



MIDSUFFOLK
DISTRICT COUNCIL
ANNUAL REPORT
2018/19

Overview & Scrutiny



MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2018/19

When I took over as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, my aim was to ensure that the Committee would add value to the Council's decision-making process. I also hoped that the Committee could become a critical friend to officers by working with them to investigate improvements to service delivery. I believe that the Committee has fulfilled these aims in the work undertaken during the year.

This year the Committee has built on the work of Rachel Eburne and her Committee of 2017/18, the first year of the Leader/Cabinet governance model. Our agendas have included pre-scrutiny of items prior to Cabinet decisions, scrutiny of topics selected by the Committee, presentations of important matters by senior officers and information bulletins requested by the Committee.

Joint meetings of the Mid Suffolk and Babergh Committees have been held to scrutinise topics of common interest, such as the governance arrangements in respect of investing for profit and the community infrastructure bidding process.

Chairs' briefing meetings are held monthly, attended by both Chairs and Vice Chairs, Committee Services officers and others relevant officers, including the authors of reports and information bulletins for future Committee meetings.

I would like to thank Henriette Holloway, Acting Senior Governance Support Officer – Committee Services, and Jan Robinson, Corporate Manager - Law and Governance, for their input and support throughout the year, also Lavinia Hadingham who has been Committee Vice Chair since July 2018. I am grateful to Members of the Committee for their commitment, and to officers for providing clear and concise responses to requests for information. Thanks, too, to Alastair McCraw, Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny and Members of that Committee for working collaboratively with the Mid Suffolk Committee.

Looking ahead to 2019/20, I hope that the Committee will continue to scrutinise areas of concern and look for ways to work with officers to ensure improvements to the services provided to our residents. The Committee's work during the year has mainly focussed on services provided by Babergh and Mid Suffolk; I consider that it is important, for 2019/20 that the Committee looks for opportunities to scrutinise topics of a wider Suffolk nature which impact directly on our residents.

Keith Welham
March 2019

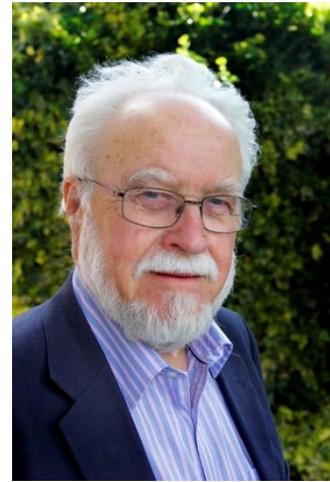
MEMBERS OF THE MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2018/19



Cllr Keith Welham - Chair



Cllr James Caston



Cllr John Field



Cllr Elizabeth Gibson-Harries



Cllr Lavinia Hadingham
(Vice-Chair)



Cllr Lesley Mayes



Cllr Derek Osborne
(Vice-Chair)



Cllr Kevin Welsby

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

In May 2017 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils adopted the Leader/Cabinet governance model for each Council. This resulted in the Joint Scrutiny Committee being decommissioned and the formation of separate Overview and Scrutiny Committees for each Council.

The Committee consists of eight Members of the Council and can be any Member except Members of the Cabinet. No Member is allowed to scrutinise a decision where they have been part of the decision process. Substitutes for Members on the Committee must be from the same political group and Council. The Committee sets its own workplan and can set up task and finish groups as and when considered appropriate.

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committees also conduct joint meetings on a regular basis to scrutinise topics and external stakeholders and Service providers relevant to both Councils.

THE ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is defined as having the key purposes of:

- Scrutinising the work of external stakeholders and service providers.
- Holding the Cabinet to account
- Being the home of “call in”.
- Being the home of Member Call for Action.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews items in relation to the Strategic Plan and where the Committee can add value; avoiding duplication with any other Committee or working group and ensuring that, where changes have been made, a significant time has lapsed before a review has been undertaken. These suggestions are worked up by the Chairs, Vice Chairs and officers into a forward plan which is put to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cannot make decisions or policies itself but has the power of influencing and can make informed recommendations to the Cabinet, Full Council and other Committees. Cabinet can also recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee conduct detailed investigation of items considered to require further scrutiny before being referred back to Cabinet for final decision.

