

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**
held in the Virtual Meeting on Monday, 18 January 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor: Alastair McCraw (Chair)
Adrian Osborne (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Sue Ayres Siân Dawson
Kathryn Grandon Bryn Hurren
Margaret Maybury Mary McLaren
Jan Osborne Alison Owen
Lee Parker

Ward Member(s):

Councillors: Sue Ayres
Bryn Hurren
Margaret Maybury
Jan Osborne – Cabinet Member for Housing
Alison Owen
Lee Parker
John Ward – Cabinet Member for Finance

In attendance:

Guest(s): Richard Walker – Parking Partnership Group Manager – North Essex
Parking Partnership

Officers: Senior Finance Business Partner
Chief Executive
Assistant Director - Environment and Commercial Partnerships
Corporate Manager - Waste Services
Assistant Director - Housing

Apologies:

Jane Gould

1 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

1.1 There were no declarations made by Councillors.

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

2.1 None received.

3 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

3.1 None received.

4 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

4.1 None received.

5 BOS/20/1 TOWN CENTRE PARKING IN BABERGH DISTRICT

5.1 Councillor McCraw made the Committee aware of the decision process for this item and asked for Members to remain apolitical.

5.2 Councillor Malvisi – Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report and stated that the report would be amended to take into account comments from this Overview and Scrutiny meeting and the debate on the petition at Council on 19 January 2021 before being taken to Cabinet in February.

5.3 Councillor Malvisi detailed the background for the report and explained that several car parks in Babergh were in need of repair to make them fit for purpose and that action plans were needed for bicycle parking and electric charging points.

5.4 The revised Car Parking Review would enable car parks in town centres to pay for upkeep of the car parking spaces and be financially viable for the future.

5.5 The Assistant Director - Environment & Commercial Partnerships detailed the main content of the report. She explained how the Car Parking Survey in February 2020 had been conducted and how the observations were made for the use of car parks in Hadleigh and Sudbury.

5.6 She stated that any changes should be based on strategic requirements and that parking tariffs were to be used as a tool to change parking behaviours to utilise the spaces available for parking in the town centres. The survey had identified several aspects including the number of cars parking, for how long and if there was enough appropriate parking available. However, a much wider strategic review would be needed but this survey was the first step.

5.7 Budgetary considerations had been included in the report and Option 2 was the preferred option. Currently the cost of maintaining and running the car parks was subsidised and the proposal endeavoured to cover the cost of the service and to reinvest into the service. An element of some of the income would be invested in sustainable travel.

- 5.8 The Chair thanked the Assistant Director and proposed possible areas of questioning to Members.
- 5.9 Councillor McLaren stated that the report was comprehensive, however, she felt that the subsidy of parking had been a major point for residents, and that the remainder of the report had been overlooked. She asked if this had been taken into consideration in preparing the report. She also asked how long Babergh had been subsidising car parking in Sudbury.
- 5.10 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships responded that the car parking service had always been subsidised and that the reaction to the subsidy issues had been anticipated but could not coherently be separated from the report.
- 5.11 Councillor Dawson asked why this report had been brought to Cabinet in January with little or no communication or consultation with Ward Members or other stakeholders.
- 5.12 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships explained that it had been a corporate objective for some time to review the parking provision within the Babergh District and that the report had been in progress since February 2020 and should have been presented to Cabinet in November 2020. However, this had been delayed due to the redeployment of staff as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. She added that the report was the initial phase to establish if the current car parking provision was fit for purpose. In addition, a need to address car parking issues in town centres had arisen and she assured Members that all stakeholders would be consulted in the wider strategy review.
- 5.13 Councillor Grandon asked how much research had been undertaken in Hadleigh and why the report had been deferred to January, as Christmas and the Covid-19 restrictions had made a wider debate difficult.
- 5.14 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships responded that the initial data survey had been completed by Alpha Parking, who had visited car parks on both weekdays and weekends to gather data including any data accessible from the ticket machines.
- 5.15 In response to the timing of the report, the Officer clarified that Covid-19 redeployment had affected the timing, however, she assured Members that members of the public and Councillors had forwarded responses to the report.
- 5.16 Councillor Grandon enquired why Dedham had been included as a good

example. When she had visited the town during the summer there appeared to be an issue with people trying to avoid parking charges by parking on the road instead of using car parks.

