

BABERGH DISTRICT
COUNCIL
ANNUAL REPORT
2020/21

Overview & Scrutiny



BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2020/21

When the Committee produced its Work Plan for 2020/21, we were aware of the pandemic and the need to meet virtually, but we could not have predicted that we would not be able to meet face to face at all during the year. It is a great credit to Officers that meetings were held using MS Teams and most of the work, which we had planned has been completed.

Most of the meetings held during the year have been joint meetings with Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Keith Welham (Chair of Mid Suffolk 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 the content of reports and information bulletins scheduled for future meetings and, where relevant, what data could be made available to assist scrutiny of the topics in the Work Plan. The meetings also afforded an opportunity to look at early draft reports and discuss whether to invite outside witnesses who might provide information to assist 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 Cabinet or Council, presentations of important matters by senior officers and witnesses from outside the two authorities. and information bulletins requested by the Committee. Our statutory requirements as a committee were all met. Details of the topics scrutinised, together with recommendations for future actions, and the value that we believe the process added are included in the body of this report.

I would like to thank Henriette Holloway, Senior Governance Officer – Committee Services, Jan Robinson, Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office, and Emily Yule, Assistant Director for Law and Governance for their invaluable input and support throughout the year. This was particularly essential in a challenging year. Of the committee itself, Adrian Osborne the Committee Vice Chair and all the members showed their commitment throughout. The same applies to Keith Welham, the Mid Suffolk co-Chair, his Vice Chair Keith Scarff, and the Mid Suffolk members with whom we worked. Any differences in approach and experiences proved to be a positive benefit in all our work, providing other insights.

Although the massive pressures on staff during the year meant that some reports had to be delayed or could not be provided in full, at all times officers provided clear and concise responses to requests for information, as well as the fullest reports possible. All of them and their teams should be thanked, and not just for this part of their roles.

Looking ahead to 2021/22, committees will be back meeting in Endeavour House, initially in a socially distanced manner. We have produced a Work Plan for the new Municipal Year, which can be found towards the end of this Annual Report. As both Councils recover 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'.

Alastair McCraw

May 2021

Chair, Babergh Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Co-Chair, Babergh & Mid Suffolk Joint Scrutiny Committee

MEMBERS OF THE BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2020/21



Cllr Alastair McCraw – Chair



Cllr Adrian Osborne – Vice-Chair



Cllr Siân Dawson



Cllr Jane Gould



Cllr Kathryn Grandon



Cllr Mary McLaren

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 and 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 has been 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 and can make 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 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 GOVERNANCE AND 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 people, who actively engage in the scrutiny function so as to drive improvement. Areas are reviewed in an a-political atmosphere.
4. Scrutiny drives improvements in public services. Good scrutiny improves the quality of life by undertaking strategic reviews of corporate policies, plans, performance and budgets.

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

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, Annual Council was held in September 2020 and Members agreed to defer any training to the next municipal year due to lockdown restrictions and time constraints.



THE ORGANISATION OF THE 2020 - 2021 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 items on the Work Plan are the Information Bulletins, brief updates on topics, areas of interest or fact-finding pieces of work for items the Committee may wish to scrutinise in the future.

COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT 2020/21

In March 2020 the Covid-19 Pandemic saw the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings suspended for a couple of months. The Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 23 March 2020 was declared inquorate, as Members were unable to attend due to the restrictions of the national lock-down. The following two scheduled committee meetings on the 16 April and 18 May 2020 were also cancelled, as the national lockdown continued. By June 2020 the Council resumed the meeting of Committees via a virtual meeting set-up system and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees continued.

The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee held an additional Committee in February 2021 to consider a review of the validation of a petition in accordance with the Councils Petitions Process and also considered a Call-in in March 2021.

However, the pre-empting of issues before going to Cabinet has generally prevented unnecessary Call-ins during this year. The Scrutiny Committee's function as a critical friend has worked well for Babergh 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.