Overview and Scrutiny forms an important part of the democratic process within the Council and wider community by examining topics and continuing to monitor the outcome of its work. Where it is considered necessary to follow up on the outcome of a scrutinised topic the Committee will conduct further scrutiny or receive updates on the topic to enable the Council to continue to deliver the best service for all residents in the District.



THE CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY'S FOUR PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SCRUTINY

1. Scrutiny provides a critical friend challenge to executive policy and decision makers by conducting a constructive, robust, and purposeful challenge. This challenge should be non-aggressive and non-political so as to create the optimum conditions for an investigative evidence-based process.
2. Scrutiny enables the voice and concerns of the public through innovative public communications, consultation and feedback. Meetings are conducted in public to enable transparency and openness.
3. Scrutiny is carried out by independent minded councillors, who actively engage in the scrutiny function so as to drive improvement. Areas are reviewed in an a-political atmosphere.
4. Scrutiny drives improvement and promotes community well-being. Good scrutiny improves the quality of life by undertaking strategic reviews of corporate policies, plans, performance and budgets.

Sources: Centre for Public Scrutiny; www.cfps.ukfps
 Mid Suffolk Annual Scrutiny Report JSC/8/13 Appendix
 Annual Report of the Joint Scrutiny Committee Report BC/17/5 and MC/17

THE STRUCTURE FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OUTSIDE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cycle is based round one monthly Chairs' Briefings which report authors are invited to attend. This enables co-operation between Officers, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when discussing the relevant content of reports, and to give a steer of what the Committee is expecting to achieve from upcoming items. It also allows the Chairs and Officers to consider any questions which may be asked at the Committee meeting. Generally, each item will be discussed at two pre-Committee meetings before going to Committee.

Between meetings, Officers and the Chairs of the Committees maintain an open and engaging working relationship to ensure that the scrutiny process will be efficient and beneficial to the Committee meeting.

Members also partake in 'Task and Finish Groups' which focus on a specific item set by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This enables Members to engage with a topic separately from the Committee and then to report back on the findings of the 'Task and Finish Group' to the Committee, which then recommends any actions required to the relevant Officers.

TRAINING

In June the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received training at the first meeting in the new municipal year, the focus being on Call-in procedures.

In October the Chair attended the Centre for Public Scrutiny for the 'Expert Charing Skills for Scrutiny'.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE 2018 - 2019 WORK PLAN

The Work Plan is updated at each Committee meeting and Members evaluate each item in relation to the Forthcoming Decisions Lists in order to assess whether the scrutiny process adds value. This results in avoiding unnecessary duplication of work carried out by any other Committee or working group and ensures sufficient time has lapsed between reviews.

COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT 2018/19

The pre-empting of issues before going to Cabinet has prevented unnecessary Call-ins during this year. The Scrutiny Committee's function as a critical friend has worked well for the Mid Suffolk Council this year, often raising concerns and receiving clarification on issues in the Committee meeting, which would otherwise have been controversial. The Committee has also frequently provided recommendations to Cabinet raising awareness of areas of concern. Cabinet has responded well to this and incorporated most of the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the past year.

Towards the end of 2017 it was agreed by the Chairs that regular joint meetings should be conducted where common topics could be considered. This was implemented from December 2017 and has continued in 2018/19. This has benefitted the scrutiny of topics as Members have been able to exchange experiences from across the two districts and has provided officers with a cohesive and joint evaluation of the issues scrutinised. The scrutiny of joint policies and procedures, and also joint services have been improved by Joint Committee work. However, it is recognised that separate Overview and Scrutiny Committees will still be required when items of specific concern for the individual District are scrutinised.

This year has also seen Cabinet Members attending Committees to present reports responding to questions in relation to their Cabinet responsibilities. This has been a valued addition to the scrutiny process and enabled the Committee Members to directly address the Cabinet Member responsible for the issue discussed. Input from the Cabinet Member with budget responsibility and the Babergh Cabinet Member whose responsibilities include Disability Facilities Grants were very useful to the Committee.

The Committee has also invited outside witnesses to provide information on areas outside the Councils' remit or in cases in which specific knowledge, expertise or experiences have been sought to provide a better foundation for the scrutiny process. Scrutiny of the Neighbourhood Planning process, CIFCO and the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership was assisted by the contributions from representatives of outside Organisations.