- 5.17 Richard Walker, Parking Partnership Group Manager – North Essex Parking Partnership, explained that the examples in the report illustrated that car parking charges did not discourage visitors and that the management of car parking tariffs improved parking in towns.
- 5.18 Councillor Dawson stated that the report did not address the issue of displacement of traffic and asked why this was not being delayed until after the wider review.
- 5.19 The Chair advised Members of the constraints of timing in relation to the budget.
- 5.20 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships clarified that on-street parking was not charged for and managed by Suffolk County Council. However, on-street parking depended on traffic regulations.
- 5.21 Councillor McCraw queried whether the suggested tariffs seemed low in comparison with parking in similar towns and asked if this was the case.
- 5.22 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships replied that she believed that these charges were modest in comparison.
- 5.23 Richard Walker explained that parking management tended to follow what the destination had to offer and that factors had been established by looking across nationally to similar places, type of stay, mode of use and congestion of the network. The introduction of tariffs was not solely about generating an income but also to manage parking issues in a sensible way for residents and visitors.
- 5.24 Councillor McLaren asked if the Shotley Peninsula had been reviewed as there was a shortage of car parks. Especially since Anglian Water had raised car parking charges at Alton Water, which appeared to have resulted in more people parking in quieter lanes and villages.
- 5.25 Councillor Grandon stated that Hadleigh and Sudbury were not comparable, but the suggested tariffs were comparable.
- 5.26 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships replied that the fee structures were different in Sudbury and Hadleigh in the recommended option.

- 5.27 Councillor Dawson questioned why the survey had been completed in February which was one of the worst times of the year for visitors to the towns.
- 5.28 Richard Walker replied that February was a quiet time of the year, however the car parks had still been full.
- 5.29 Councillor Adrian Osborne queried what would be the impact on the budget if changes were not made.
- 5.30 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships responded that the current parking budget was showing a £185,000 deficit, which did not include any funding for improving deteriorating car parks. Tables 4a and 4b in section 6.5 of the report detailed the current budget for parking services.
- 5.31 In response to Councillor McCraw’s question for the provision of 3 hours free parking, Richard Walker stated that it was unusual to have such a long period of free parking.
- 5.32 Councillor Dawson asked if enforcements had been considered and Councillor McCraw enquired further if the authority received any income from enforcements.
- 5.33 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships responded that a service level agreement with Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council were in place and that the income from car parking charges were unlikely to cover the cost of enforcement.
- 5.34 Councillor McLaren enquired if any comments had been received from residents, who would gain resident’s parking permits in Sudbury, to which the Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships replied that it was expected that views would be made under the wider review.
- 5.35 Councillor McCraw questioned if there was a capacity to amend the timeline in the report and were delays feasible within budget and practical constraints.
- 5.36 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships clarified that the budget would be a separate issue, however it would be feasible to delay the implementation date.
- 5.37 In response to Councillor Dawson’s questions relating to the alternative options explored, Councillor Malvisi referred to the alternative strategies’

options detailed in the report.

- 5.38 The Chair invited Members to debate the issues.
- 5.39 Councillor McLaren began the debate by raising the method of consultation and stated that some people felt that their views had been missed.
- 5.40 Councillor Adrian Osbourne stated that he understood that the three hours free parking was unsustainable and suggested that the implementation date should be amended to late 2021/early 2022. He added that residents being unable to park near their homes should be investigated as this impacted car parks.
- 5.41 Councillor Dawson agreed that factors of displacement needed reviewing and suggested that this report be deferred until after the strategic parking review.
- 5.42 Councillor Grandon thought that businesses and the public needed time to recover from the effects of the Covid-19 crisis before implementation of car parking charges. She thought that the Sudbury and Hadleigh tariffs should be different and that more work should be undertaken regarding the displacement issues.
- 5.43 Councillor McCraw felt that the tariffs suggested were reasonable and acceptable, however he suggested one hour of free parking instead of the half hour proposed. He thought that a comprehensive parking review was required in addition to considerations of residential parking permits.
- 5.44 Councillor Dawson enquired why Lavenham had been omitted and The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships explained that Lavenham Parish Council had approached Babergh District Council regarding the transfer of responsibilities for a number of services in Lavenham and that it was hoped that these talks would come to a conclusion soon.
- 5.45 Councillor McCraw suggested that recommendation 3.1 in the report be amended so that the commencement date for the strategy review be changed to quarter three and that the implementation date in recommendation 3.2 be amended to '*no earlier than 01 July 2021*'.
- 5.46 Councillor Grandon thought that engineering investments to car parks should not be delayed.
- 5.47 Councillor Dawson suggested delaying the implementation date until after the

