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, 19 August 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Susan Maria Ayres	James Caston
	Jane Gould	Kathryn Grandon
	Lavinia Hadingham	Alastair McCraw (Co-Chair)
	Mary McLaren	Andrew Mellen
	David Muller	Adrian Osborne
	Penny Otton (Substitute)	Keith Welham (Co-Chair)

In attendance:

Councillor(s):	Clive Arthey BDC Cabinet Member for Planning David Burn MSDC Cabinet Member for Planning Derek Davis BDC Cabinet Member for Communities Julie Flatman MSDC Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing Jan Osborne BDC Cabinet Member for Housing Margaret Maybury
Witness(es):	Colleen Sweeney, Chief Officer for Sudbury and District Citizens Advice Carol Eagles, Manager for Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk
Officers:	Project and Research Officer - Business Improvement (BB) Corporate Manager - Strategic Planning (RH) Governance Support Officer (HH) Chief Planning Officer (PI) Strategic Policy Strategic Planner (MD) Corporate Manager - Democratic Services (JR) Strategic Director (JS) Strategic Projects and Delivery Manager (SS)

Apologies:

Councillor Keith Scarff

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2.1 The following Members declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Citizens Advice Presentation:

Councillor Muller as a member of the Board of Trustee for Citizens Advice – Mid Suffolk.

Councillor Adrian Osborne as an Observer at Citizens Advice Sudbury and

District.

Councillor Ayres as a representative for Sudbury Town Council at Citizens Advice – Sudbury and District.

3 JOS/19/9 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 2019

It was RESOLVED: -

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 18 July 2019 be confirmed as a true record.

4 BOS/19/5 CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 24 JUNE 2019

Note: Babergh Members Only

It was RESOLVED: -

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 24 June 2019 be confirmed as a true record.

5 MOS/19/5 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 27 JUNE 2019

Note: Mid Suffolk Members only.

It was RESOVED: -

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 27 June 2019 be confirmed as a true record

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

None received.

7 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

8 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

9 CITIZENS ADVICE PRESENTATION

9.1 The Chair introduced Colleen Sweeney, Chief Officer for Sudbury and District Citizens Advice and Carol Eagles, Manager for Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk

and invited them to begin their presentation.

9.2 Carol Eagles provided an overview of the Citizens Advice and stressed that each Citizen Advice (CA) was part of the National Citizens Advice but that each organisation was a local funded independent charity. The CA provided advice to over 6000 people across the two districts by providing help by phone, face to face contacts, visits, emails and web chats. Approximately 40% of the advice services were face to face. They also operated an Out-reach Service and were often able to reach residents in rural areas through this service. Services were mainly provided by local volunteers, supported and managed by a small core team.

9.3 Benefit issues were the biggest, and debt was the second biggest area for advice to be provided.

9.4 Colleen Sweeney then provided statistics for the financial circumstances for the clients they helped and the kind of groups the CA could reach.

9.5 The work provided by the CA saved the local and national Government £8.1M per year and generated social and economic benefits of £48.1M. The figures helped to provide the financial benefits gained by the advice and services provided by the CA.

9.6 In addition, the CAs also received funding from a variety of other funders, some of which specified for what purpose the funding could be used, excluding funding for items such as core costs. It was a challenge to secure sustainable sources of funding as funding was usually provided on an annual basis. This had to be considered in context to the fact that the demand for CA services was increasing.

9.7 The CA had become the main support for the completion of benefit forms and there was a concern that any instability in economic climate would put pressure on the provision of services. However, careful strategic planning was applied to ensure that the CAs in Babergh and Mid Suffolk would be financially sustainable for the near future, despite the change in funding from SCC.

9.8 The funding provided by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils was the main funding for the two CAs. Managers explained that further funds would need to be identified to enable the CA to complete the three-year Business Plan as required for sustainable businesses and charities.

9.9 The Chair thanked Colleen Sweeney and Carol Eagles for the presentation and asked for clarification on the funding issues for SCC and CCG.

9.10 It was confirmed that the decision was made by SCC last year and had resulted in the funding being cut by 50% for 2019/20 and withdrawn completely for 2020/21. This had left the CAs with a consequential funding gap which had been partly recovered with funds provided by the CCG, who had agreed to fund 50% of SCC's original funds for both 2019/20 and

2020/21.

9.11 It was confirmed that talks were still on-going with SCC and the CCG with regards to future funding for the CA and the managers were optimistic for a resolution.

9.12 Councillor Otton asked how much SCC funding was lost and Members were directed to the tabled infographics, which detailed that SCC funded the CA Sudbury and District with £45K and the CA Mid Suffolk with £41K for 2018/19.

