

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: COUNCIL	REPORT NUMBER: MC/20/12
FROM: Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee	DATE OF MEETING: 26 November 2020

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT TO MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL 26 November 2020

The Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee met on 4 and 21 September 2020 and considered the following items:

FUTURE DELIVERY MODEL FOR PUBLIC REALM

The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships provided a summary of the background for the Public Realm provision and presented a report which outlined the differences between the present delivery of Public Realm Service to the two districts. The current contract arrangements in Babergh are due to expire in October 2021 with no option to extend further. If new contract arrangements are to be developed, a large body of urgent work needs to commence very soon.

The Assistant Director explained that four different options for future delivery had been considered:

- Continue as at present with an outsourced service in Babergh and in-house in Mid Suffolk
- Bring the services together as a single in-house operation
- Outsource the service to both districts
- Establish a wholly owned trading company (LATCo) to deliver services to both councils

Members discussed the way that the service is delivered in Babergh via a contractor and the in-house delivery of the service in Mid Suffolk. Across the two districts, the service covers the following:

- Countryside, including grounds maintenance and emptying litter bins
- Amenity areas, parks and open spaces
- Street scene, including litter picking, fly tipping and mechanical sweeping
- A14 litter picking under a partnership agreement
- Playgrounds
- Public conveniences
- Car parks – grounds maintenance and cleansing only

Members discussed the quality of service provided to the separate councils. Mid Suffolk members spoke highly of the service delivery by the in-house team; some areas where improvements could be made if an in-house team covering both districts was the adopted option were identified. For instance, purchase of specialised equipment and providing a broader in-house arboricultural service would be cost-effective.

Babergh Members spoke highly of some aspects of the service provided by the contractor; however, flexibility and responsiveness is more readily achieved with an in-house service.

It was recognised that Mid Suffolk already own much of the equipment needed to deliver the service in their district and a depot at Stowmarket. Babergh would need to acquire some equipment, and other equipment could be acquired jointly for use across both districts. Capital investment in a depot from which to deliver the Babergh service would need to be considered. Contractor's staff providing the service in Babergh would need to be transferred.

Members expressed concerns that there was currently no set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to enable the efficiency and effectiveness of the service to be measured and asked that a set of KPIs be established for delivery of the service.

Members considered a tabulated assessment of the four options and agreed with the Assistant Director's recommendation that option 2 – joint in-house service delivery – be the preferred option. Members felt that in the longer term, option 4 – a wholly owned trading company to deliver the services to both districts - might be worthy of consideration.

The Joint Committee resolved: -

- 1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnership and Consultants for the detailed report and recommended to Cabinet that the Committee endorses Option 2 as the preferred option.**
- 2. That further work be undertaken in respect of developing the KPIs and contract management.**
- 3. That Option 4 (LATCO) be retained as an option for future consideration by both Councils.**

SCRUTINY AND FIRST REVIEW OF THE BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLANS (SEPARATE DOCUMENTS)

Christine Thurlow, Professional Lead - Key Sites and Infrastructure introduced the report and explained that the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan had been introduced by Government. Both Councils were to review the Action Plans in early 2020, however due to the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown period this had been delayed. It is mandatory for any Planning Authority without a 5-year housing land supply to produce an Action Plan. Both Councils now have a 5-year supply, but it is nevertheless considered beneficial to produce an Action Plan.

Members considered the report and officers responded to a number of general points and ward-related queries. The joint committee commended officers on the report and agreed that progress had been made. Developers had their reasons for not bringing sites forward to be developed, often to maintain a steady flow of properties for sale and to avoid flooding the market with properties of the same size and asking price. The Government White Paper would not be able to prevent this.

Members praised the methods used to analyse the data collected and the way the Action Plans were set out. Although no longer mandatory, there is a clear benefit to having an Action Plan. However, it was difficult to see how the Committee could make specific recommendations.

The Joint Committee resolved:

That the contents of this report and appendices together with verbal contributions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted and taken forward as part of the HDT Action Plan review (for both Councils) so that new HDTAPs produced for 2021 are informed in part by this scrutiny process.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY AND HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING REDUCTION STRATEGY, 2019-2024

These two separate strategies were adopted by both councils in March 2019 and cover the period 2019-2024.

The Homes and Housing Strategy sets out the councils' vision 'for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities. As part of that Strategy, the councils also adopted a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. When adopting the strategies, a commitment was made to report to Overview and scrutiny for an annual review and update to members.

The joint committee received a presentation from Heather Tucker, Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions who explained that the strategies had nine specific strategic aims and from these 93 action points had been identified. Delivery of the strategies is overseen by a project board made up of managers and senior officers from across the councils.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, officers were presented with an unexpected challenge. There had been an increase in people staying with friends and family (Sofa Surfers) or living with elderly relatives in the beginning of the year and who had been asked to leave as a result of the pandemic. This had created a high number of rough sleepers in the area and had increased the need for single accommodation. This challenge was met, and all rough sleepers and homeless people were accommodated very quickly. The Government will cover support costs and the councils have applied for additional funding from Central Government to enable further support for this group.

In response to concerns regarding evictions, the Corporate Manager responded that the eviction ban ended on 20 September 2020. The legislation was complicated and, in preparation, the team had worked with any known cases of impending evictions. The team was actively engaging with the individuals and had been successful to date, but there might be further unidentified cases. Private landlords were not able to share tenant information with the councils and may therefore not inform the councils if their tenants were at risk of being evicted. Both councils had made commitments not to evict any of their own tenants during the Covid-10 Pandemic.

Although the officer's report covered a wide range of housing services, much of the debate focussed on the councils' response to the pandemic. The committee praised the housing teams for their commitment and innovative approach when dealing with the many challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Joint Committee resolved:

- 1 That Members had reviewed and noted the contents of this report and appendices, along with verbal contributions.**
- 2 That Members thanked the officers for the report, presentation and the work conducted, especially at the commencement of Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions and the innovative approach to the work undertaken.**
- 3 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognise the importance of these strategies and stresses that housing continues to be recognised by Cabinets and Council as primary functions.**

BMSDC INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICE - A NEW MODEL FOR DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

The committee considered a report in confidential session, as detailed in the Local Government Act, 1972. This was in the public interest as it contained Sensitive and Confidential Information.

The joint committee, having previously examined this subject over the last two years and after careful consideration of the proposal, were pleased to support the Officer recommendation and sent our own recommendation to Cabinets.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Committee endorses Option 3, and the recommendations listed in Appendix 3.

Councillor Keith Welham
Chair of the MSDC Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26th November 2020