Strategic Parking Review.

- 5.48 The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships confirmed that the average time for a Strategic Parking review was 12 to 18 months.
- 5.49 Councillor McLaren suggested one-hour free parking in town centres and an implementation date of no earlier than September.
- 5.50 Councillor McCraw proposed a recommendation of no change to recommendations 3.1, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 in the report, that the implementation date in recommendation 3.2 be amended to: '*be implemented no earlier than September 2021*' and recommendation 3.3 be amended to a variant of options 2 and 3 to: '*but includes that one hour free parking be provided in Hadleigh and Sudbury*', which was seconded by Councillor Osborne.
- 5.51 Councillor Grandon proposed an amended recommendation for 2 hours free parking and that the implementation date should be 6 months after the majority of the general public had received a Covid-19 vaccination.
- 5.52 The Monitoring Officer advised against using the Covid-19 vaccination as a cut off time for implementation and suggested implementation after the Strategic Review instead.
- 5.53 This was agreed by Councillor Grandon and she proposed that Recommendations 3.1 and 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 remained unchanged and that Recommendations 3.2 and 3.3 be amended as follows:
- 3.1 *That a comprehensive parking strategy review be undertaken for the whole District, which will commence in quarter two 2021/22 and that delegation be given to the Assistant Director for Environment & Commercial Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment.*
- 3.2 *That the parking management principles and interventions detailed in Appendix A **not be implemented until the comprehensive Parking Strategy review has been completed.***
- 3.3 *That additional parking controls or tariffs be applied to District car parks in accordance with Option 2, table 3, paragraph 6.3 of this report **but to include two hours free parking in Hadleigh and that free parking in Sudbury to be determined,** subject to the Statutory Order Process and requirements for consultation, in order to achieve availability and*

occupancy priorities outlined below.

- 3.4 *That residential parking permits be implemented in Mill Lane Car Park, Sudbury for overnight stays, subject to the Statutory Order Process and requirements for consultation.*
- 3.5 *That a proportion of income generated from chargeable parking will be allocated to the delivery of the sustainable travel agenda.*
- 3.6 *To resolve to delegate the decision to make changes to the parking orders in order to bring in the agreed changes to the AD for Environment and Commercial Partnerships so that appropriate actions can be undertaken in a timely manner.*

5.54 Councillor Dawson seconded the amended proposal, which was put to Members for voting.

By 2 votes for and 3 votes against

It was RESOLVED:-

That the vote for the amended proposal was lost.

5.55 Members returned to the substantive proposal, which was put to Members for voting.

By 3 votes for and 2 votes against

It was RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- 3.1 That a comprehensive parking strategy review be undertaken for the whole District, which will commence in quarter two 2021/22 and that delegation be given to the Assistant Director for Environment & Commercial Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment.**
- 3.2 That the parking management principles and interventions detailed in Appendix A be implemented no sooner than 1st of September 2021.**
- 3.3 That additional parking controls or tariffs be applied to District car parks in accordance with Option 2, table 3, paragraph 6.3 of this report but includes that one-hour free parking be provided in Hadleigh and Sudbury, subject to the Statutory Order Process and requirements for consultation, in order to achieve availability and occupancy priorities**

outlined below.

