

MID SUFFOLK  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2019/20**

Overview & Scrutiny





# **MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT**

## **FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2019/20**

When the committee produced its work plan for 2019/20, we could not have predicted that our programme of work would be disrupted by a General Election and a viral pandemic. Two committee meetings were delayed in the pre-election period; we were very busy immediately after Christmas and a number of meetings were held in January and February. All meetings were then cancelled until arrangements could be made for virtual meetings to be held.

We have produced a work plan for 2020/21 and I am confident that monthly meetings from June 2020 through to the end of March 2021 will enable scrutiny of topics delayed from Spring 2020 to be completed; other issues have also been incorporated in the Work Plan which can be found towards the end of this Annual Report.

Most of the meetings held during the year have been joint meetings with Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Alastair McCraw (Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee) and I have alternated chairing the meetings. Joint Chairs' and Vice Chairs' meetings have been held to plan our committees' workloads and discuss with officers how best to scrutinise the topics in the work plan. The meetings also afforded an opportunity to look at early draft reports and assist officers in providing the necessary information to enable effective scrutiny in committee meetings.

Our agendas have included pre-scrutiny of items prior to Cabinet or Council decisions, scrutiny of topics selected by the Committee or requested by Council, presentations of important matters by senior officers and witnesses from outside the two authorities, and information bulletins requested by the Committee. The Joint Committee set up a Task and Finish Group to work with Members and Officers from other Suffolk authorities to scrutinise the work of Citizens Advice and provide recommendations to the Scrutiny Committees of the authorities taking part. This work was particularly helpful by assisting understanding of the breadth of work covered by Citizens Advice as well as the pressures they are under and how they are funded.

Throughout the year the Committee has acted as a critical friend to officers by working with them to investigate improvements to service delivery. We have also continued to add value to the Council's decision-making process.

I would like to thank Henriette Holloway, Senior Governance Support Officer – Committee Services, and Jan Robinson, Corporate Manager - Law and Governance, for their input and support throughout the year, also Keith Scarff who has been Committee Vice Chair throughout the year. 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, his Vice Chair Adrian Osborne and members of that Committee for working collaboratively with the Mid Suffolk Committee.

Looking ahead to 2020/21, we will be operating very differently until it is deemed safe to meet together. Our recent virtual meetings have demonstrated that scrutiny can be carried out effectively via home-working equipment. As Mid Suffolk recovers from Covid-19, there

may be a need for new services and new methods of service delivery. The Committee will have a role in helping the Council transform to 'the new normal'.

**Keith Welham**

July 2020

Chair, Mid Suffolk Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Co-Chair, Babergh & Mid Suffolk Joint Scrutiny Committee

**MEMBERS OF THE MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2019/20**



**Cllr Keith Welham – Chair**



**Cllr Keith Scarff – Vice-Chair**



**Cllr Terence Carter  
27 February 2020 - Present**



**Cllr James Caston**



**Cllr Lavinia Hadingham**



**Cllr Dave Muller**



**Cllr Andrew Mellen  
22 May 2019 – 27 February 2020**

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

In May 2017 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils adopted the Leader/Cabinet 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 six members of the Council who can be any Member except Cabinet Members. No member is allowed to scrutinise a decision where they have been part of the decision-making 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, where similar interests have been identified, to scrutinise topics, 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 Committee 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 Joint Corporate Plan seeking 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 is 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 by making informed recommendations to the Cabinet, Full Council and other Committees. Cabinet can also recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee conduct detailed investigations 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](http://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/17/7

## **THE STRUCTURE FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OUTSIDE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cycle is based around one monthly Chairs' Briefings to which report authors and Assistant Directors 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. This is also an opportunity for the Chairs to provide a steer of what the Committee is expecting to achieve from upcoming items. It allows the Chairs and Officers to consider any questions, which may be asked at the Committee meeting by members of the Committee. Generally, each item will be discussed at the Chairs' briefings twice before going to Committee.

At the public meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Members are invited to attend and respond to questions within their relevant portfolio. Other Members of the Council are able to attend and are often allowed, at the discretion of the Chair, to ask questions with regards to the items presented at the meeting.

Between meetings, Officers and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees maintain an open and engaged working relationship to ensure that the scrutiny process will be efficient and beneficial to the Committee meetings.

Members may 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 their findings to the Committee, which can then consider any recommendations or actions required.

## **TRAINING**

In June 2019 the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received training at the first meeting in the new municipal year, the focus being on what good scrutiny is, good scrutiny procedures and Call-in procedures. Members were also presented with two case studies as examples of ineffective scrutiny.

Relevant training for specific areas of scrutiny are organised throughout the year to meet emerging requirements.



## **THE ORGANISATION OF THE 2019 - 2020 WORK PLAN**

The Work Plan is updated at each Committee meeting and Members propose possible items for consideration for the workplan. Each item is evaluated to determine relevance and purpose by the Committee Members. A review of the Forthcoming Decisions List is also undertaken monthly, in order to assess whether the scrutiny process adds value to any items listed. This avoids unnecessary duplication of work carried out by any other Committee or working group and ensures that sufficient time has lapsed between reviews.