The Committee is continuing to work jointly with Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in 2020/21 most meetings were joint as the Committees were scrutinising identical topics. This is partly a result of previous years' positive experiences and partly due to 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 has benefitted from 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 on 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.

The Work of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21

1. JOINT COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

In July 2020 the Joint Committee received a presentation of the Joint Compliment, Comment and Complaints Policy, which had been requested by the Committee, as a result of a report brought to the Joint Committee in December 2017. Members' main concerns were how residents accessed customer services, response times to enquiries and face to face contact for those, who needed support accessing the service provided for residents. Generally, Members were satisfied that the Customer Service Centre were providing a good service to residents, that the policy was sound and that complaints were dealt with in a timely manner.



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 arranged, 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 customer services performances.

VALUE ADDED

Since the first presentation of the Compliment, Comment and Complaints policy in 2017, the Customer Service Team have reviewed their service provision and have subsequently implemented changes, including the introduction of a new software programme for the management of customer contacts. The scrutiny of the customer service provision and the changes in customers' interactions with the Councils, satisfied Members that the Customer Service Team provides a sound and robust service for residents in the District.

2. FUTURE DELIVERY MODEL FOR PUBLIC REALM

In September 2020 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee held an additional Committee meeting to receive a report from the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships. The purpose of the report was for the Committee to consider the options for bringing the Public Realm service in-house for Babergh District Council and to maintain the current in-house service for Mid Suffolk District Council. Members' concerns included the impact on the service provided to communities and residents, the cost to the Councils and the consequences for staff employed by the current provider for Babergh District Council. In addition, some Members raised concerns for transfer of land to the Council from developers and the maintenance of the significant number of small areas of public land in villages and rural areas. Members considered the proposed options for Public Realm and the measures put in place to manage an in-house service. They also discussed that there currently were no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the services against and asked that these be established. They agreed that currently Option 2, a joint in-house service delivery, was the preferred option, however Option 4 should also be considered as a long-term solution.

RESOLVED



- 1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships 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.**

VALUE ADDED

Members of both Councils had expressed concerns regarding bringing the Public Realm Service in-house and the consequences of making this a shared service. The Committee was able to scrutinise the proposed options, including the budget arrangements and identified issues that required to be resolved in the contract management of the service.

3. SCRUTINY AND FIRST REVIEW OF THE BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLANS

The Committee met again later in September and considered the annual report for the Housing Delivery Test Action Plans (HDTAP) for both Councils. The Professional Lead – Key Sites and Infrastructure provided the introduction. This report should have been presented to the Committee in March 2021, however due to the Covid-19 Pandemic the report had been deferred. It was mandatory for any Planning Authority without a 5-year housing land supply

to produce an Action Plan. Both Councils now had a 5-year supply, but it was nevertheless considered beneficial to continue to produce an Action Plan.



development sites.

The updated report and appendices were scrutinised by Members and questions were raised including the level of 5-year housing land supply and the delivery of sites by developers, outstanding planning permissions, engagement with developers and communities and target figures for the housing supply. Other issues debated were the delivery of bungalows, affordable housing and stalled

RESOLVED



That the contents of the 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.

VALUE ADDED

Housing delivery in relation to the 5-year housing land supply has been a challenge for the Councils in the past and both Overview and Scrutiny Committees have considered reports in relation housing land supply. Previously scrutiny of the HDTAP formed part of fulfilling requirements from Central Government, whilst this was not a requirement in 2020, the Committee had asserted that the established process continues to maintain openness and transparency for both Councillors and the public.

4. 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 covered the period 2019-2024.

The Homes and Housing Strategy set 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.

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee also received a report and presentation from the Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions. Both Councils had adopted a Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and the report reviewed and updated Councillors on the progress and the performance of the strategy. This year Councillors' main concerns were the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on homelessness, rough sleepers, sofa surfers and temporary accommodation provision. Members debated the impact on the services provided by the Councils and areas which still needed to be addressed in the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy. Generally, Councillors were reassured that the services provided by the Housing Team and the work undertaken with other authorities and partners delivered the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy to the action points set out in the strategy.