9.13 Councillor Grandon appreciated that the CA had a core cost, however she asked for clarification of what kind of cost was incurred by the volunteers.

9.14 Volunteers travel expenses were paid for by the CA and any other costs to enable volunteers to volunteer. Specialised and CPD training was on-going, as regulations and guidelines were updated and changed. Training costs was a large part of the budget, the largest cost being the provision of supervision and management costs.

9.15 Councillor Otton explained as a County Councillor she had received information which had formed part of the SCC decision for the CAs funding and the number of referrals to the CA and she would like clarification of this issues. However, she had three further questions to ask:

- At what stage did the Suffolk CAs have talks with SCC and District Councils to avoid the funding crisis which occurred last year.
- How much did the CA work with Trading Standards, as many of the scams are detected by them;
- How many single men contacted the CA for advice on the allocation of social housing?

9.16 Carol Eagles responded to the questions in reverse order and said that the CA helped a lot of single and especially homeless men, however the majority of clients were female.

9.17 The CA works closely with Trading Standards covering areas such as scam awareness and fraud. She then provided examples of such co-operation. The banks were also good at informing the CA of fraud issues.

9.18 In response to the first question, it was clarified that the CA had a duty to be financially stable, which required that reserves were held to ensure sustainability and the ability to draw on these to function for a period of time. As a charity it was prudent to have savings.

9.19 Councillor Muller enquired how many parents with children were referred to the local food bank by the CA.

9.20 Carol Sweeney would provide an answer to this outside the meeting and added that the CA helped with many other aspects of family life and provided grants for various items such as school uniforms and football boots.

9.21 Councillor Welham asked four questions:

- Did the CA have a waiting list for access to advice and services;
- Did the CA have any drop-in sessions in the evening or weekends for people who were working;
- Did the two CAs measure the impact of their services, for instance how debt was managed;
- Was there a cross-over between the border to neighbouring Councils and was there any financial arrangement in place to accommodate this?

9.22 Collen Sweeney clarified that the CA did have some evening drop-in sessions and Saturday morning openings, the issues being that other organisations and services were closed and limited provision for help. The CA was open during Christmas and New Year and provided referral to foodbanks. The CA also had its own advice information system and received a large amount of views during 2018/19.

9.23 There were arrangements in place between CAs for cross-border services.

9.24 In response to debt advice and lowering debt levels there had in the past been a post to cover this particular area in the CA – Sudbury and District to conduct the casework for clients. There had also been an on-going project with Babergh, however the CA decided to halt this project until a dedicated person was in post for this area.

9.25 There was data collected on waiting times for drop-in sessions and the average waiting times were five to ten minutes.

9.26 In response to Councillor Caston's question it was clarified that the CA was able to reach many 'hard to reach' residents in rural areas, because of the options of making home visits. General Practitioners also contacted the CA to inform them of patients, who required assistance.

9.27 The Chair read a question forwarded by Councillor Scarff:

Were there substantial different types of funders, particularly outside bodies such as charities, trusts etc. (This may well prove useful to know)

If this was the case, were they on a service level type arrangement and if so for how many more years would they be in place, as this could also impact on their financing going forward.

9.28 Colleen Sweeney responded that most provision of funding was on an annual basis and the CA would not know how much would be available until April or May of each year. This made it difficult to plan ahead as there was never any guarantee of a steady funding stream. She would forward the Annual Financial report to Members after the meeting.

9.29 The Babergh Cabinet Member for Communities, Councillor Derek Davis and the Mid Suffolk Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, Councillor Julie Flatman were present to answer questions.

9.30 Councillor Flatman stated that the CA was invaluable for the community and the first point of call for many residents. She felt if there was to be less funding for the CA then there was a likelihood that debt issues would increase.

9.31 She also pointed out that staff and volunteers needed proper training in dealing with violent people and that training needs had to be assessed on a local basis. She continued that Mid Suffolk District Council funded CA – Mid Suffolk on an annual basis of £86,700.

9.32 Colleen Sweeney explained that there was a National Business Plan for the CA and that CAs worked together but had to work independently due to local needs for diversity. Both Managers had approximately sixty volunteers to manage in addition to paid staff, apart from managing the strategic side of the organisation. To train volunteers required flexibility to accommodate their needs and it was difficult to share this across the two districts, as each organisation had to manage internal issues and requirements.

9.33 Councillor Davis said that Babergh District Council paid £53,500 towards the revenue costs for the CA -Sudbury and District to the year up to 2020 and a further £7,673 to the CA - Ipswich. He stated that often organisations such as Trading Standards directed cases through the CA.