Other regular items on the Work Plan are the Information Bulletins, brief updates on topics, areas of interests or fact-finding pieces of work for items the Committee may wish to scrutinise in the future.

## **COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT 2019/20**

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.

At the beginning of the municipal year the Chair of Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to hold joint Committee meetings when both Committees were scrutinising identical topics. This was partly a result of previous years' positive experiences and partly due the reduction of the number of Members on the committee, as a result of the Ward Boundary Review which was completed in 2019. 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 joint services have benefitted by the 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 Council are scrutinised.

The attendance of Cabinet Members to present reports under their Portfolios and responding to questions in relation to their area of responsibility has been a valued addition to the scrutiny process. This has enabled the Committee Members to directly address the Cabinet Member responsible for the issue discussed.

The Committee has also invited outside witnesses to provide information on areas outside the Councils' remit, or in matters where specific knowledge, expertise or experiences have been sought to provide a better foundation for the scrutiny process. Scrutiny of the Local Citizens Advice, CIFCO and the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership were assisted by the contributions from representatives of these and other outside organisations.

Our joint scrutiny of Citizens Advice led to the setting up of a cross-authority task and finish group – the first cross-authority scrutiny since the Cabinet system of governance was adopted by the councils.

# The Work of Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20

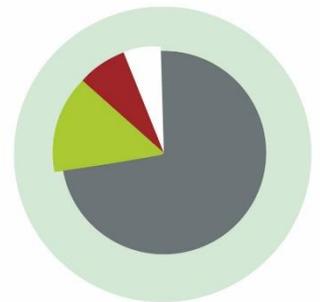
## 1. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE JUNE COMMITTEE

The first meeting of the municipal year included scrutiny training of committee members, agreement of the new workplan and a discussion around the year ahead.

This year the Committee received training on good scrutiny, call-in procedures and discussed two case studies which illustrated unsuccessful scrutiny processes.

## 2. CAPITAL INVESTMENTS (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD.) BUSINESS TRADING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

In July 2019 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to comment on the Business Plan and the trading activities for the CIFCO Capital Ltd for 2018/19. The Report was divided into two parts in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, due to the financial sensitivity of the investments.



CIFCO Capital Ltd had been trading since 2017 and this was the third annual business plan for the Company to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committee. During the last 12 months CIFCO had completed the first phase of investments and now held 12 diverse commercial assets primarily across the Eastern regions of country

The Committee discussed general property investments in relation to the financial market. Concerns included investments in retail property in comparison to industrial units. Further questions were raised regarding Brexit and the stability of the financial market.

Members were reassured that due diligence was applied for the decisions process when requisitioning properties for investments and that the state of the current market was considered

**RESOLVED**



- 1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes CIFCO Capital Ltd. trading activity and performance for the year to end April 2019.
- 1.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the report and asks that Council notes the comments made in the minutes from the meeting 1 July 2019.

## VALUE ADDED

The Committee invited all Members of both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to the meeting and questions and concerns were raised. The Board Members for CIFCO Capital Ltd were present and provided responses that were cohesive and robust. Members wanted it to be noted that the Committee was impressed with the work of the Board and the Assistant Director for Assets and Investments.

### 3. AMENDMENTS TO THE JOINT COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY: UPDATES ON PROGRESS

In July the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the amendments to the Joint Complaints, Comments and Complaints Policy. This included progress made regarding Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints improvements, since the policy was last discussed at Committee in May 2018

The committee considered a report from the Corporate Manager for Customer Operations. The new system for dealing with compliments, comments and complaints was ready to be rolled out on the 22nd July 2019, by which time all officers dealing with complaints would have been trained in its operation. Members noted that there had been real improvements in the quality of stage 1 complaints responses and a marked reduction (34%) in the number of stage 2 complaints being upheld.

Members debated the details contained in the report and highlighted the need for monthly reports to be provided to the Senior Leadership Team.

## RESOLVED

- 1.1 **That the Joint Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy be endorsed by the Committee to commence in August.**
- 1.2 **To note that the complaints reports are submitted every month to the Senior Leadership Team.**

## VALUE ADDED

Dealing with Complaints was an opportunity to improve services to the Council's customers and the reduction in Stage 2 Complaints indicated that more issues were resolved at the initial Stage 1 part of the Complaints procedure and not progressed to a Stage 2 Complaint.

### 4. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

The Committee had asked to be provided with an update in July 2019 which outlined proposals and future options to address the underspend, following the adoption of The Regulatory Reform Order Policy on Minor Disabled Adaptation Scheme in March 2019 by Cabinet. The Committees had also received an Information Bulletin in January 2019 for the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) and subsequently made recommendations to Cabinet.



The committee considered a report from the Corporate Manager which set out steps being taken to provide much-needed adaptations to properties in Babergh and Mid Suffolk and avoiding an underspend of the budget for 2019/20. A suggested way forward was to make Minor Adaptions Grants up to a limit of £5000 and to arrange for work to be carried out by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS). Discussions were taking place with other district councils in Suffolk to develop a strategy regarding future commissioning once the current contract with Orbit Homes had ended.

Members of both Councils could help by promoting the grants and providing information to residents.