- 3.4 That residential parking permits be implemented in Mill Lane Car Park, Sudbury for overnight stays, subject to the Statutory Order Process and requirements for consultation.
- 3.5 That a proportion of income generated from chargeable parking will be allocated to the delivery of the sustainable travel agenda.
- 3.6 To resolve to delegate the decision to make changes to the parking orders in order to bring in the agreed changes to the AD for Environment and Commercial Partnerships so that appropriate actions can be undertaken in a timely manner.

6 BOS/20/2 DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

Note: The Committee adjourned between 11:50 am and 12:00 Noon.

- 6.1 Councillor Ward – Cabinet Member for Finance introduced paper BOS/20/2 and summarised the main points in the budget. Overall, the Council was in a good financial position for the year, however the prediction for the coming years for the Council's financial position required careful attention.
- 6.2 Councillor Grandon understood the seriousness of the Council's situation and asked why there was only a minimal increase for the brown bin collection. She felt that as it was an excellent service it could be increased further, and she believed an increase would not discourage current or new subscribers.
- 6.3 Councillor Ward responded that this had been reviewed earlier in the year. However, after comparison of garden waste collection charges with other authorities, it was felt that £2.50 was the right amount.
- 6.4 Councillor McLaren referred to page 47, bullet point 6.6, in relation to the Public Realm service, which was being brought in-house and asked if there were other services, which could be brought inhouse.
- 6.5 Councillor Ward responded that currently no other services had been identified.
- 6.6 Councillor McLaren then queried the use of external consultants and Councillor Ward explained that external consultants were only used when necessary to provide specialism and skills for specific projects, which the Council's officers could not provide.
- 6.7 Councillor Dawson referred to the service charges for Endeavour House and that the rental income in the commercial market had come down. She

questioned why the service charge for Endeavour House had increased by £43K.

- 6.8 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources clarified that when the Council entered the rental and service charges contract with Suffolk Country Council (SSC) it included planned increases. However, as a result of the current situation an ongoing conversation with SCC for a reduction in service charges was being conducted as SCC had seen a reduction of overhead charges. However, there were still fixed overheads included in the charges and the Council had agreed to increases when the agreement was signed with SCC.
- 6.9 Councillor A. Osborne thanked the Finance team for putting together a balanced budget in difficult circumstances.
- 6.10 Councillor McCraw queried the £404K surplus forecast for this year, achieved by using the New Homes Bonus, Section 31 Grant and Rural Service Delivery Grant, and he compared this figure with the £381K in the reserves and asked if consideration had been made to not using the reserves and have a smaller surplus.
- 6.11 Councillor Ward responded that the reserves were earmarked for specific service areas. He added that the New Homes Bonus was reducing every year, however, the new reserves were used for the Council's priorities such as the biodiversity commitment for the coming years.
- 6.12 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources added that the reserves were used to fund particular service areas such as homelessness. The Council received funding for homelessness on an annual basis and this funding was put into the reserves and was drawn upon when required to fund homelessness services.
- 6.13 Councillor Grandon queried the £88K increase in vehicle running costs and asked if this was part of the project to become carbon neutral and if so when would this be balanced.
- 6.14 Councillor Ward explained that this was the price difference between the cost of diesel and HVO and would be an ongoing cost. This was a consequence of the Council's dedication to climate change.
- 6.15 Councillor Dawson asked for details for the returns on the investment funds.
- 6.16 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that these investments were still paying positively to the Council and that details would be presented to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee (JASC) next week. The investment funds were providing a reasonable return to the Council, helping the Council's budget position.
- 6.17 Councillor Dawson asked if a summary of the investment funds could be provided to all Members.

- 6.18 Councillor McCraw stated that as a member of JASC he could confirm that the investment funds returns were meeting expectations.
- 6.19 Councillor McLaren supported the above comments and stated that the matter of ethical investments would be raised at the next JASC meeting.
- 6.20 Members debated the budget issues including that the budget had been presented to all Members at several briefings before coming to committee and that it was a fairly neutral but balanced budget, including a small increase in Council Tax, of which the Council received 10% of the total amount collected. It was noted that a deficit was forecast for the next three years.
- 6.21 Members commended the Assistant Director and the Finance team on the General Fund Budget for 2021/22 and Four-year Outlook.
- 6.22 Members debated the recommendations to Cabinet and Councillor McCraw proposed that the Committee commended recommendation 3.1 and 3.2, with the exception of the matters relating to the parking item discussed previously.
- 6.23 Councillor A. Osborne seconded the proposal.