RESOLVED ✓

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

VALUE ADDED

The scrutiny of the report and the presentation indicated that the strategies were robust, and that the delivery of services had been met despite the difficult circumstances of 2020. The Committee was satisfied that residents received a good standard of support and Members thanked the Housing Team for the effective response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

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

This report was presented in a closed session to the Committee, as the area of concern related to the delivery of the independent living service, the impact on service users and the financial implications for implementing the operational model. Councillors' concerns included the availability of resources to deal with the back log occupational therapy assessments, collaboration between the service providers and authorities and the provision for communication and information for residents and communities.



RESOLVED ✓

That Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Committee endorse Option 3, and the recommendations listed in Appendix 3, to create an in-house Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Independent Living Service.

VALUE ADDED

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee had previously raised concerns for the service provider for the Disabled Facilities Grants and the availability of occupational therapy services. The scrutiny of the proposed new model ensured that these areas had been considered and that plans had been put in place to address the issues in the new model for Disabled Facilities Grants and would provide an improved service to residents.

6. REVIEW OF OUTSIDE BODIES



In November 2020 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised Representation on Outside Bodies. The report was presented by the Corporate Manager for Law and Governance. This was a scrutiny process which had started in 2019 and which had resolved that an annual review of Representation on Outside Bodies should be conducted. Members reviewed each Outside Body separately, supported by witnesses who attended the various Outside Bodies meetings. This generated a good debate and identified several organisations which no longer required member representation.

Councillors voted as sovereign authorities for the recommendations, which included training for those who were to represent the Councils on the Outside Bodies and annual updates from Representatives. The recommendations were presented to each Council and noted.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Councils named that the following appointments to Outside Bodies, no longer requiring representation, be removed from the appointments made, based on the information received.

Babergh District Council

Babergh Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum

East West Rail Consortium

Joint Waste Management Board

Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Policy Panel

Suffolk Rail Policy Group

Mid Suffolk District Council:

Joint Waste Management Board

Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Policy Panel

- 1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that both Councils consider withdrawal from the Haven Gateway Partnership as the Committee feels that the Partnership cannot demonstrate Value and relevance.
- 1.3 That Babergh District Council considers that a member representative be appointed to Home-Start in line with Mid Suffolk District Council
- 1.4 That consideration be given by Mid Suffolk District Council that an observer be appointed to Stowmarket Citizens Advice in line with Babergh District Council.
- 1.5 That a reporting mechanism in the form of a template for Representatives on Outside Bodies be established to provide valuable information to Members and Public, the information be presented as part of the annual review of Member

Representation on Outside Bodies to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 1.6 That support and training be established for Members when appointed as representatives on Outside Bodies.**
- 1.7 That Mid Suffolk District Council considers taking up the appointment of a representative to the East West Rail Consortium by making a payment of the subscription fees required for full participation.**

Omitted recommendation (Agreed by Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2021)

That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Mid Suffolk District Council approaches the Suffolk Disabilities Forum to establish whether formal councillor representation on the forum would be appropriate and possible and that any appointment to the Suffolk Disabilities Forum be made by resolution of the Full Council.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee identified several Outside Bodies, which no longer required Member representation and the debate revealed that further information was required for some of the organisations, such as subscription fees. The Committee reiterated the need for representatives to report back and update all Members on the work of the Outside Bodies.

7. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT – TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

In December 2020 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the progress on the on the transformation project for planning enforcement, which included a new software, new processes and training of officers. The Chief Planning Officer provided the background for the transformation project and then the Officers for Heritage and Planning Compliance, the Performance and Quality Officer and the Business Practice Manager provided a progress update for their particular area. As working practices had changed during the Covid-19 Pandemic, Planning Enforcement team had been dealing with various complaints relating to building sites and delivery restrictions. Members' concerns included a backlog in enforcement cases, complaints process, resources and planning application processes. Public perception of planning enforcement was also an issue. The number of alleged breaches reported had increased year on year, but the increase in 2020 might have been partly due to people spending more time in their neighbourhoods due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. Not all reports were planning breaches and it was 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. Most cases could be resolved but, in exceptional circumstances, legal

proceedings are necessary. These can be costly without any certainty of reimbursement of costs when cases were successful.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 That the contents of the report be noted.**
- 1.2 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.**
- 1.3 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.**

VALUE ADDED

Members were able to scrutinise the Planning Enforcement Transformation Project in detail and gain insight into the work undertaken by the Planning Enforcement Team. The establishment of the Task and Finish Group added value to the Joint Local Planning Enforcement Policy and an update will be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.