**RESOLVED**



**The contents of the report and appendices be noted and that Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress on any remodelling of the DFG process within the next six months:**

**Members commend the work of the Manager for Housing Delivery (Heather Worton), her team and other parties involved for the work that was currently taking place and ongoing regarding Adaption Grants; and**

**Hard copies of resources be provided to Members to promote the grants and advice that were available to residents.**

**VALUE ADDED.**

The Committee asked questions regarding processes and procedures being put in place to mitigate the underperformance of Orbit, the provider for disabled facilities resources and how to improve the Councils services to residents. Discussions of options and solutions added support to officers going forward to resolve the current situation.

## **5. INFORMATION BULLETIN – STAFF TURNOVER AND WELFARE**

The Committee considered an Information Bulletin in July 2019, which set out statistics covering staff turnover and sickness. It was noted that staff turnover had dropped. Sickness related absence had also dropped whilst sickness related to stress, anxiety and depression had increased. This could have been in part due to societal change and a better understanding of mental health and, also, to the long-term absence of a very small number of staff.

The mental health and counselling service had been heavily promoted. Staff could self-refer to the service, which was well-used and waiting times for appointments were short.

**RESOLVED**



**That Staff Turnover and Welfare be reported back to the Committee when data for 2019 – 2020 is available to allow a direct comparison.**

## VALUE ADDED

This was the third Information Bulletin on the subject of Staff Turnover and Welfare and Members agreed that as absences and staff turnover were reducing the Committee was satisfied that processes and procedures were in place to mitigate the issues debated.

## 6. CITIZENS ADVICE

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee commenced a review of the provision of Citizens Advice (CA) across Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts and suggested that the review could be widened to cover provision across the whole of Suffolk



In August 2019, The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee invited the Chief Officers from Sudbury and District Citizens Advice and Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice to provide a presentation on the work and services provided to residents of the two Districts. As funding cuts had been announced by Suffolk County Council in 2018, the Committee was concerned about the consequences for the provision of services and the impact this could have on the Councils' own services to residents.

Around 6000 residents of the two districts had been helped in the last year; approximately 40% of contacts with clients were face to face. Other means of contact are by telephone, email, webchat, a visit to a client or via an outreach event. A high percentage of requests for advice are on benefit issues and debt.

Members expressed concern that funding for 2020/21 should be in place in time to avoid the problems caused when SCC withdrew 2019/20 funding. CAs remained concerned about the long-term future because most of their financial support was awarded on an annual basis making long term financial planning difficult.

CAs were finding it difficult to recruit volunteers with the necessary skills. Council Members were asked to help with this by suggesting to people who had suitable professional skills that they consider becoming CA volunteers.

### RESOLVED



- 1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended 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.**

## VALUE ADDED

Members' concerns were confirmed regarding the impact of the reduction of funding for the CAs and resulted in a recommendation to Cabinet to approve a three-year funding programme for Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice in January 2020. A similar decision was agreed by Babergh District Council.

The Committee set-up a Task and Finish Group for Citizens Advice and invited the Chairs and Vice-Chairs from all Councils in the County to participate. Please see further in the report for work undertaken by the Cross-County Task and Finish Group.

## 7. FIVE-YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY UPDATE

This was an update following the report presented to the Committee in March 2018. At the time of the report the draft annual position statement figure for the MSDC Supply was at the time of the meeting calculated at 5.61 years. Whilst this provided some reassurance, the Council was not yet in the strongest position. Completion of the Local Plan process remained vital because without a Local Plan the Councils could still be subject to challenges from developers when planning permissions were refused.

With an approved Local Plan, the Five-year Housing Land Supply could be agreed by the Planning Inspectorate and would be fixed for a year. Until this was agreed, and the statement published, the Council could be challenged by developers.

Responding to questions regarding the weight that could be given to the Position Statement at Planning Committees, the Chief Planning Officer explained that, by providing a Five-year Housing Land Supply statement, the Councils would be in stronger position. Adopted Neighbourhood Plans already carried weight and would continue to do so even without an approved Local Plan.

## 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.**

## VALUE ADDED.

The Committee had previously received a report on the Five-year Housing Land Supply and this update was provided to confirm that the housing supply was still robust.

## 8. INFORMATION BULLETIN – VOIDS

Also, in August 2019 the committee received an Information Bulletin covering void times in Council Owned Housing. Void times had remained below target and the Performance Management Statistics on Connect included the performance in respect of void times.

It was agreed by committee that the Voids Project had been a success for the team and that thanks should be extended to the entire Housing Team for the work undertaken for the past two years. It was also agreed that no further Voids Information Bulletins should be forwarded

to the Committee unless there was a significant change in the performance against void time targets.

**RESOLVED**



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

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

**VALUE ADDED**

At the time when void times were first looked at by Overview and Scrutiny in September 2017, the void times in Mid Suffolk were 51 days and in Babergh were 54 days. Void targets were agreed, and the project set up to achieve those targets. Through joint member/officer working, void times had reduced and had been consistently below the target for around 2 years. By Q1 2019, void times in Mid Suffolk were 18 days and in Babergh 13 days.

