

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: COUNCIL	REPORT NUMBER: MC/20/18
FROM: Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	DATE OF MEETING: 21 January 2021

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT TO MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL

The Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee met on 23 November and 14 December 2020, and considered the following items:

REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report which included a list of outside bodies to which Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have appointed representatives. Various Members of the Committee explained their roles on bodies to which they had been appointed and a description of the work undertaken by the body.

Officers had identified bodies which no longer held meetings and the Committee agreed that those bodies could be removed from the list.

Each of the bodies on the list were considered; in the case of those bodies with a representative from only one of the councils, Members of Committee from that council made recommendations.

It was agreed to recommend that a reporting mechanism in the form of a template for Representatives on Outside Bodies be established to provide valuable information to members and the public, the information to be presented as part of an annual review of Member Representation on Outside Bodies to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was also agreed that support and training be established for members when appointed as representatives on Outside Bodies.

The following changes are recommended specifically to Mid Suffolk District Council:

No appointments to the Joint Waste Management Board or the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Policy Panel because these bodies no longer meet.

Consideration be given to the appointment of an observer to be appointed in respect of Stowmarket Citizens Advice in line with Babergh District Council, who have an observer appointed to attend meetings at Sudbury Citizens Advice.

The Committee discussed the East West Rail Consortium, to which representatives had been appointed but did not attend because the subscription required had not been paid. It was felt that, as the line passes through Mid Suffolk with four rail stations on the route and the need for greater use of rail in the future, payment of the subscription should be made by Mid Suffolk.

Additionally, it is recommended that both Councils consider withdrawal from the Haven Gateway Partnership as the Committee feels that the Partnership does not demonstrate value and relevance.

Specific recommendations to Council are set out in Agenda item 11b.

PLANNING ENFORCEMENT: REVIEW OF PROGRESS WITH PLANNING ENFORCEMENT SERVICE TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

The Chief Planning Officer introduced his report on the Planning Enforcement Service and explained the background to the project. Simon Bailey then gave some caseload statistics and explained how Covid-19 restrictions had necessitated a different way of working. He detailed the methods staff had used to review longstanding cases. He explained that businesses, especially in the retail and leisure sectors had needed to alter the way they operate in order to keep working under the Covid-19 restrictions.

John Mawdsley explained a new enforcement flow chart devised to show every step from initial report of an alleged planning breach through to final outcome. Alleged breaches are categorised high, medium or low and each category has a different timescale for investigation. Julie Havard detailed the work of the administration team and timescales for the various steps in the process. Each report of an alleged breach needs to be validated in a similar way to planning applications. Closer working with the Development Management team has been beneficial in progressing this transformation project.

The number of alleged breaches reported has increased year on year, but the increase in 2020 may have been partly due to people spending more time in their neighbourhoods due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. Not all reports are planning breaches and it is important to sieve these out at an early stage and inform the complainant.

Improved process mapping and workflow management have assisted officers to deal with high personal workloads.

Members of the Committee asked a large number of questions and were confident that the transformation project is already resulting in an improved service. On the question of resources, Members were assured that sufficient staff are in place to cover the enforcement workload.

Most cases can be resolved but, in exceptional circumstances, legal proceedings are necessary. These can be costly without any certainty of reimbursement of costs when cases are successful.

It was RESOLVED:

- 3.1 That the contents of this report be noted.**
- 3.2 That a further update on progress with service transformation work within planning enforcement be provided to the Committee at the conclusion of the work of the Joint Member/Officer Task & Finish Group recommended under 3.3 at the conclusion.**
- 3.3 That the Chief Planning Officer establish a Joint Member/Officer Task & Finish Group (comprising as a basis of the Members of the Joint Local Plan Member working group together with further Member input resolved with the chief planning officer in consultation with Political Group Leaders) to review and make recommendations on the Joint Local Planning Enforcement Policy (JLPEP) and that this group have regard to best practice and other examples of published local enforcement policies in that process of review.**