9.34 Councillor Davis explained that the District Councils could not increase funding to the CA as other funding losses from the SCC had to be covered by the Councils.

9.35 Councillor Otton asked for clarification on how the CA would proceed with the budgeting, assuming that the CA, SCC and District Councils were all working together to avoid a crisis like the one from last year.

9.36 Caroline Eagles responded that the financial resources were sustainable to ensure the services could continue.

9.37 Councillor Davis responded that he would like SCC to reconsider the decision to withdraw the funding for the CA, and he was encouraged that talks were still on-going, but other funders had to be identified and a structured programme would help this. Also, the recruitment of volunteers was a competitive market, making it a challenge for all Charities.

9.38 Councillor Maybury said that in their role as Councillors, Members came into contact with professionals who would be able to volunteer, and she thought that perhaps engagement with Members to recruit volunteers from this group would be useful.

9.39 Councillor Jan Osborne agreed with Councillor Maybury and specified that

lobbying of SCC should continue.

9.40 Councillors Muller, Caston, Adrian Osborne and McCraw all agreed that the CA did invaluable work and that residents would suffer, if not enough funding was found to support the CA. The organisation conducted value for money services and the District Councils need to commit to continue steady funding.

9.41 It was generally agreed that continuing lobbying of SCC was required.

9.42 Councillor Welham said that the Committee had a role to scrutinise the service of the CA to find a better way forward. The Committee could ensure that there was publicity of the District Councils' scrutiny of the service and that this might urge others to grant funds.

9.43 Councillor Ayres endorsed the need for funding and lobbying of SCC, the publicity for the Scrutiny of the CA and the recruitment of professional people to volunteer for the CA.

9.44 Councillor Adrian Osborne said that some Parish Councils provided funding for the CA in Sudbury, and that these small amounts all helped to sustain the CA.

9.45 The Mid Suffolk Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, the Babergh Cabinet Member for Communities and the Babergh Cabinet Member for Housing agreed that both Councils had to pledge funding for the respective CA for the next three years.

9.46 Members agreed that both Councils should maintain minimum funding to the CA and that further scrutiny of the value, and the impact of the services provided by the CA should be scrutinised in more detail.

9.47 The Chair suggested that this scrutiny process was proposed to all Councils across the County and Members agreed.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to both Cabinets that the current minimum funding for the Citizens Advice be maintained for the next three years.

1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee approach the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and Scrutiny Governance Officers of East Suffolk Council, West Suffolk Council, Ipswich Borough Council and Suffolk County Council, with a view of setting up a county-wide scrutiny process to examine funding and the impact on Citizens Advice and the services of Citizens Advice.

1.3 That the Chairs of the said Scrutiny Committees be supplied with a report from Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the topic of Citizens Advice based on this Committee

meeting as a basis for the scrutiny process.

10 JOS/19/10 FIVE-YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY UPDATE

The Committee held a ten-minute recess and returned at 11:15am.

10.1 Councillor Arthey, Babergh Cabinet Member for Planning, introduced the report. Babergh District Council did not currently have a Five-year Housing Land Supply, whereas Mid Suffolk District Council did. He referred to page 11, paragraph 4.14 and 4.15, detailed the produced draft annual position statement figure for both Councils, which now proved that both Council had a Five-year Housing Land Supply, including a 5% buffer for Babergh.

10.2 He knew this was not an ideal statement, as neither of the Councils had an up to date Local plan and he couldn't stress the importance of the Joint Local plan enough.

10.3 Councillor Burn, Mid Suffolk Cabinet Member for Planning agreed and said that without a Local Plan the Councils could be subject to challenges from developers, when planning permissions were refused.

10.4 Robert Hobbs, Corporate Manager for Strategic Planning referred to the key information in the report and said that there had to be evidence that the supply of sites for development were robust. Once feedback had been received from the consultation with developers, the Five-year Housing Land Supply statement would be produced.

10.5 Councillor Welham asked for a timescale for the feedback from developers and clarification if the Five-year Housing Land Supply statement had any value without the Joint Local Plan.

10.6 Officers responded that the Five-year Housing Land Supply was only agreed by the Planning Inspectorate and fixed for one year, where there a recently adopted Local Plan in place. Until this was agreed, the statement to be published could be challenged by developers. The feed-back from developers would be produced shortly.

10.7 Councillor Otton referred to paragraph 4.4, she felt it was not clear how the figures were calculated, and officers responded that calculation was based on market position and that developers' predictions of what sites would come forward for development.

10.8 Councillor Otton asked if there was any leeway on this calculation as some of the figures were subject to the economic position of not just the Councils but also nationally.