## **9. CIL EXPENDITURE FRAMEWORK**

In September, the Committee examined a report from the Professional Lead Key Sites and Infrastructure. This followed on from a previous review by the Committee in 2018, designed to help and inform the Joint Member Panel set up to review the implementation of CIL.



The Committee were addressed by several witnesses: a councillor from a parish which had made a number of successful bids, a member of the Joint Member Panel (Cllr. Arthey, also Babergh Cabinet Member for Planning and supporter of a number of bids within his ward), and representatives from Suffolk County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group-Health and Network Rail. The Professional Lead and the Assistant Director for Planning and Communities were also able to take questions and comment.

In hearing from, and questioning, the witnesses, it became apparent that the size and scale of CIL bids and the range of bidders was changing, moving from a focus on local community-based bids (made by parish councils and local community groups) to larger ones (SCC, CCG, Network Rail) up to potential cross-authority bids (Network Rail). This had been foreseen in the initial development of our CIL Framework. Both the CIL bidding procedures and the eventual allocation of CIL funds were well in hand. The framework was under constant review through the work of the CIL team and the Joint Member Panel.

**RESOLVED**



**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the work of the CIL team (and the CIL Member Working Group) and notes that a fit and proper process is in place in respect of the bidding and allocation of CIL funds.**

**VALUE ADDED**

The scrutiny of the process for the CIL bids and the CIL funding revealed that CIL bids formed part of a co-operation between stakeholders in the community, the Council and the Suffolk County Council and that this process was evolving. In addition, the work of the CIL Members working group was debated and the Committee was satisfied that due diligence was applied.

## **10. WASTE COLLECTION ROUTE CHANGES JULY 2019**

In July the Committee discussed the recent introduction of new waste disposal collection routes, as most members had received comments from residents and other Members on the subject. Members debated a proposal that the Committee ask for a report on the newly introduced change of the collection routes and the issues related to the collection of bins, the reasons for the disruption of collection, the long-term effect and the issues with communication to residents.



In September, a report was presented to the Committee summarising the recent day and route changes to the refuse and recycling collections element of the waste service. It showed the reasons for the changes, timings, planning and implementation, communication approach, lessons learnt and missed collection statistics.

The Committee had invited questions from all Members before the meeting and encouraged Members to attend the Committee as there appeared to be issues in the community regarding the route changes.

The Committee scrutinised the report and questioned the Corporate Manager for Waste Services attending, and it became apparent that although there had been some missed waste collections and disruptions, good mitigation had been implemented for the transitional period for the waste collection change.

The optimisation of routes was designed to provide an effective and efficient service, reduce non-productive travel time, use of fuel and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### **RESOLVED**



- 1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee extend thanks for the report.**
- 1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee commend the Waste Collection Service Team on the successful introduction of the new Bin Collection Routes.**
- 1.3 That the points learnt during the implementation of the new Bin Collection Routes be forwarded to the Senior Leadership Team for consideration in future similar projects.**

### **VALUE ADDED**

The Committee responded quickly to Members' concerns regarding the impact on communities as a result of the waste collection changes. The scrutiny process provided

evidence that there had been minimal impact on the service provided and that the Waste Collection Team had followed a robust project plan and were able to solve any issues satisfactory.

## **INFORMATION BULLETIN – UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

The Committee also received an updated Information Bulletin at the meeting in September which provided an update to the Information Bulletin received in February 2019.

The roll-out of Universal Credit had reached around 30% of the claimants within Mid Suffolk. Overall, rent arrear figures for the Council had marginally improved in the last two quarters but rent arrears of Universal Credit claimants are rising.

Mitigation of the effects of Universal Credit was in place. The Housing Team, working with Citizens Advice, the Income Team, the Tenant Board, and the Department for Work and Pensions were taking effective action. The Committee were satisfied that it was being managed well by the Housing Team. The Committee felt that no further Information Bulletin would be required unless the situation were to change markedly for the worse.

**RESOLVED**



**That no further Information Bulletin updates be submitted to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee unless there are any significant changes in rent arrears**

**VALUE ADDED**

Concerns over the implementation of the Universal Credit Scheme and that it was the Department for Wages and Pension who managed the scheme was expressed by the Committee. The update provided an insight into how officers were managing the housing service during the roll-out of Universal Credit.

**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cancelled the meeting in October and did not convene again until January 2020 due to the pre-election period and the General Election in December 2019**

## **11. GATEWAY 14**

This item was considered following the exclusion of members of the public. However, this report does not include any of the confidential details presented and discussed. For such details, Members are invited to read the Committee Agenda papers and minutes.



An outline of the agreement options available to the Council to bring the Gateway 14 and Stowmarket East project forward was provided.

It was clarified that Gateway 14 was the vehicle for implementing the development and that the Stowmarket East site and the Gateway 14 site were considered to be one development site for future planning and development.

It was confirmed that both sites were wholly owned by Mid Suffolk District Council and had received planning permission for outline consent. It was clarified that although the two

developments were to provide financial returns to the Council, it was also the intention that they would provide benefits to the local community as employment sites and for social activities. The most likely occupants would be commercial operations and distribution centres. The current time scale is to develop the site over 12 years.