8. TOWN CENTRE PARKING IN BABERGH DISTRICT

The Town Centre Parking in Babergh District report had been deferred by Cabinet to allow scrutiny to take place before an executive decision was made.

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Environment, who stated that the final report to Cabinet would be amended to take into account comments and recommendations from both this Scrutiny meeting and a Petition to Council to be heard on 15 February 2021.

The Assistant Director-Environment & Commercial Partnerships detailed the main content of the report, describing the Survey work carried out and the strategic objectives. Budgetary considerations included highlighting the need to cover service costs, reinvestment, and investment into sustainable travel. Members questioned issues relating to the effective subsidy provided, the data survey, examples given and evidence of parking behaviour, traffic displacement, timing of the report with regard to the budget, differences in proposed tariffs for Hadleigh and Sudbury, the current deficit in the Parking budget, the length of current free parking provision at 3 hours, parking enforcement, parking permits, the omission of parking in Lavenham within the report and the reasons for that, the proposed timeline and the implementation date, and alternative strategies.

Members' concerns related to the length of time for free parking in Hadleigh and Sudbury and the date of implementation, effects on business, and recovery from Covid-19 and it was suggested that implementation could be delayed until after the strategic parking review. It

was clear that a comprehensive parking strategy review was required, that residential parking permits were to be implemented and that a proportion of income generated should be allocated to sustainable travel.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 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.**
- 1.2 That the parking management principles and interventions detailed in Appendix A be implemented no sooner than 1st of September 2021.**
- 1.3 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.**
- 1.4 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.**
- 1.5 That a proportion of income generated from chargeable parking will be allocated to the delivery of the sustainable travel agenda.**
- 1.6 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.**

VALUE ADDED

Cabinet had asked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake scrutiny of the Town Centre Parking in Babergh District, as it had become a controversial topic. The Committee provided a forum for robust questioning and debate of the proposed implementation of parking charges in Sudbury and Hadleigh and Cabinet received the Recommendations from the Committee and incorporated them into Cabinet resolutions.

9. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the draft General Fund budget in January 2021, which this year had been affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic and lock down restrictions. However, Central Government had provided funding to mitigate some of the

incurred costs associated with the Pandemic. After a substantial introduction by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Members scrutinised aspects of the budget such as bringing further services in-house, use of external consultants, Endeavour House service charges, the allocation of reserves, HVO vehicle running costs, investment returns, and future consideration of ethical investments. The debate included that the budget had been presented to all Members at several briefings before coming to Committee. Members noted that a deficit was forecast for the next three years.



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 had been debated at the meeting today.

VALUE ADDED

The scrutiny of the General Fund Budget supports the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a critical friend and holding the executive to account. Members highlighted areas of concern and lack of clarity for Officers to address before the budget was presented to Cabinet and Council.

10. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2021/22 BUDGET AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to scrutinise the Housing Revenue Account Budget at the January meeting and the Cabinet Member for Finance provided a detailed introduction to the Committee. Members questioned and debated Service charges for sheltered housing tenants, the number of tenants affected, empty council houses and garage sites, provisions for rough sleepers, previous council house rents in recent years, specific repairs and the reasons for them. Concerns were also raised regarding combustible cladding on Council housing. The Assistant Director – Housing confirmed there were no high-rises in the area and none of the Council’s housing had any such cladding applied.

Members 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 had achieved.

The Committee endorsed the HRA budget.