The Work of Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2018 - 2019

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK BUILDING SERVICES (BMBS) – A REVIEW OF FIRST YEAR TRADING AND NEXT STEPS

The municipal year began with scrutiny of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS). The report incorporated a revised Business Plan, as it had been recognised that the original Business plan (as approved by Members) was not achievable.

This report provided an overview of the first 12 months of trading for BMBS following its inception in April 2017 and explained the strategies and actions to be deployed to ensure the effectiveness of BMBS as it progressed into year two and beyond.

Members were concerned that the financial implications of the new Business Plan had been based on realistic estimates and that that the implementation of new processes and software would improve the service.

Members raised issues round the process for altering Members, when projects were not going according to plan, as this had been the case for BMBS. The Committee agreed that a full and robust business case, containing a performance monitoring framework, should be prepared before the commencement of any joint working arrangements or changes to the delivery of in-house services and be reviewed by people with appropriate skills. The Committee also recommended that Cabinet review the financial figures in the revised Business Plan.

The report was restricted due to the financial implications of BMBS.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee was able to discuss the issues with the previous Business Plan and identify areas which should be addressed. Confirmation of solutions to the issues identified as challenges were also established.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY (CIFCO) CAPITAL LTD.

In June the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised CIFCO which had been trading for one year. Members were asked to scrutinise the structure of the Business Plan to ensure it was robust enough to be able to support the intended delivery of the investment, but not to consider the investments as this was for the two Boards of the Holding Companies and the Board of CIFCO.

Members scrutinised the governance structure for BDC (Suffolk Holdings) Ltd, MSDC (Suffolk Holdings) Ltd and the Board of Directors of CIFCO. The purpose of CIFCO and the investment structure, which was outlined to the Committee. Members questioned the risk assessments, and how these were categorised. In relation to risk, Members discussed the impact of an unstable retail market and what effect Brexit would have on any investments.

Members then went into a closed session to discuss the financial aspect of CIFCO.

RESOLVED

- The resolution was confidential by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

VALUE ADDED

The Committee was attended by other Members of both Councils, some whom had been sceptical of the creation of an investment vehicle for the Council. The scrutiny of the CIFCO Business Plan and the responses to the questions raised at the Committee meeting have improved Members understanding of the purpose of CIFCO and its governance and decision-making process.

PRE-PLANNING APPLICATION FEE

At the Committee in July, Members conducted a scoping exercise for the Pre-planning Application Fee to scrutinise the impact of the application fee, which had been in place for approximately one year. The Planning department had conducted a survey for customer satisfaction and was in the process of analysing the responses. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee clarified in the scoping document the questions they required responses to and the external witnesses, such as developers and Suffolk County Highways, they would like to invite to help measure the success of the Pre-planning Application Fee.



At the meeting in September, the Committee received a report based on the scoping exercise. The report detailed the results of the on-line survey and included an action plan for responding to some of the issues raised. There is no evidence that applicants are put off using the pre-app service due to cost. Advice in respect of Listed Building Applications is free.

RESOLVED

- 1.1 **That the contents of the report be scrutinised by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review, and**
- 1.2 **That the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee agree that the recommendations below are robust enough to promote the continued improvement of the charged pre-application service:**

- Embed a “right first time, on time” approach to pre-application advice offer through consistent use of Enterprise and 1-2-1s.
- Establish management monitoring and intervention measures to achieve nil rate of refunds in the forthcoming year.
- Review charging arrangements for site visit elements of pre-application advice services to better reflect time and resource costs.
- Review pre-application charge exemptions or discounts for community groups or other organisations where relevant support is already being provided by the Councils.
- Introduce cancellation administration charges where meetings are cancelled by the enquirer at short notice.
- Repeat customer satisfaction survey mid-2019 and to evaluate when the best time will be for conducting this survey.
- Review potential for and introduce as appropriate additional service offers and cost recovery associated with other internal stakeholders (including Housing Enabling, Communities, Public Realm, CIL, Planning Policy) with appropriate Service Level Agreements to underpin delivery.