In choosing partners for the site, the main business goal was to generate revenue, but that both social and community aspects were taken into consideration and were important to the project. It was a large site and there would be opportunities for various developments on the site, but focus remained on business expansion. It was anticipated that a number of occupancies and businesses would be attracted to the site improving skills and employment opportunities for the area.

Reference was made to the Council's declaration of a climate emergency. However, the Gateway 14 development would depend on road transport, increasing road traffic at a time when this needed to be minimised. Environmental sustainability should be given very serious consideration and increasingly occupiers were looking to be sustainable. Work was being undertaken to ensure that the site would be sustainable where possible and, although this point might not be as strong as the Council would have wanted, a balance had to be struck between financial and sustainable considerations.

Members discussed possible recommendations and it was generally agreed that the report should be supported, but that the sustainable aspects and the reduction of carbon should be explored further when choosing occupancy of the Gateway 14 site.

**RESOLVED:** 

- 1.1 That the committee supports the recommendations included in the report;**
- 1.2 That the social and community potential be expanded in the report;**
- 1.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Council to consider discussions with partners to explore opportunities in maximizing sustainability of the site.**

**VALUE ADDED**

The Committee was able to receive responses to questions for the strategic and financial implications of Gateway 14. However, the meeting raised other issues such as sustainability and commercial attractiveness of the site. Generally, the committee was satisfied that these concerns had been considered.

**12. CORPORATE PLAN OUTPUT**

In January 2020, the Strategic Director presented the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the Corporate Outputs document which the Leaders of the Councils had requested to be scrutinised by the Committee.

This high-level document formed a layer in the Corporate Plan between the overall Plan itself and the variety of Policies and Programmes that would be used to implement the Plan. The Corporate Outputs listed the various outcomes desired under each of the six priorities, including items completed, in progress or planned for action. Each priority was to be supported by its own strategy, updated, as necessary. These, and the outputs themselves, were expected to be added to and changed as the plan evolved. In addition, 'Business as

Usual' would be expected to contribute to Strategies and Outputs without being specifically listed.

It was recognised that all Members and Cabinet should be equipped with the development opportunities that would be needed fully understand the process and how they could be involved.

Further regular monitoring and reporting would take place, which could then feed into future Overview and Scrutiny work plans

Members queried measurement of the outputs and how this could be achieved. An approach of using 'milestones' and Programme Boards chaired by the Strategic Director was given, alongside the quarterly reports to Cabinet. A traffic light system (red, amber, green) was being integrated.

An alternative approach to the subject was also suggested in that this aspirational list was too high level for detailed scrutiny but that individual parts and programmes of the six priorities would make suitable subjects for closer examination.

All member briefings for the priority themes were suggested by the Strategic Director and there were cross party Member Working Groups already in place to support delivery.

There was a considerable amount of discussion about the various means of involving Members more fully in the Corporate Plan, the Corporate Outputs and the individual projects. It was noted that uptake and ownership was not always high amongst Members.

## RESOLVED



**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee urges Cabinet to find a range of methods to engage with all Members to understand the linkage between the Corporate Plan and the Corporate Outputs and explain the role of Member Working Groups in developing strategies and actions plans.**

## VALUE ADDED

This was a successful scrutiny of the Corporate Outputs as Members were able question and debate the challenges of the plan. It became apparent that Members were concerned of member involvement in the Corporate Plan and its Outputs.

## 13. WESTERN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY SAFTY PARTNERSHIP (WSCSP)

This annual statutory requirement had been postponed due to the General Election. It was attended by the following witnesses.

<b>Cllr Joanna Spicer</b>	Chair of Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Suffolk County Councillor
<b>Paul Goodman</b>	Group Commander for Prevention and Detection – Suffolk Fire
<b>Clair Harvey</b>	Community Safety Lead - Localities & Partnerships Team Health, Wellbeing & Children's Services Suffolk County Council
<b>Emma Gaskell</b>	Senior Primary Care Manager NHS West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group
<b>Kim Warner</b>	Western Area Commander – Police Vice-Chair of WSCSP

Each witness provided a presentation and update the Committee on developments in the area and five priority areas were identified, County Lines, Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Men and Boys, Hate Crime, PREVENT, Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR). This did not exclude emerging areas of concern in Community Safety. Members were informed of the way the services cooperated through the WSCSP and provided support for maintaining and improving community safety across the County.

In general questioning and discussion, questions were raised about Violence against Women & Girls, domestic abuse in general, mental health issues, and availability of beds for victims of domestic abuse. It became apparent that the situations were much as before, but that there was an increasing willingness to report issues and for them to be taken seriously.

The Committee debated how Members could assist with the work of the WSCSP and witnesses suggested various information streams which could provide support, including member briefings, sharing information with Council employees and the wider communities, social media and news releases and asking Members who were already involved with Community Safety to share their experiences with other Members.

Members asked that the members 'tool kit' was updated and re-distributed to Babergh and Mid Suffolk Members.

**RESOLVED**



**That the confidential member 'Contact tool kit' pack be updated and distributed to all Members as a Babergh and Mid Suffolk Confidential 'Contact Tool Kit'**

**VALUE ADDED**

The WSCSP had been scrutinised previously and Members were now familiar with the work undertaken by this partnership. Members were keen to develop further understanding and provide more information around the issues discussed. The Member and Officer briefings provided during the past year had helped to broaden Members awareness of crime and disorder in the community.

