

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: COUNCIL	REPORT NUMBER: MC/21/9
FROM: Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	DATE OF MEETING: 23 September 2021

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT TO MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL

The Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee met on 24 May and 28 June; and again on 19 July to complete the business from the June meeting which was adjourned when it became inquorate. The Joint Committee considered the following items:

24 MAY - REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2020/21

The Chair, Councillor McCraw, introduced the item and outlined the background for the annual review of the Committee. He referred to the appendices in the agenda papers and invited Members to make comments and observations on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees during 2020/21 and the Annual Reports.

Members first made a number of observations on remote meetings, concluding that they had worked well but were missing the interaction before the meetings. It was agreed that officers had provided tremendous support for Councillors before and during virtual meetings and generally during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some Members felt there was more pressure from attending remote meetings, due to technical issues. Both Chairs felt that chairing virtual meetings was more demanding than meetings in Endeavour House.

Remote meetings had worked well when the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had invited witnesses to attend, such as the Local Citizens Advice and the scrutiny of Representatives on Outside Bodies. Briefings were particularly suitable for remote meeting and saved time for both councillors and officers.

Members expressed concern that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were mostly guided by the Cabinet and Council for items to be scrutinised and that there is little feedback to the Committees from Cabinets and Councils. Also, whilst Joint meetings enabled a broader debate, they reduced the number of meetings held, which resulted in fewer items being scrutinised.

The Chair commented that both the Joint and sovereign Overview and Scrutiny Committees had held a large number of meetings, scrutinised most of the items on the workplans, and were among the hardest working committees of the Councils.

There were various views on the process of scoping of topics. Some Members felt that this was not an efficient way of approaching topics for scrutiny, as it was going over the same topic twice. The Monitoring Officer explained the benefits of scoping a topic and suggested that in the future officers could present a more completed scoping document to the Committee for consideration. It was agreed that Members needed training not just in scoping of topics but for scrutiny in general.

Members resolved that:

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the new Overview and Scrutiny Committees:

- 1.1 That pre-meetings of half an hour are adopted as standard practice;**
- 1.2 That officers work on a proposal for increasing the size of each committee to enable robust scrutiny for the sovereign committees;**
- 1.3 That a bespoke training session for committee members be held, encompassing all elements of the scrutiny function and taking into account the skills and experiences of individual members;**
- 1.4 That an increased use of a wider range of internal and external witnesses be adopted by the Committee;**
- 1.5 That an increased use of Task and Finish Groups be adopted by the Committee.**

28 JUNE - CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD) BUSINESS TRADING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21

Prior to the main report the Assistant Director - Assets and Investments explained that the Executive Summary had been provided to assist Members with the report. She drew the attention of members of the committee to paragraph 1.2 of her report:

1.2 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the following:-

- Does the current performance of CIFCO deliver good value to the councils?**
- Are the KPIs appropriate measures of performance?**
- Is the business plan robust and appropriate for the next 12 months?**
- Is their sufficient confidence in the management of CIFCO?**

Mid Suffolk District Councillor Peter Gould, Mid Suffolk Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments, presented the main report. He detailed the main points and developments for CIFCO identified in the report and advised that CIFCO now had a public website.

The four witnesses who were members of the CIFCO Board of Directors presented the essential details relating to the proposed work plan.

It was highlighted by the Chairman of the Board of Directors that the portfolio was well balanced and that the board was always looking to improve the value of the assets. He emphasised that despite a capital loss of £12.5m, Councils had to date received a net income of £5.5m.

Two written questions in relation to share allocation and registration were raised by a member of the public prior to Members' questions; these highlighted the importance that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be transparent and recognise that the public do watch the live stream and take an interest.

Member questioning included the value of shares, opportunistic investments, the location of the investments, late payment of interest, borrowing costs, reletting and refurbishment of properties, whether the KPI measures were appropriate and effective, debt collection start date, weighted average unexpired lease term, future targets for sustainability, the management fee and possible shortfall in repayments.

Members debated the issues and were re-assured by the details of the report.

Members considered the recommendation to make to Council and there was general agreement that the Committee thought the Business Plan was robust and that members had scrutinised the four bullet points with rigour.

Members resolved:

That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the four bullet points in paragraph 1.2 of the Executive Summary and that the Committee were satisfied that the CIFCO Capital Ltd Business Plan and Investment Plan for 2021/22 was robust.

28 JUNE - SCRUTINY AND REVIEW OF THE JOINT PARKING STRATEGY PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships introduced the report and informed Members that the timeline had changed, as an external consultant would be engaged to carry out parking surveys and other pre-consultation work. The pre-consultation period could now be concluded in the summer 2022 rather than December 2022.