The Pre-planning Application charge will be presented to Cabinet in March 2019 to review the charges and officer delegation.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee identified areas which could be improved including the delegation of workload amongst officers and some inconsistency of the planning advice provided at on-site visits and the pre-planning advice.

REVIEW OF THE SHARED LEGAL SERVICE

In July the Committee also conducted a review of the Shared Legal Services. This was an update following the scrutiny of the service on the 18 December 2018 which recommended a six months review.

The Committee received a report, which provided an update on the operations of the service.

Members were concerned with the efficiency of case management and the cost implications for both Councils. They conducted an update on the recommendations made in December 2018.

RESOLVED 

1.1 That the contents of the report and presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.



1.2 That an Information Bulletin be provided by the Finance Department to clarify Appendix 2 of the report be presented to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 November 2018.

1.3 That the data in Appendix 3 of the report be analysed and clarified and presented to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 19 November 2018.

VALUE ADDED

It was possible for the Committee to receive answers to questions regarding the performance of the service and the process with which client cases were managed. The Committee established that the service had initially had issues, but that these had been or were in the process of being addressed. It was confirmed that the new Case management system would make access to individual cases easier for the legal staff who then would be able to provide up to date information to clients.

It was later decided that Members should receive the Resolution 1.2 and 1.3 via an email update.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOINT HOUSING STRATEGY 2018 -2036

The development of the Joint Housing Strategy 2018 – 2036 was scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2018. The Committee was presented with a report which detailed the Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Housing Strategy 2018 – 2036 framework background and development process. This also included the co-production of an updated Homelessness Reduction Strategy to ensure compliance with the new Duties as detailed under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.



Members raised issues regarding funding, staffing and energy efficiency. They were also concerned about the impact of population growth and the delivery of housing developments. They queried if the strategy would be robust and flexible enough to withstand any changes delivered by Central Government.

RESOLVED ✓

That the comprehensive BMSDC Housing Strategy context and development process detailed in the report be endorsed, which includes a revised Homelessness Reduction Strategy

VALUE ADDED

The Committee provided a robust discussion of the issues related to the Joint Housing Strategy for Officers to consider and include in the Strategy.

VOID RE-LET TIMES IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES

This item was considered at a Joint Committee meeting and was a six-month update on the Void times which had been monitored during the past year. Initially raised as a concern by Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee, due to the nature of the item this became a Joint item for both Councils.

The issue had previously been scrutinised in September 2017 as void times were increasing. The Chair of the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet Member for Housing worked with officers to monitor the progress for reducing void times. Regular updates were presented to the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This resulted in a Project Management Plan which was implemented in December 2017, its aim was to reduce Void times by 10 days by April 2018. This work significantly reduced void times and by June 2018 average voids times for both Babergh and Mid Suffolk was 21 days. This was included in the quarterly Information Bulletin to the Joint Committee in June 2018.

The report presented to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September was a six-month review of Voids and an update on the data. The ensuing debate highlighted areas which were still developing such as resources and as a result of this, inspections of properties was still a challenge.

The Committee thought that the report was good, and the Joint Committee voted unanimously for the Recommendations.

RESOLVED

- 1.1 That the Committee notes the improved performance for re-let times and commend Officers for their work in achieving this improvement.**
- 1.2 That the Committee endorses the actions contained within the long-term plan. (Paragraph 4.13 and Appendix F)**

A verbal Information Bulletin update was provided at the end of September 2018 and the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to continue to receive a quarterly update, the next update being in December 2018. Void times have continued to reduce, except for difficult-to-let properties.

VALUE ADDED

The scrutiny of the reduction of Voids times and the resulting Voids project are an example of how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee worked with officers and Cabinet Members to achieve a common goal. The work conducted by the Committee provided a positive consideration of the project and the long-term plan.

The Success of the voids Project and the work of the Scrutiny Committee was showcased at the Centre for Public Scrutiny Annual Conference in December 2018.

THE CRIME AND DISORDER PANEL SEPTEMBER 2018

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Committees decided to jointly exercise the statutory requirement to sit as the Crime and Disorder Panel. It was agreed to scrutinise the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, as there were many cross-county issues which Members felt needed to be clarified.