#### **14. TASK AND FINISH GROUP CITIZENS ADVICE – TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chair described these as this was the first opportunity the Committee had to meet since the group formation and the basic remit was agreed.

**RESOLVED**

**That the Task and Finish Group for Citizens Advice – Terms of Reference be approved.**

## **15. TASK AND FINISH GROUP CITIZENS ADVICE – RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee Chair and Task and Finish Group Chair presented the draft report and draft recommendations to the Task and Finish Group. The Group's approval was given for the Task & Finish Group Chair to complete the report for general distribution to all constituent Councils.

The Committee were asked to approve the proposal that the report be so completed.

It should be noted that the report and recommendations were presented to both Cabinets and Councils in January meetings as described above.

### **RESOLVED:**



**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve that the Members of the Task and Finish Group completed the report and recommendations in time for the Report and Recommendations to be presented to both Cabinets in January 2020.**

### **VALUE ADDED.**

The Task and Finish Group is reported further on in the report.

## **16. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2020/21 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK**

In January 2020 the Committee received the Draft General Fund Budget 2020/21 and Four-year Outlook report.

Questions were raised regarding council tax increases for empty properties and responses included an explanation that this change was aimed at short-term tenancy agreements and that the number of properties for renting was increasing. Properties left unoccupied following death were exempt from paying Council Tax for six months until the estate was settled. If necessary, an exemption for a further six months could be granted.

There had been some issues with PV panels project and the cost of servicing and repairs of these. However, in the last few months the income from the panels had been steady.

Reference was made to the New Homes Bonus and that this would be phased out over the next couple of years, particularly whether any guidance from Central Government had been received in respect of a replacement for New Homes Bonus. The Council had not yet been informed on how the New Homes Bonus would be phased out.

Questions were raised regarding the drop-in business rates income and the effect on the retail market, CIFCO and the repayment of the loan at the new interest rate and Gateway 14 loan arrangements. There were also queries regarding expenditure income associated with Civil Parking Enforcement which were to be answered outside the meeting.

Members debated the recommendations and it was generally agreed that comments made at the committee should be forwarded to Cabinet for their consideration at their meeting in February.

**RESOLVED:** 

- 1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked that Officers and Cabinet take into consideration the comments made at this meeting when submitting the budget to Cabinet for consideration at the Cabinet meeting in February 2020.**
- 1.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed the additional £1/2m allocated to Climate Change for the year 2020/21**

## **VALUE ADDED**

The scrutiny of the Draft General Fund budget raised queries around details of the income and expenditure for 2020-21 and gave officers an opportunity to consider areas of concern and lack of clarity, when drafting the final budget and report to Cabinet.

## **17. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK**

The Committee also scrutinised the Draft Housing Revenue Budget 2020/21(HRA) and Four-year Outlook.

An explanation was sought in respect of the service charges for Sheltered Housing, and the likely increase in service charges due to the de-sheltering of council houses. A review of Sheltered Housing would be undertaken in the coming years to ensure that the service was cost effective.

Concerns were raised about the staffing costs around the new build and if there was enough staff to manage this area. During the last four years a hundred or so homes had been built and any additional staffing costs were being absorbed in the budget. Staffing issues had been resolved by restructuring and the teams had the staff required going forward.

Garage uptake had not increased as expected and the Housing team was working with the Assets team to review these sites.

Other issues raised by the Committee were the withdrawal of decoration vouchers, statutory requirements for tenancy and the increase in Local Housing allowance.

Members generally agreed that the HRA Budget should be endorsed and that the comments made at the meeting should be forwarded to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:** 

**That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the Housing Revenue Account Budget and Four-year Outlook but ask that Officers and Cabinet take into consideration the comments made at this meeting when submitting the budget to Cabinet for consideration at the Cabinet meeting in February 2020.**

## **VALUE ADDED**

The Scrutiny of the HRA Budget ensured that the budget is set to provide the most beneficial and efficient funding for services for the Councils Residents.

## 18. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

In February 2020 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on Planning Enforcement.

The Committee had asked for a report on Planning Enforcement as Members across the both Districts had expressed concern about how this was implemented in the communities, and the perception of planning enforcement by residents. Members also raised individual issues around and questioned what policies and regulation existed around planning enforcement.

The Committee was presented with a substantial report and appendices, which provided a robust clarification of how the Joint Local Planning Enforcement Plan was implemented across the two Districts.

Members queried the process and procedures for enforcements, the experience of the Enforcement team, the use of Building Control and in-house provision for this, and the relationship between developers and Planning Enforcement.

The report included case studies which provided further questions regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) bids, Tree Preservation Orders (TPO), emergency enforcement, and planning enforcement for larger developments, and the relationships between the Planning Department and developers in general.

In response to the community perception of Planning Enforcement, officers explained that often misunderstanding of what Planning Enforcement, and how this was enforced, was often the cause for of this perception. It was not reliant on resources.

