

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Virtual Meeting on Monday, 20 July 2020

PRESENT:

Councillor: Keith Welham - Chair

Councillors:	Terence Carter	Siân Dawson
	Kathryn Grandon	Lavinia Hadingham
	Alastair McCraw (Co-Chair)	Mary McLaren
	David Muller	Adrian Osborne
	Keith Scarff	

In attendance:

Officers: Assistant Director - Customer Services (SW)
Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer (EY)
Corporate Manager - Customer Operations (SL)
Senior Governance Support Officer (HH)

Apologies:

Councillor Jane Gould

49 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

49.1 There were no declarations made by Councillors

50 JOS/19/34 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 22 JUNE 2020

It was Resolved:

That with the following amendments the minutes of the meeting held on the 22 June 2020 be confirmed and be signed at the next practicable opportunity.

Paragraph 42.20 to add 'Councillor Grandon asked the following questions *which had been forward to her from a constituent*

Paragraph 42.39 to add: *in relation to how the income from CIFCO supported Gateway 14.*

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

None received.

52 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

53 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

54 JOINT COMPLIMENT, COMMENT AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

54.1 Samantha Lake, Corporate Manager – Customer Services provided the presentation, which was a result of a report brought to the Committee in December 2017.

54.2 Councillor McLaren asked if the new Customer Charter was ready and when this would be available for Members. She was advised that the New Customer Charter would be launched during the next few months and would be forwarded to Members in due course.

54.3 Councillor Muller requested a breakdown of the 402 complaints. The Corporate Manager responded she would provide this information outside the meeting.

54.4 Councillor Scarff enquired that as the number of physical face to face appointment were reducing, would this service continue or was there any plans to reduce such appointments. To which the Corporate Manager – Customer Services, responded that there was always a requirement for face to face appointments to support and enable customers to go online. Further work was being undertaken along-side community partners to assess and expand this type of support for customers further.

54.5 Councillor Welham queried if the face to face contacts were the same across all Customer Access Points, and the Corporate Manager – Customer Services, explained that these types of contacts were mostly made in Sudbury and Stowmarket, however, there was a general decrease for this service across all Customer Access Points.

54.6 Councillor Carter commented that the term ‘customers’ implied a matter of choice, however he felt that residents did not have any other options for contacting the Council other than through the Customer Access Points. He then referred to Mid Suffolk Disability Forum and arrangement agreed with regards to improving disability access to the building in Stowmarket.

54.7 He continued with questions and asked if there was a multitude of issues in one customer appointment, whether it that was logged as a singular issue or as separate issues.

54.8 The Corporate Manager – Customer Services responded to all the questions and said that all the improvements agreed with Mid Suffolk Disability forum had been implemented and included signage and appropriate wheelchair

turning space inside the office.

- 54.9 Multitude areas of concern would be logged separately to be dealt appropriately.
- 54.10 Councillor Dawson referred to the call waiting time of 2 minutes and 32 seconds and then the call abandonment rate of 14%. She enquired to what extent were the calls real abandonments. The Corporate Manager explained that call analysis was undertaken to understand the services provided and this also identified unresolved queries. The Corporate Manager offered to explain this further outside the meeting.
- 54.11 Councillor Welham advise that some callers were not confident enough in setting up items on-line such as direct debits and that community projects could help people to overcome this kind of complications.
- 54.12 Councillor Grandon asked if the recent failure of the telephone system had been rectified and examined, so that it would not happen again. The Corporate Manager responded that unfortunately the telephony system had failed for a couple of hours and that this had been the only time this had happened. It was a fault across the country and had be resolved by the provider Eight*Eight. The Council was working with the provider to ensure this did not happen again.
- 54.13 Councillor Grandon was surprised that so many customers attend the face to face pop-up events at the Customer Access Point in Hadleigh and asked if the figures included the recent months. She enquired further how support was provided for customers, who could not attend in person. The Assistant Director – Customer Services, responded that the figures did not include the Covid-19 Pandemic period. She reassured Councillor Grandon that support was provided to customers, who could not attend face to face appointment via telephone calls or email contact.
- 54.14 Councillor McCraw commented that an organisation that had a customer central focus would provide a better service and that this kind of attitude had to be part of the organisation's culture. He felt that currently the Customer Service team was providing this kind of focus. The approach to public face to face appointments and the way officers dealt with the public was important. He thought that Members could also be part of this and wondered if the Corporate Manager – Customer Services had any thoughts for how Members could be involved to improve customer services. The Assistant Director responded she would take this away to consider Member engagement throughout this process.
- 54.15 Members debated the issues and commented on various aspect of the presentation including:
- That despite that face to face contacts were reducing this service would remain in place, as an important support to customers, especially the elderly and those not confident with alternative contact options.