The Witnesses invited were as follows:

Councillor Joanna Spicer – Chair of Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP)

Claire Harvey, Community Safety Lead – Localities and Partnerships Team Suffolk County Council

Paul Goodman, Protection and Prevention Manager for Suffolk Fire and Rescue

Superintendent Kim Warner informed Members that he was the Western Area Commander for Suffolk

Eugene Staunton, Associate Director of Transformation across the Eastern and Western Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group

Lois Wreathall, Head of Primary Care for West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group

The meeting covered mental health issues and services, prevention of crime in rural areas, public perception of access to help from services and especially the police. One major issue was the violence related to gangs in relation to ‘County Lines’ and Members spent some time raising issues related to this.

Violence against women and children raised the debate regarding violence against men and boys and how to help these victims in the Community.

This meeting raised concern regarding how Members could help the WSCSP and related organisations, but also how Members could be better equipped to deliver correct information to their communities and at Parish Council meetings. Therefore, several recommendations were proposed.

RESOLVED

- 1.1 **That a joint Member briefing be delivered to all Members detailing the issues in the report.**
- 1.2 **That a toolkit with the key contact details for agencies dealing with the issues discussed today be formulated and distributed to all Members.**
- 1.3 **That officers prepare a summary of the main points of the discussion to be circulated to Suffolk County Council.**

VALUE ADDED

The Committee identified a need to involve Members and communities further to enable a stronger understanding of the underlying problems of crime and disorder in the community. The proposed Member briefings and tool kit were intended to provide the basis for this understanding.

Member briefings took place in February 2019 and the roll-out of the toolkit was also achieved in February 2019. Suffolk County Council received a summary of the main points as agreed by the Committee.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY - CIL EXPENDITURE FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW



In November the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was presented to the Committee for scrutiny.

The CIL Expenditure Framework, the CIL Expenditure Framework Communications Strategy and the Timeline for Implementation and Review were all adopted by both Councils in April 2018.

Both Councils agreed that the CIL Expenditure Framework and the Communications Strategy should be reviewed after Bid round one had been completed and whilst Bid round two was in operation, so that any amendments to the scheme would be considered by both Councils and be in place before Bid round three commenced.

A timeline for the implementation of the scheme outlined that a review of CIL should be conducted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in late 2018 and report any comments to the Joint Member Panel who informed the content of the CIL Expenditure Framework.

Witnesses were invited to support this review, in their capacity as applicants of CIL funding. The witnesses were:

Sally Reeves, Parish Councillor for Stowupland and Secretary to the Stowupland Village Hall Management Committee

Clive Arthey, District Councillor – North Cosford, and Member of the Joint Member Panel

James Cutting, Planning Strategy Manager – Growth, Highways and Infrastructure for Suffolk County Council (SCC)

Each witness provided valuable insight into the process of applying for CIL Funding and enabled the Committee to produce a list of comments to the Joint Member Panel and officers to progress improvement to the bidding experience.

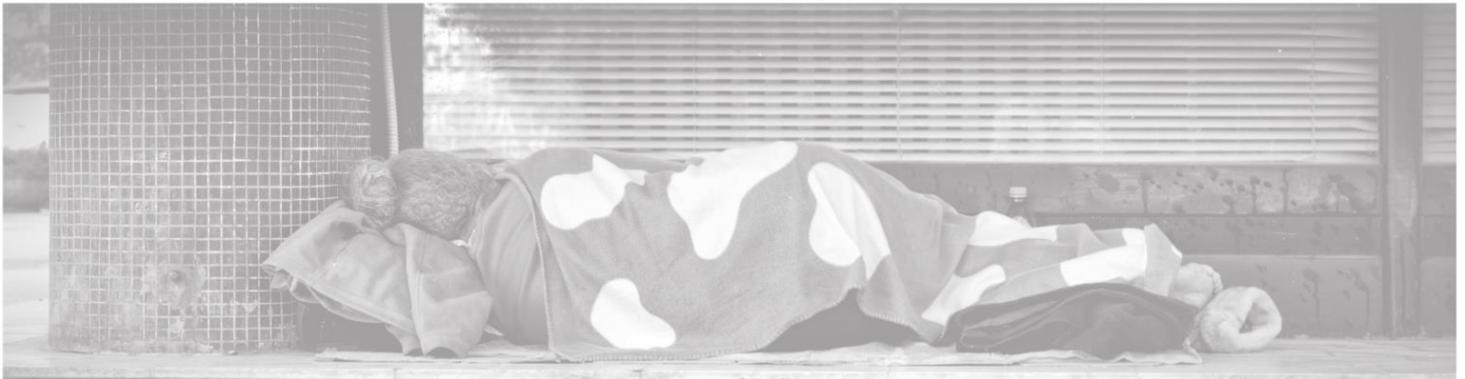
RESOLVED ✓

1.1 That the Communities be made aware of upcoming CIL bidding rounds and that consideration be made to extend the period of the bidding round.