RESOLVED



That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22 and Four-Year Outlook but asks that Officers and Cabinet Members take into consideration the comments made at this meeting, when submitting the budget for consideration at the Cabinet and Council meetings in February 2021.

VALUE ADDED

All Members had received several briefings for both the General Fund Budget and the HRA Budget before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however Members ensured that the HRA Budget was sound and would provide the best services for the Council's residents.

11. REVIEW OF LOCAL CITIZENS ADVICE (LCA)

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee had scrutinised the Local Citizens Advice service in August 2019 and had recommended to Cabinet a three-year rolling funding for the LCA. Cabinet had approved the funding.



The Committee had invited the following:

Nicky Willshere, Chief Officer – Citizens Advice Ipswich
Simon Clifton, Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice
Colleen Sweeney, Chief Officer – Sudbury and District Citizens Advice

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the LCA representatives in February 2021, as part of the scrutiny process of the services provided by the LCAs in the Districts. The Corporate Manager for Communities outlined the cooperation between the Councils and the LCAs. The Chief Officers from each of the participating LCAs presented the past year's statistics and outlined the services provided in each area. Each LCA had maintained services and support to residents despite the Covid-19 Pandemic. There had also been a change in the Mid Suffolk District catchment area, as Diss, Thetford and District LCA were now mostly providing services to residents outside Mid Suffolk District. This had implications for the funding arrangements which were being addressed. Members' questioning included recruitment of staff and volunteers, services provided to both towns and rural areas and funding. Members were keen to ensure that the funding was index linked and the LCA provided support to residents and by doing so alleviate some of the pressure on the services provided by the Councils.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied and notes the content of the Report and commend the work as of the Mid Suffolk Local Citizens Advice, Ipswich Citizens Advice and Sudbury and District Local Citizens Advice.**
- 1.2 **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirms the previous resolution made at the last review that the three-year rolling funding arrangements review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis, finances permitting, as a measure of importance we attach to ongoing LCA funding.**

VALUE ADDED

The continued scrutiny of the Local Citizens Advice provides Members with an opportunity to identify the issues for the LCAs in the Districts and how they relate to the services provided by the Council. The Council provides funding to the LCAs in the Districts and whilst the services provided by the LCAs are in addition to the services of the Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the funding is consistent and maintained. Both parties benefit from the scrutiny process and an additional benefit has been a broader understanding of the services provided by the LCAs.

12. INFORMATION BULLETIN – COMMUNITY GRANTS REVIEW UPDATE

Members also received an Information Bulletin in the form of a Presentation provided by the Corporate Manager for Communities. A Grants Review Task and Finish Group and been working with the Communities team to review the grants process.

VALUE ADDED

This Information Bulletin provided Members with an update on issues which could be considered for scrutiny in due course.

13. INFORMATION BULLETIN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 18 JANUARY 2021

This Information Bulletin contained responses to questions raised at the January Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair had requested that they be collated and included in the Agenda for information only.

14. VALIDATION OF PETITION

This meeting was called in February 2021 to review the validation process for a Petition submitted on the 11 January 2021. The Petition was ruled invalid, and the Lead Petitioner had requested a review under paragraph 7 of the Council's Petition Scheme. Members agreed the proposed process for reviewing the petition.

RESOLVED



That the Protocol for reviewing the Procedure be approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee received statements from the Lead Petitioner and the Corporate Manager for Governance and Civic Office. The Lead Petitioner was supported by the Mayor of Sudbury

and Sudbury Town Councillor Sue Ayres. The review followed the agreed process and Members' concerns related to the advice provided to the Lead Petitioner by Officers, the suggestion to allow the Lead Petitioner to address Council and subsequently rejected by the Lead Petitioner, the method used to validate the names in a petition and the collection of signatures during the Covid-19 Pandemic lock-down period. Members felt that the Lead Petitioner had employed tremendous efforts in gathering the signatures for the Petition, however they could only review the petition process, which had resulted in the Petition being rejected and they found that the process had been followed satisfactorily and that the petition had been dealt with adequately.