By 3 votes for, 1 vote against and 1 abstention.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2 in the report to Cabinet, with the exception of any effects made in relation to the parking matter which has been debated at the meeting today.

7 BOS/20/3 DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2021/22 BUDGET AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

- 7.1 Councillor Ward – Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced paper BOS/20/3, and summarised the main points of the report to Members.
- 7.2 Councillor Grandon asked for a clarification of the service charges for sheltered housing tenants and what was included in the increase of 69 pence per week.
- 7.3 Councillor J. Osborne – Cabinet Member for Housing responded that the new residents in the de-sheltered houses had been offered to continue the same service as the sheltered houses at a cost. For the sheltered sites the services remained the same.
- 7.4 The Assistant Director – Housing, added that the service was a wraparound service and included Health & Safety and a warden on-call system and utilities costs which was all included in the service charges. A review would

be brought to Cabinet later in the year. The 69 pence increase paying for increase in utility charges.

- 7.5 Councillor Grandon asked how many tenants live in the Council's sheltered accommodations and the Assistant Director- Housing response approximately 450 tenants but he would provide a more detailed response outside of the meeting.
- 7.6 Councillor McLaren referred to the national reports of thousands of council houses standing empty and asked if an update could be provided for the number of empty houses and garages across the District.
- 7.7 The Assistant Director – Housing responded that the demand for garages was higher in some area while other areas had a low demand. There would be a project around the consideration of strategic sites and the use of sites in the long term in due course. There was a turnover of houses becoming empty as tenants moved and the property had to be maintained between tenants. There was also a review of empty garage sites, some of which might be under consideration for redevelopment.
- 7.8 Councillor McLaren asked if the Council would provide 'pods' for rough sleepers, similar to Ipswich Borough Council.
- 7.9 The Assistant Director – Housing responded that this came under the General Fund Budget, but he reassured Members that the Council had made every effort to ensure that rough sleepers had been provided with accommodation. This could be either in the Councils own accommodation or in B&B and hotel accommodation in which the Council currently housed rough sleepers as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Cabinet had considered the options and made the decision that hotel accommodation was the best option, based on a business case, and was more cost effective and flexible for the Council.
- 7.10 Councillor Jan Osborne added that some properties might appear to be empty when a resident has gone into temporary care as the property had to remain available as stated in the tenancy agreement until the resident went into permanent care.
- 7.11 Councillor McCraw asked when the last time was the Council had increased the council housing rent and he referred to the increase of 1.5% in recommendation 3.3 in the report.
- 7.12 The Assistant Director - Housing responded that the council housing rent had been increase last year based on the CPI, which was the first year of the new Government rent standards. However, prior to this Council had for the previous five years been obliged to reduce rents. He did not have the figure for Babergh available, but Mid Suffolk District Scrutiny Committee members had compared and contrasted figures for last week for 2015/16 and 2021/22, and drawn the conclusion that the rent increase was on average 11pence higher now than 6 years ago.

- 7.13 In response to Councillor Ayres' comments regarding the repairs on Minden Road in Sudbury the Assistant Director – Housing responded that the repair had been for fire safety and environmental issues, as agreed with the stakeholders involved there, and had been long overdue.
- 7.14 Councillor Grandon asked if any of the Council's properties had any of the combustible cladding which was discussed in the current news and the Assistant Director – Housing confirmed that there were no high rises in the area and none of the council's housing had any of the combustible cladding applied.
- 7.15 Members briefly debated the issues and congratulated the Assistant Director – Housing, the Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions and the Housing team on the work undertaken, problems resolved and the work they have achieved.
- 7.16 Councillor Grandon proposed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the Recommendations in the Report, which was seconded by Councillor Dawson.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports Recommendations 3.1 to 3.7 in the Report to Cabinet.

8 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Forthcoming Decisions List be noted.

9 BOS/20/4 BDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

It was Resolved: -

That the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan be noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 1:45 pm.

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Chair