1.2 That clarification be made if parish clerks can charge a fee for administration costs when administering CIL.

VALUE ADDED

This scrutiny process provided value to the current review already undertaken by the officers and clarified some areas which had made the application difficult. The statements and responses to questions by the witnesses enabled a clear and comprehensive list of comments to the Joint Member Panel.



THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT 2017 - REVIEW OF THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

In November 2017 a report “Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act”, was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, providing Members with detailed information of how the changes would impact on the Council, and outlined the work being carried out to ensure that the Councils were legally compliant and able to fulfil the new duties. It also outlined the current and predicted work levels within the homelessness service. The Committee resolved at the time that a review should be undertaken to review the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2017.

The report presented to the Committee in November 2018, reviewed the first six months of the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act, but also included a review of the work being carried out, the performance of the Housing Solutions service and the current and predicted work levels within the homelessness service.

The Committee was reassured that the Housing Solution team was managing the challenges as a result of the implementation of the act. However, there were areas of concern, which the Corporate Manager was addressing. Also, it was uncertain how funding from Central Government would be allocated.

RESOLVED ✓

1.1 That the Committee notes the information provided.

1.2 That the Committee commend the Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions and her team for the effort already taken and to receive a review in another six months.

VALUE ADDED

Members were assured that the Housing Solutions team was able to manage the increased workload and had appropriate resources allocated.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

This draft report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable an early engagement on the Councils' Community Strategy. The Committee was asked to debate the strategy to provide comments but also to approve the engagement approach for community involvement in developing the strategy.



Members were concerned that the strategy was too broad and would have limited engagement with a wide range of residents in the community. Concern was raised over residents who were hard to reach, such as the elderly but also the youth was an area of concern. Members also wanted to be reassured that Parish and District Councillors would be involved in the formation of a Community Strategy.

RESOLVED



That the Committee endorse an engagement approach through use of focus groups involving (a) internal staff; (b) external statutory and voluntary sector partners; (c) members of the community represented by a cross-section of winners from the recent 'Star' awards; and (d) a cross-section of Councillors.

VALUE ADDED

Members and Officers were able to discuss the purpose and the target audience of the Strategy. Members also raised concerns regarding how the Strategy could support the vulnerable and hard to reach residents in the Community.

DRAFT REPORT TO CABINET – EXTENSION OF THE SERCO CONTRACT



The extension of the Serco contract was scrutinised by Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December. Four options for future delivery of the refuse collection service had been considered. The preferred option put forward by consultants appointed by the Councils would be an extension of the existing contract with a few amendments. The report was to be presented to Cabinet and detailed the options for the Council.

The Committee scrutinised the four options available to the Council and the background for the new contract. Concerns were raised regarding the cost of the new contract, the terms and conditions and performance indicators.

Generally, Members were satisfied with the service provided by Serco and it was clear that an extension was the best cost option for the Councils.

RESOLVED: 

That Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that recommendations 3.1 and 3.2 in report MOS/18/17 be approved.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee was able to debate at length the implications of extending the Contract and could endorse the recommendation to Cabinet based on sound scrutiny of the report.

DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2019/20 AND FOUR YEAR OUTLOOK

The Committee meeting in January scrutinised the General Fund Budget and Four-year outlook prior to the Budget being presented to Cabinet in February. Members were concerned for the proposed future investment for CIFCO in relation to investments in retail market and the effects of Brexit. They asked for clarity of the loans and the effect of the repayments on the Council's Budget in the final report.

Members of the Committee felt that there was not enough transparency around CIFCO for the general public and that it would be useful to have a paper available outlining the purpose of CIFCO, to support Members when responding to questions regarding CIFCO. They asked that the paper included the reasoning behind setting up CIFCO, its governance and how investment decisions are made and by whom.