RESOLVED

That the Council followed the Validation Process correctly and that the Petition was dealt with adequately and that the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Constitution Working Group that the Petition Scheme only be reviewed and recommendations be reported to Full Council (in line with the comments made at this Committee).

VALUE ADDED

This was the first time that the petition process had been scrutinised in relation to a rejected petition and the Committee approached the topic objectively and questioned in detail all parties involved.

15. TO REVIEW THE ACTIVITY OF THE WESTERN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (WSCSP)

In March 2021 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the WSCSP, as part the Council's statutory requirement to sit as the Crime and Disorder Panel. Due to the increased workload in respect of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Members received a truncated report from the Corporate Manager for Communities. However, the witnesses invited provided substantial updates for Members to consider. The witnesses were:

Councillor Joanna Spicer – Chair of WSCSP and Suffolk County Councillor

Clair Harvey – Suffolk County Council Specialist Lead - Public Health

Janine Wratten - The Superintendent for Suffolk Constabulary

Jane Reason - Albany Pupil Referral Unit

Councillor Derek Davis – Babergh representative on the WSCSP

Councillor Sarah Mansel – Mid Suffolk representative on the WSCSP

Councillor Spicer provided an introduction for the role and work of the WSCSP, after which each witness supplemented with further information for their specific area and addressed in turn the five identified priorities, which the WSCSP focussed on; Criminal Exploitation;

Violence against Women and Girls, Men and Boys; Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHA); Hate Crime and Prevent.

Members asked questions relating to all five priorities and in addition concerns were raised regarding hard-to-reach victims in rural areas, anti-social behaviour, youth offenders, and increased violence against parents/carers, as a result of the long periods of lockdowns in 2020/21. There were also questions relating to drug offences, County Lines and exploitation of young persons as couriers for criminal activities.

The debate focused on the availability of reliable statistics and the inclusion of further details in the report. Members were also concerned that the Councils' own representatives updated all Members on the progress of the WSCSP. They also asked that the confidential WSCSP information pack was updated and distributed to all Members.



RESOLVED:



That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, having reviewed the activity of the WSCSP and noted the content of the officer's report, have the following observations:

That the previously prepared Confidential Member WSCSP information pack be prepared, updated and additional information added and distributed to all Members;

That arrangements be made for a briefing for Members of the Councils on the procedures, processes and the action plan in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour;

That the next annual review of the WSCSP to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the activity of partnership.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee scrutinises the WSCSP annually and this has added value not only to the questioning process, but also to the expectation for witnesses to provide intelligible analysis and evaluations against the priorities.

16. CALL- IN OF THE DECISION FROM THE MEETING OF THE BABERGH CABINET 11 MARCH 2021

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a Call-in for a Cabinet Decision for the Belle Vue site in Sudbury, after having agreed the scope of the call-in, Members heard statements from the Lead Signatory, two further signatories and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth.

The Lead Signatory stated that due process and consideration had not been followed and listed the issues on which the Call-in was based. The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth detailed the background for the report, the debate in Cabinet and the Cabinet Decision.

Members evaluated the evidence, and their concerns included the 123 Notice of the disposal of Council owned land, the redline which presented the land for sale, the bids submitted, the timing of the consultation period and the method of presenting the bids and that they had been presented in a closed session. After a statement read by the Monitoring Officer, which responded to many of the issues raised in the Call-in, Members debated the issues several Members expressed frustration that the item had not been presented to Council and some believed that not all relevant information had been provided to Members. After the debate the Lead Signatory and the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth summed up their evidence. However, Members agreed that the decision process for the Cabinet Decision had been followed correctly.

RESOLVED: 

That the decision be upheld and implemented immediately.

VALUE ADDED

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the home of the Call-in and as the Committee operates separately from the executive can provide a critical review of Cabinet decisions. As evidenced in this meeting questioning and debate can establish whether a sound process has taken place, ensuring that the Council is compliant with its Constitution and the statutory rules and regulations.