The Committee received detailed responses and it became apparent that the Enforcement Team was working on improving the enforcement processes, which included a new processing system.

The Joint Local Planning Enforcement Plan was under review and Members asked that a cross party Task and Finish Group was set up for the review process.

**RESOLVED:** 

- 1.1 That the contents of this report be noted.**
- 1.2 That the Committee recommend to Council the establishment of a Member/Officer Task and Finish Group to review the JLPEP and that this Group be requested to have regard to best practice and examples of other published Local Enforcement Plans in that process of review.**
- 1.3 That an update on progress with service transformation work within the Planning Enforcement Team be provided to the Committee in six months.**

### VALUE ADDED

This was an area of concern for most Members and they were often responding to questions related to Planning Enforcement at Parish Council meetings. The Committee was able to scrutinise the processes and gauge if the concerns had any foundation. Members

expressed satisfaction that this was not the case and suggested that the report be made available to all Members.

Link to the Planning Enforcement report on the committee webpage

[Planning Enforcement Report](#)

## **19. PRESENTATION CUSTOMER ACCESS POINT ACTIVITY**

This was a Joint review which had been suggested by the Corporate Manager – However due to the Covid-19 Pandemic this meeting was deferred, and the item was added to the Work Plan.



## **20. SCRUTINY OF THE BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLAN**

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic this meeting was deferred and added to the Work Plan.

## **21. CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD) BUSINESS TRADING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20**

In June, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report and presentation for CIFCO prior to presentation to Full Council. Directors and Business Advisors for CIFCO Capital Ltd., the BDC (Suffolk Holdings) Ltd, MSDC (Suffolk Holdings) Ltd, the Cabinet Members for Assets and Investments for both Councils were present to respond to questions

The Committee scrutinised the Business Plan and commented on the contents and the robustness of the plan. Members asked detailed questions regarding the effect on the investments and loan repayments as a result of Covid-19 Pandemic. Concerns included the recent change in work patterns and future use of retail and office space, investments in sustainable and 'green' properties, investments in local assets, exit plans, security of rental return for CIFCO and loan repayments to the Council. Members also queried the rental income threshold to maintain a viable business project.

Members of the Committee debated various aspects of the Business Plan including the risk, equity, and losses and whether the Business Plan and report contained enough information for these areas.

**RESOLVED**



**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Capital Investment Fund Company (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD.) Business Trading and Performance Report 2019/2020 and asked that Council take into consideration the minutes from this meeting.**

### **VALUE ADDED**

The annual scrutiny of the CIFCO Trading and Business Plan enables Members to review the trading performance and the Business Plan in detail and forms an important part of the

Council's principle of Openness and Transparency for both the public and Members. The committee's discussion highlighted key areas of concern for both the CIFCO board and Council to be considered.

## **CROSS AUTHORITY TASK AND FINISH GROUP – CITIZENS ADVICE**

Following the Babergh and Mid Suffolk scrutiny of Citizens Advice in August 2019 the Joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the Chairs should approach other authorities in the County for a cross authority Task and Finish Group. Chairs and Vice-chairs were invited from each of the other Authorities and participation involved Ipswich Borough Council, West Suffolk Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council.

The Task and Finish group held three meetings in October, December 2019 and January 2020. Unfortunately, due to the General Election meetings were disrupted between October and December. But the Task and Finish Group managed to agree recommendations before each authority had to agree budgets.

It must be noted that each authority has different arrangements in place for funding of Citizens Advice. The intention of the Task and Finish Group was to identify issues and areas of concern which each individual Authority could use as a foundation for recommendations to their own authorities.

There were three areas identified, Value, Impact and Funding and each area was allocated specific attention at meetings.

The Task and Finish Group received participation from all of the Chief Officers from the five Citizens Advice across the County in the first session. The second session saw representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group, IBC Housing Advice department and the IBC Benefits department, the BMSDC Funding services and the BMSDC Tenant Services. All provided brief summaries of the work they undertook, and the interaction between their organisations/departments and Citizens Advice.

The Third Task and Finish Group meeting in January 2020 was dedicated to considering the evidence received from the previous two meetings and conclude the work of the group. The Joint Report and recommendations produced by the Task and Finish Group were presented to each of the constituent authorities own Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Copies were also provided, on an information basis, to the relevant Cabinet Member at SCC, the CCG's and the participating Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The report, in turn, was intended to be forwarded to the relevant Cabinets. This took place in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Babergh Cabinet subsequently adopted Recommendation (e) requesting that Overview and Scrutiny carry out the annual review of funding for Citizens Advice, as suggested within the report.

