INFORMATION BULLETIN 2

Review of the Impact and Implementation of Universal Credit

58.1 Councillor Jan Osborne Introduced the Information Bulletin. There were fewer than 200 households, which would be receiving Universal Credit. Apart from introducing a new system for the claimants, the working relationship with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) would be entirely different from working with the Housing Benefit team.

58.2 Councillor Mayes reminded Members that some people did not have access to a computer, even if these were available in Job Centres and libraries. She thought this could deter claimants as they were often vulnerable people.

58.3 Lee Crowdell - The Corporate Manager for Tenant Services, explained that front line services were doing their best to provide support and that Citizens Advice was providing further support from April 2019.

58.4 The Cabinet Member for Housing informed the Committee that 92% of applications were completed on-line, however her concern was to provide support for the remaining 8%. Shared Revenues Partnerships was undertaking work round these issues.

58.5 Councillor Adrian Osborne was concerned that individuals would have some problem with budgeting, as the Universal Credit was paid directly to the claimants on a monthly basis.

58.6 Members discussed this issue as the landlords could evict young and vulnerable people. They would then become the responsibility of the Council as homeless applicants.

58.7 Questions were raised regarding the increase use of foodbanks and figures for how many used them in Suffolk. The Corporate Manager responded that he would provide an answer outside the meeting.

58.8 Concerns for resources and staff were raised, and the officer responded that resources would be reviewed. Operations issues had been identified and an action plan for managing rent arrears had been outlined.

58.9 Universal Credit was paid monthly but the DWP did not recognise that 2019/20 had 53 weeks; housing rent was paid on a Monday and claimants would still be charged for the additional week, but not receiving benefit for the rent payable on the 53rd Monday. Currently the advice was for claimants to take this issue up with their Work Support officer.

It was RESOLVED:

That Information Bulletin 2 be noted

59 JOS/18/28 REVIEW OF OUTSIDE BODIES

59.1 Report JOS/18/28 was introduced by Janice Robinson, Corporate Manager for Democratic Services. There had not been a review of representations on outside bodies for some time and this review would ensure that Members were still required on the various Outside Bodies.

59.2 The representation by Members were a two-way process between Councillors and the organisations. Members provided a link back from the District to the organisations.

59.3 Training would be organised for Members, including the different kinds of representations. Attention would also be drawn to the question of indemnity and for which roles Members were covered.

59.4 Representatives on outside bodies would also be required to provide a brief annual update to Council, which would be managed by Committee Services.

59.5 A database had been created for Members' responses, attached in Appendix A and B. There had been additional responses from questionnaires sent to the Outside Bodies and panels, but these would not be shared with Members.

59.6 Councillor Caston proposed that attendance by Members on statutory outside bodies should be recorded and published on the website and Members agreed that this be should be added to the recommendations.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

1.1 That training needs relating to outside bodies be investigated by the Member Learning and Development Working Group and any relevant training be programmed in for the next municipal year.

1.2 That a simple mechanism be agreed for councillors to report back on an annual basis to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.3 That a review of the list of Outside Bodies be carried out on an annual

basis and the update of that review be included in the report above.

- 1.4 That records be kept of Members attendance at qualifying statutory meetings of the Outside Bodies
- 1.5 That the attendance of Members' on statutory Outside Bodies/Panel be published on the website.

60 JOS/18/29 INFORMATION BULLETIN NUMBER 1.

Disabled Facilities Grant

- 60.1 Jan Osborne, Babergh Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report.
- 60.2 Heather Worton, Corporate Manager-Property Services, and Amanda Todd, Senior Environmental Health Officer were present to answer questions.
- 60.3 A report was being prepared to Cabinet in March which included proposed changes to alleviate the current way of working with the Disabled Facilities Grant, as outlined on page 24 bullet point 3.0 to 3.7.
- 60.4 Councillor Hadingham queried if there was a preliminary assessment of applications and the officers responded that this was provided by Orbit. It was the responsibility of Suffolk County Council to conduct the initial referrals and that there were a lot of work being conducted before the referrals were forwarded to Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils.
- 60.5 The proposed changes would be implemented during the last sixteenth months of the Orbit contact. It was established that Orbit was under resourced and that the proposed changes would be funded by the Councils involved in the Orbit contact. The Council had a statutory obligation to provide support and Orbit was unable to provide further support as the organisation had no additional resources.
- 60.6 Members questioned the Orbit Contract and the Cabinet Member for Housing clarified that the contract was initially for five years and that the consequences of pulling out to the contract would have financial implications for all the authorities involved.
- 60.7 Paragraph 1.4 was queried by Members and if the funding would be lost if not allocated before 31 March 2018. It was clarified that it was unlikely that Council would be able to commit to allocate all the funding and that any surplus would be diverted to Suffolk County Council.
- 60.8 Members continued to debate the Orbit contact and some Members were unhappy that contract would continue for another 16 months. Officers and the Cabinet Member for Housing were highly concerned that the penalty clauses within the contract would result in a greater financial loss and a significant pause in any delivery.
- 60.9 Members generally agreed that the proposed recommendations to Cabinet

were acceptable, but they would like to receive feed-back from Cabinet once a decision had been made. Both Cabinets would be considering proposed changes to Disabled Facilities Grants in March.

60.10 Members also suggested that for the future Scrutiny Committee a cross county scrutiny function be conducted with Councils with similar issues on the Disabled Facilities Grant. It was clear that recruitment of Occupational Therapist was part of some of the issues with the assessment process for the grant applications.

60.11 Discussion ensued regarding whether the Committee should receive a report back on the Disabled Facilities Grant or whether a six-month review was required. However, considering the urgency of the issues with Orbit and the implications for the applicants it was agreed to endorse the proposed suggestions included in the Information Bulletin.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly endorsed the propose 'Changes to Disabled Facilities Grant 3.0 to 3.7' in the Information Bulletin to Cabinet.

1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a report back after the Cabinet Meeting in March 2019 on the agreed future arrangements for the Disabled Facilities Grant and that the report included the conclusions and the legal implications of the contract with Orbit, to be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2019.

61 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Forthcoming Decisions List be noted.

62 JOS/18/30 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Babergh Work Plan be noted.

63 JOS/18/31 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Mid Suffolk Work Plan be noted

64 RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC (WHICH TERM INCLUDES THE

PRESS)

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That pursuant to Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the business specified below on the grounds that if the public were present during this item, it is likely that there would be the disclosure to them of exempt information as indicated against the item.

The Committee was also satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

65 JOS/18/33 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 19 NOVEMBER 2018

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Confidential Minute of the meeting held on the 19 November 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

66 JOS/18/34 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTE OF THE BABERGH MEETING HELD ON THE 19 NOVEMBER 2018

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Confidential Minutes from the Babergh meeting held on the 19 November 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 11:29 am.

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Chair (& Date)