The Committee agreed that the budget was prudent and subject to some adjustments endorsed the report.

RESOLVED: 

1.1 That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse Recommendations 3.1 to 3.4.

1.2 That the comments made by the Committee at the meeting be considered by Cabinet.

VALUE ADDED

The Chair of the Committee had invited all Members to attend and to ask questions in relation to the Budget and Four-year Outlook. Queries raised during the meeting were considered by officers who included further explanation of forecasts and proposals in their final report to the full Council meeting.

DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

The HRA Budget was separated from the General Fund Budget for the first time. It was generally agreed that the report was clear in its content. There were two significant discussions during the meeting, the Right to Buy scheme and Garage rents.

Concerns regarding purchasing new housing stock in a competitive housing market were raised by Members. The Council had to buy stock at market price, however the long-term benefit of purchasing good quality new built homes would not just be financially viable but also provide social value.

Members debated the issue regarding empty garages in the District and the Assistant Director for Housing indicated that a proposal for the disposal of empty garages had been suggested

RESOLVED: 

- 1.1 That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse recommendations 3.1 to 3.8.**
- 1.2 That the Strategy expressed by the Assistant Director for Housing in respect of the use of empty garages be considered for implementation.**

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK AREA PARKING PLAN

The Committee was asked to provide feedback on the draft report before the final report was presented to Cabinet. The plan was written by a consultant engaged by both Councils.

Each Council has a statutory duty to provide a parking policy, and the report was a joint consultation on parking in the two Districts.

Specifically, Policy 2 was questioned as there was an indication that the Council would provide further off -street parking.

The debate raised traffic and parking issues around drop-off and pick-up times at schools, parking enforcement and management of parking for Blue Badge holders.

Enforcement would be assisted by the new PCSOs across the District.

RESOLVED: 

That the wording in Policy 2 be amended to read:

Off-street parking places will be utilised to assist with traffic management and support and promote our communities.

VALUE ADDED

Scrutiny of the Joint Parking Policy provided a clarification of the purpose of the policy, but also identified areas of concern for residents and Members alike.



COMMUNITY GRANTS – HEALTH CHECK FOR GROUPS RECEIVING REVENUE GRANTS

This report had originally been proposed by the Community Officers in 2017/18 to provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee on the community grants process.

Members were informed that Revenue grants totalling over £200,000 have been allocated to community groups in 2018/19. The 'Health Checks' had been put in place to ensure that the applications received were corresponding to the funding allocated.

Members thanked officers for their report and the work that they carry out to ensure effective use of revenue grants. They requested that the Committee received a report again in 2021.

RESOLVED: ✓

That the Committee endorse the continuation with the Health Check process and that these be undertaken bi-annually.

VALUE ADDED

Members were reassured that Community Grants team were managing the application process efficiently.

REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

This was a Joint review which had been suggested by the Corporate Manager – Democratic Services in a response to the Committee's concern over the requirements of attendance and reporting by representatives on Outside Bodies and Partnerships.

The review was also asked to consider whether the Council should appoint the Members most suited to the individual Outside Body and if there were appropriate mechanisms in place for feedback to the Council.

The two-way process between the Council and Outside bodies was debated and that this was an important function for Members to undertake.

Awareness of Indemnity Insurance cover for Members and the differences between statutory, optional and volunteer representation was discussed.

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/Panels be published on the website.**

TOPICS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE MARCH 2019 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Information Bulletin – Voids Quarterly Update

Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2018/19 – Lessons Learnt, Improvements and Achievements

The Committee intends to conduct a thematic examination of the past year's topics and consider the achievements and outcomes of the scrutiny process. Consideration of the work routine and the outcomes of the scrutiny process will form part of recommendations to the succeeding Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

INFORMATION BULLETINS PRESENTED TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2018/19