10.9 Philip Isbell, Chief Planning Officer, responded that the key point was that developers agreed with the position statement and that the current consultation with developers would confirm developers own estimates of

sites for development and their own financial position.

10.10 Councillor McCraw reminded the Committee that this was a simple summary of the housing land supply statement, which was out for consultation and that the committee was to discuss the mechanism of the calculations, but to understand that a certain amount of rigour had been involved in the gathering of the figure and the Position Statement.

10.11 The Chief Planning Officer responded to questions regarding the weight of the Position Statement at planning committees and said that by providing a Five-year Housing Land Supply statement the Councils would be in a stronger position. The adopted Neighbourhood Plan Policy already carried weight and would continue to do so even without the Five-year Housing Land Supply Statement.

10.12 Councillor McCraw read out a question from Councillor Hinton:

What was the external financial cost implication for the legal advice for carrying out the work for the Position Statement?

10.13 Councillor McCraw reminded Members that the Position statement was a statutory requirement made by the Government. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees had previously scrutinised the Shared Legal Service and unlike the recent reporting in the press which had not included Babergh or Mid Suffolk, there had been no indication of an increase of external legal costs for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. External legal costs were most frequently associated with Individual planning cases, appeals and Judicial Reviews.

10.14 The Chief Planning Officer replied that apart from Officers' time and the service to the Shared Legal Service, which was part of the Councils, no financial implications had been incurred.

10.15 Councillor Grandon enquired if when the Joint Local Plan was published and the figures for the Five-year Housing Land Supply could have changed would that have an impact on the statement.

10.16 The Corporate Manager for Strategic Planning responded that if the Government was notified in the April of that year and that the Councils had submitted a Housing Land Supply Position Statement including a figure by 31 July in that year then it could be considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

10.17 Councillor Burn stated that the Council could defend its Housing Statement position because the work undertaken was thorough.

10.18 The Chief Planning Officer clarified that the position statement was based on the current information received from developers.

10.19 The Chair clarified the consultation referred to in recommendation 3.1 was a professional and not a public consultation.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the content of the report and the Draft Babergh and Mid Suffolk Five-Year Housing Land Supply Annual Position Statement for 2019/20, which were subject to consultation, be noted.

11 JOS/19/11 INFORMATION BULLETIN

11.1 The Chair informed the Committee that Heather Tucker, Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions had forwarded her apologies, but would respond to Members outside the Committee if they had any questions.

11.2 Members discussed the Information Bulletin and whether it would be necessary to continue the updates on voids, as the Performance Management Statistics on Connect included the performance of voids too.

11.3 It was agreed by all Members that the Voids Project had been a success for the team.

11.4 Councillor Welham proposed that no further voids Information Bulletin should be forwarded to the Committee unless there was a significant change in the targets.

11.5 Councillor McCraw added that thanks should be extended to the entire Housing Team for the work undertaken for the past two years.

By unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

1.1 That no further Voids Information Bulletins be forwarded unless there was a significant change in the targets

1.2 That thanks be extended to the entire Housing Team for the work undertaken for the past two years

12 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Forthcoming Decisions List be noted

13 JOS/19/12 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

Item 13 and 14 was discussed together.

13.1 Councillor Welham asked Members if they would prefer to have separate committees on the same day for the rare single issues on the work plans.

13.2 Members agreed that this would be the most suitable solution.

13.3 Councillor Otton asked that the explanation for Community Transport Services be expanded to explain what the Committee would be scrutinising.

13.4 Members discussed this and some felt that the lack of transport in rural areas and the cut in funding made this a suitable topic for scrutiny. Others felt that both Community Transport and public transport fell under the control of Suffolk County Council and that scrutiny could not add any value to this service.

13.5 Councillor Caston question how a solution could be found to the issues with community transport, and if scrutiny of the SCC decision could provide further solutions.

13.6 Members generally disagreed on how to approach this issue and the Chair asked Members to consider the topic and forward any proposal to either the Chair or the Committee Clerk.

13.7 Councillor Otton then brought the Committee's attention to the issues with the new bin collection routes and suggested a report be provided to the Committee.

13.8 Councillor McCraw agreed and proposed that the Committee asked for a report on the newly introduced change of the collection routes and the issues related to the collection of the bins, the reasons for the disruption of collection, the long-term effect and the issues with communication to residents.

It was RESOLVED: -

That a report be produced and brought the next Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the newly introduced change of the collection routes and the issues related to the collection of the bins, the reasons for the disruption of collection, the long-term effect and the issues with communication to residents.

14 JOS/19/13 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

The business of the meeting was concluded at 12.11 pm.

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Chair