**The recommendations were:**

**RECOMMENDATIONS – SUFFOLK CROSS AUTHORITY CITIZENS ADVICE TASK AND FINISH GROUP, 7th JANUARY 2020.**

- (a) The Task and Finish Group recommend to Suffolk County Council that it meets the previous proportion of basic core funding needs of Suffolk CAB's by agreeing to restore its grant for 2020/2021 to at least £184,000 per annum; and
- (b) The Task and Finish Group recommend to the Clinical Commissioning Groups and Suffolk County Council that they work together to ensure that – between them - a minimum of £368,000 is granted to Suffolk CAB's annually beyond 2020/21; and
- (c) All Suffolk Executive's attention should be drawn to the Task and Finish Group paper when considering allocations of Community Cash Grants, or any other funding mechanism, for 2020/21 onwards and that those Executives should seek that, having regard to the Task and Finish Group paper, they should seek to avoid any reductions to current annual grants to Citizens Advice Bureau when considering these allocations for 2020/21 onwards; and
- (d) All districts/boroughs should be made aware of the cash allocations being made to Citizens Advice by all other Suffolk authorities, in particular where more than one authority contributes to an individual LCA; and
- (e) The Task and Finish Group recommends that where multiyear arrangements are agreed for LCA's, these should be rolling agreements, subject to annual review and annual inflationary increases, to be agreed by Councils; and
- f) The Task and Finish Group recommends that Communities teams, or their authority equivalent, are approached to seek other means of funding for the LCA's and that they and each of our constituent Councils explore means of raising awareness of the benefits provided by CAB to the organisation.

## MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PLAN 2020/2021:

Due to the circumstances of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the following deferral of items on the Work Plan, The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan will be presented to Full Council in September 2020.

TOPIC	PURPOSE	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER	PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED TO COMMITTEE
<b>20 July 2020 - JOINT</b> Chair Cllr Welham				
<b>Joint Compliment, comment and Complaints Policy</b>	An update following as agreed at the Chair's briefing in March 2020	Assistant Director- Customer Services  Corporate Manager – Customer Operations	Cabinet Member - Customers, Digital Transformation and Improvements	18 July 2019 JOS/19/3
<b>Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20</b>	Review of the work conducted throughout 2019/20 – Lessons learnt, improvements and achievements	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services  Senior Governance Support Officer		
<b>20 August 2020 - JOINT</b> Chair Cllr McCraw				
<b>Planning Enforcement - Review of Service Transformation work</b>	Following the Scrutiny in February 2020	Chief Planning Officer	Cabinet Member - Planning	20 February 2020 JOS/19/25
<b>Future Delivery Model for Public Realm</b>	Scrutiny of the Delivery Models proposed	Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnership	Cabinet Members - the Environment	
<b>17 September 2020</b>				
<b>Joint Home and Housing Strategy</b>	Scrutiny of the Joint Home and Housing Strategy	Assistant Director for Housing  Housing Strategy and Policy Officer	BDC Cabinet Member - Housing  MSDC Cabinet Member - Housing and Communities	
<b>Suffolk Independent Living – A New Home Improvement Agency Model</b>	Scrutiny of the New Home Improvement Model	Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions	BDC Cabinet Member - Housing  MSDC Cabinet Member -Housing and Communities	
<b>15 October 2020</b>				

<b>Representatives on Outside Bodies</b>	A review of the Representatives on Outside Bodies and an update on the work undertaken	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services  Senior Governance Support Officer		
<b>19 November 2020</b>				
<b>10 December 2020</b>				
<b>14 January 2021</b>				
<b>Draft General Fund (GF) 2020/21 and Four-year Outlook</b>	Scrutiny of the GF Budget for 2020/21	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources  Corporate Manager – Finance	The Leaders  Cabinet Member - Finance	MSDC 16 January 2020
<b>Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Four -year Outlook</b>	Scrutiny of the HRA Budget and Business Plan	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources  Corporate Manager – Finance	The Leaders  Cabinet Member - Finance	MSDC 16 January 2020
<b>18 February 2021</b>				
<b>18 March 2021</b>				
<b>Crime and Disorder Panel meeting</b>	The Committee conduct a scrutiny review of the SWSCP to fulfil the Councils Statutory requirements	Assistant Director – Sustainable Communities	BDC Cabinet Member - ok Communities  MSDC Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities	8 January 2020 – JOS/19/20
<b>14 April 2021</b>				
<b>20 May 2021</b>				
<b>Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21</b>	Review of the work conducted throughout 2019/20 – Lessons learnt, improvements and achievements	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services  Senior Governance Support Officer		

## ITEMS DEFERRED DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

The items below will be allocated to a meeting in due course.

<b>Scrutiny and First Review of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Housing Delivery Test Action Plan</b>	Scrutiny of the Action Plan	Professional Lead – Key Sites and Infrastructure
<b>BMBS and proposed Development of Building Services Business Case</b>	To scrutinise BMBS and the proposed development of the Building Service Business Case	Assistant Director - Housing
<b>Underspend of Grants for bringing empty homes back into to use</b>	A report to be brought to Committee for the effect of the underspending off grants for bringing empty homes back into use	Assistant Director – Housing Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s latest workplans are on the Council’s website and can be viewed on the following link:

[OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKPLAN](#)

## TOPICS IDENTIFIED FOR REVIEW BUT NOT CURRENTLY TIMETABLED



**Annual Review of Local Citizens Advice – As agreed at BDC Cabinet 11 February 2020 - January 2021**



**Crime and Disorder Panel meeting**

Required to take place at least once a year, provisionally agreed to take place in **March 2021**.



**Improving Access to the Private Rented Sector – Chairs to discuss the timing for bringing this to Committee**



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



**Other topics identified:**

- The impact on the Council when patients are discharged from hospital