14 June 2018	Staff Turnover and Welfare Members scrutinised staff absence and recruitment issues
23 July 2018	Five Year Housing Land Supply Members were updated on the current status of the land supply
20 September 2018	Void Improvement Project Update 2018 An update on the completed Voids Improvement Plan
18 October 2018	Staff Turnover and Welfare An update on the points resolved at the 18 June 2018 Committee
	Review of Public Attendance at Public Meetings Scrutiny of public attendance at Endeavour House compared with Needham Market
19 November 2018	Regeneration Proposal – Hurstlea Road, Needham Market An update on the points resolved at the 18 June 2018 Committee
20 December 2018	Voids Performance Monthly update on the Improving Voids Figures

17 January 2019	<p>Staff Turnover and Welfare</p> <p>Further update on Staff absence and the reasons for staff absence</p>
	<p>Shared Service Level Agreement</p> <p>Confidential information on the cost for services and facilities at Endeavour House</p>
14 February 2019	<p>Review of the Disabled Facilities Grant</p> <p>Scrutiny of the proposed suggestions for improving the Disabled Facilities Grant before going to Cabinet for decision</p>
	<p>Review of the Implementation of the Universal Credit</p> <p>An update the current situation and resources</p>
14 March 2019	<p>Voids – Quarterly Update</p> <p>Further updates on Voids</p>

The Staff Turnover and Welfare Information Bulletins provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a cohesive picture of staff sickness and absence within the Council. The statistics were compared with similar authorities, allowing for a broader understanding for staff absences.

The Disabled Facilities Grant Information Bulletin drew Members' attention to the controversial contract arrangements and service delivery of the provider for this service. It was clear that further scrutiny of this service was required.

SCOPING TOPICS FOR MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2018/19

Scoping of topics has been conducted in the Overview and Scrutiny Chairs' briefings. Officers have been invited to the meeting to discuss the upcoming reports. Usually officers attend two of these briefings to allow for scoping and adjustments to ensure that the finished reports respond to the questions posed by the Scrutiny Committee. The briefings included the Chairs and Vice Chairs from both Councils and as such provide a range of questions and contributions.

MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2019/20:

TOPIC	PURPOSE	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER	PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED TO COMMITTEE
20/24 June 2019				
Overview and Scrutiny Training for Members of the Committee		Corporate Manager – Law and Governance		
Annual review of BMS Invest investment Business Plan	To scrutinise the BMS investment plan	Assistant Director – Assets and Investments	The Leader Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments	28 June 2018 JOS/118/1
Disabled Facilities Grant	To receive a report back after the Cabinet meeting in March 2019	Corporate Manager – Property Services	Cabinet Member for Housing	14 February 2019 Information Bulletin
Members to agree the BDC Work Plan for 2019/20		Governance Support Officer for Scrutiny		
18/22 July 2019				
Joint Compliment, Comment and Complaints Policy	An update based on the training, which took place in February/March 2019. Report to include feedback and data	Corporate Business Improvement Manager Project and Research Officer	Cabinet Member for Organisational Delivery	21 May 2018 JOS/17/15
19/23 September 2019				
Crime and Disorder Panel	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake this a part of the Council's statutory duties.			20September 2018 JOS/8/14
16/20 January 2020				

Draft general Fund Budget 2020/21 and Four-year Outlook	Scrutiny of the General Budget before Cabinet and Council	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources	Cabinet Member for Finance	17/21 January 2018
Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget and Four-year Outlook	Scrutiny of the HRA Budget before Cabinet and Council	Assistant Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing	17/21 January 2018

TOPICS IDENTIFIED FOR REVIEW BUT NOT CURRENTLY TIMETABLED:



Cross County Scrutiny with authorities who share similar issues with the provider for Disabled Facilities – Outcome from the Joint Meeting on 14 February Information Bulletin for Disabled Facilities Grant



Crime and Disorder Panel meeting

Required to take place at least once a year, provisionally agreed to take place in **September** of each year.



Enforcement

Enforcement for parking, planning etc to be discussed with Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Kathy Nixon – Strategic Director to decide how to approach this area.



Community Transport Services

To scrutinise the services provided by SCC and consider what Overview and Scrutiny can add to these services.



Universal Credit – Update

An update on Universal Credit following the Joint O & S Committee on 14 February 2019



Community Grants – ‘Health Check’ A report following the report received on the 17 January 2019 MOS/18/26 in 2021.

Other topics identified:



- Scrutiny of Outside Bodies
- Efficiency of CAB
- The impact on the Council, when patients are discharged from hospital