17. REVIEW OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2020/21



The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee completed the municipal year by scrutinising the work of the Committees during the past year to evaluate the processes and the lessons learnt. Observations and suggestions are then provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2021/22.

As this Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review takes place immediately before the Annual Councils in May it will not be possible to provide a summary of this scrutiny process at this stage.

The Work of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21

TOPIC	PURPOSE	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER	PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED TO COMMITTEE
24 May 2021 – JOINT - Chair – Cllr Welham				
Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21	Review of the work conducted throughout 2020/21 – Lessons learnt, improvements and achievements	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services Senior Governance Support Officer		
21 JUNE 2021				
Overview and Scrutiny Training for Members of the Committee	Training on the principles and approach to Scrutiny	Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office		
CIFCO Business Plan	To Scrutinise the Business Plan	Assistant Director for Assets and Investment	Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments	June 2020
Information Bulletin Public Realm	A review of management of public open space secured in relation to planning and the adoption policy	Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships	Cabinet Members for Environment and Commercial Partnerships	
19 JULY 2021				
Annual Review of Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy		Assistant Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing	

Customer Service Update	An Information Bulletin brought to Committee as a result of the presentation update on 20 July 2020, to include a general update but focusing on Face-to-Face customer services performance.	Assistant Director – Customer, Digital Transformations and Information Corporate Manager Customer Operations	Cabinet Member for Customer, Digital Transformations and Information	
23 AUGUST 2021				
20 SEPTEMBER 2021				
18 OCTOBER 2021				
22 NOVEMBER 2021				
Annual Review of Local Citizens Advice	To review the Funding Arrangements for LCA in the two Districts.	Assistant Director – Planning for Growth	Cabinet Member for Communities	
20 DECEMBER 2021				
17 JANUARY 2022				
Draft General Fund (GF) 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook	Scrutiny of the GF Budget for 2022/2023	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources Corporate Manager – Finance	The Leaders Cabinet Members for Finance	BDC 18 January 2021
Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Four - year Outlook	Scrutiny of the HRA Budget and Business Plan	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources Corporate Manager – Finance	The Leaders Cabinet Members for Finance	BDC 18 January 2021

21 FEBRUARY 2022				
Representatives on Outside Bodies	A review of the Representatives on Outside Bodies and an update on the work undertaken	Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office Senior Governance Officer		A review of the Representatives on Outside Bodies and an update on the work undertaken
21 MARCH 2022				
Crime and Disorder Panel meeting	The Committee conduct a scrutiny review of the SWSCP to fulfil the Councils Statutory requirements	Assistant Director – Sustainable Communities Community Safety Professional Lead - Communities	BDC Cabinet Member for Communities MSDC Cabinet Member for Communities	22 March 2021
25 APRIL 2022				
23 MAY 2022				
Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21	Review of the work conducted throughout 2020/21 – Lessons learnt, improvements and achievements	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services Senior Governance Support Officer		

The latest Overview and Scrutiny Workplans are on the Website and can be viewed on the following link:

[Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Workplan](#)

TOPICS IDENTIFIED FOR REVIEW BUT NOT CURRENTLY TIMETABLED



Underspend of Grants for bringing empty homes back into to use

A report to be brought to Committee for the effect of the underspending off grants for bringing empty homes back into use – **To be reviewed by the Chair in February/March 2021** NOTE: Whilst in emergency response mode SLT deemed this was not a high priority.



Crime and Disorder Panel meeting

Required to take place at least once a year, provisionally agreed to take place in **March 2022**.



Annual Review of Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy to be reviewed in **June/July 2021**



Customer Service Update July 2021 – an Information Bulletin brought to Committee as a result of the presentation update on 20 July 2020 to include a general update but focusing on Face-to-Face customer services performance.



Improving Access to the Private Rented Sector - Chairs to discuss the timing for bringing this to Committee.

Other topics identified:

- Home ownership review
- Suggestion: Scrutiny of ABS projects and policies – Suggested at the meeting on the 22 March 2021