- That dual skilling of call operators was an excellent way to prevent customers being passed from person to person.
- That call operators offered assistance to residents and devoted time to help customers.
- That the matter of attitude, and importance of this, could not be stressed enough, and helped to ensure that the customers experience, and that of the call operator, was enjoyable and productive for all involved.
- That it was important to stress this crucial point of good attitude across the organisation, to Members and officer.
- That the Corporate Manager – Customer Services and the Customer Service team had exemplified good customer service and Members commended her and her team.

54.16 Some felt that the organisation should be mind-full of the use of the term 'customer' and that this should be alien to residents, others informed Members that this issue had been brought up and debated on numerous occasions.

54.17 Councillor Osborne reminded Members that previously the Councils' Customer Services provisions had been confusing and that this had been rectified during the last few years.

54.18 Members debated the recommendations, considering if an annual report should be presented to the Committee and if there was any value in continuing the scrutiny process.

54.19 Councillor Welham suggested that Members visited the Customer Access points in their respective Districts, however, due to the current Covid-19 Pandemic, the arrangements should only be made when this would be possible.

54.20 The Assistant Director for Customer Services advised Members that the Cabinet's Quarterly Monitoring Reports contained much of the information discussed and were available on the website. She advised that the Committee focused on single issues rather than an update on figures.

54.21 Councillor Welham thought that the presentation provided confidence in Councils' Customer Services.

54.22 Councillor McCraw suggested that an update should include information regarding face to face issues and how customers used the access points. He thought that statistics was the only way to gauge this.

54.23 Councillor Scarff felt that the way the update had been presented was a far more useful way for Members to understand this and that an Information Bulletin might be a better way to get this information to Committee.

54.24 All Members thought that the presentation had been excellent and that the Corporate Manager – Customer Services and the whole Customer service team should be commended for the work during the past three years.

54.25 They all agreed that visits should be arranged to the Customer Access Points when this became possible and that an Information Bulletin should be brought back to the Committee in July 2021.

54.26 Councillor Scarff proposed the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Muller.

It was Resolved:

1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Corporate Manager for Customer Services and commended the work of the Customers Service Team, noting the significant improvement of the work undertaken during the last three years.

1.2 That the Committee asked for visits to be arrange when appropriate to the Customer Access Points.

1.3 That an annual Information Bulletin be brought to the Committee in July 2021, focusing on face to face customers services performances.

55 REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2019/20

55.1 This item was withdrawn following a decision by the Chairs to review the item in a different format.

56 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

It was Resolved: -

That the Forthcoming Decisions List be noted

57 JOS/19/35 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

57.1 Members discussed the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Work Plans and the Chair asked that the *Planning Enforcement-Review of Service Transformation Work* and *Future Delivery Model for Public Realm* reports were added to the Babergh Work Plan for August 2020.

57.2 The meeting in August would be a joint meeting on the 24 August 2020.

57.3 Councillor McCraw reminded Members that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports were included in the upcoming Council Agendas for both Councils and he urged Members to read them.

57.4 He also thanked Officers, Members of the Council and particularly his Co-chair and Vice-Chair, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

57.5 He also extended thanks to Janice Robinson, Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office, Robert Carmichael, Mandy Smith for technical support and Henriette Holloway, Senior Governance Support Officer.

57.6 Councillor Welham concurred.

It was Resolved: -

That with the above amendments the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Work Plans be noted.

58 JOS/19/36 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

See above

The business of the meeting was concluded at 11.05 am.

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Chair