Members welcomed the shortening of the timescale and were given an assurance that the new proposed date took account of the need for Cabinet and Council decisions.

Members raised current concerns about parking, including the need to take account of legislation and enforcement in respect of pavement parking. The needs of voluntary groups using the authorities' car parks will require careful consideration. Members welcomed the provision of electric vehicle charging points in rural areas but raised concerns about whether appropriate power supplies were available.

Other issues raised by Members included parking for vehicles for the disabled, park and ride facilities, emergency services, on-street parking in town centres, parking on verges in rural areas, car pooling, park and ride, park and walk, park and cycle, car park maintenance and the urgent need for resident car parking permit schemes.

In order to make an impact towards meeting climate change targets, the strategy should look for opportunities to influence motorist behaviour.

Members resolved:

1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report;

1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that, by employing consultants to carry out some of the identified tasks, the timeline can be amended, and requested that the final report be presented to Cabinet in June 2022.

1.3 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended that the following should be added to the list of stakeholders in paragraph 4.6 of the Officer's report:

- **Voluntary groups**
- **Emergency services**
- **Electricity supply companies and EV charging providers.**

And that the following topics should be considered:

- **Parking on pavements and verges**
- **Town centre on-street parking**
- **Impact of car park maintenance and management on climate change**
- **Park and ride, park and walk, park and cycle**
- **Hospital car parks**
- **Car pooling**
- **Opportunities for using the strategy to encourage walking, cycling and public transport.**

1.4 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognised that there was an urgent need for a resolution to resident parking permit scheme issues within both Districts and in doing so recognised that both Districts would have to consider potential financial commitments to such a scheme.

1.5 That work on this subject must be carried out within the Joint Parking Strategy.

Note: At the completion of the above item, the meeting became inquorate; only two Babergh representatives were remaining in the Chamber. The meeting was therefore adjourned and the remaining items discussed on 19 July.

19 JULY – QUESTION FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

A question received from Mr Morelli was read out. He made reference to legal challenges to planning decisions, in particular the judicial review brought by Boxford Parish Council. He asked that the Committee carry out a review of the work undertaken by the Shared Legal Service. The Chair indicated that this would be considered under a later item – Future Work Plans.

19 JULY – INFORMATION BULLETIN – LAND ADOPTION POLICY

The Corporate Manager for Strategic Property invited questions and comments on the Information Bulletin. Members raised questions and concerns about maintenance of open spaces on housing developments, maintenance of roadside verges, the scope of mapping software, maintaining an accurate record of open spaces and responsibility for maintaining them and the role of planning enforcement if open spaces are not properly laid out and maintained, during and after completion of new developments. The Corporate Manager said that the points raised would be taken into account as work proceeds on developing a Land Adoptions Policy.

19 JULY – INFORMATION BULLETIN – INSOURCING THE PUBLIC REALM SERVICE

The Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships outlined the work being undertaken to insource the service provided in Babergh, and provide an in-house service to both districts. Mid Suffolk Members agreed that the in-house service provided in that district is well run and would not wish its effectiveness to be diluted. Babergh Members outlined concerns about the current service provision in Babergh, which is provided under a contract which is nearing its end date.

The Assistant Director gave details of progress made and next steps required, including the transfer of contractor's staff to the councils. Further concerns were raised in respect of potential understaffing if operatives chose not to transfer but Members were assured that steps would be in place to hire staff at short notice if necessary.

19 JULY – TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR SCOPING A SCRUTINY OF THE PROVISION OF TRANSPORT IN THE DISTRICTS

The Chairman asked Members to consider setting up a Task and Finish Group to consider whether a scrutiny of provision of transport in the two districts would be of value. He said that, in both rural and urban areas, some residents have little or no access to public transport or volunteer schemes. Rather than include an item in the Work Plan and commence a review, he suggested that a Task and Finish Group be set up to consider whether such a review might be of value and what aspects the review might cover. The Group would report back to the Joint Committee and if it was then agreed that a scrutiny of the topic would be of value, a scoping exercise would be undertaken.

Members expressed strong views for and against setting up the Task and Finish Group; after debate, a proposal that the Group be set up was agreed. The Group will consist of the Joint Chairs and two other representatives of each council.

19 JULY – SCRUTINY WORK PLANS

Each Council has a separate work plan but most items are common to both and are therefore considered by the Joint Committee.

In response to the request from Mr Morelli, it was agreed that a review of the Shared Legal Service be included in the Work Plans for consideration at a future Joint Committee meeting.

The Work Plans are included as Appendices.

[Appendix A: Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan](#)

[Appendix B: Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan](#)