



# **Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23**

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An annual review of the work undertaken by Mid Suffolk District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2022/23

# Foreword

## By the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman

It has been an honour to serve another year as Chair of the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Joint Chair of meetings held with the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

After the uncertainty of the Covid pandemic, it has been good to hold all our meetings face to face. Our work has benefitted from the presence of Members and officers in the room together.

As in previous years, most of the meetings during the year have been joint meetings with the Babergh Chair and I sharing the Chairing role. Separate meetings have been held when items were relevant only to one of the two sovereign councils, for example scrutiny of the General Fund Budget and the Housing Revenue Account. Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also heard the call in of a Cabinet decision relating to a proposed housing scheme in Elmswell.

Our Work Plan for 2022/2023 included a number of topics which are scrutinised annually, and others which were chosen by Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Joint Committee. We have received presentations from senior officers, invited witnesses and received information bulletins. We have also benefitted from advice given by an invited panel of specialists in the review of some of the chosen topics. A summary of our discussions, together with our agreed recommendations and how we added value to the work of the Council, are included in the main body of this report.

Our meetings are planned at monthly Chairs' and Vice Chairs' virtual meetings, where we discuss with officers the content of reports and information bulletins which they will be presenting at upcoming committee meetings.

A Cabinet/Scrutiny protocol has been agreed and an action tracker introduced so that action taken by Cabinet in response to Committee recommendations can be more visible.

The work of scrutiny relies heavily on the commitment of officers, and we have benefited greatly from the guidance and support of a number of officers during the year, including Henriette Holloway, Jan Robinson, Emily Yule, and Bethany Webb. I would like to record my thanks to them and give special mention to Alicia Norman who has been the committees' lead support officer throughout the year. I am grateful too for the input and support of James Caston, our Vice Chair, and John Hinton, Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny, and all members of both Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

A draft Work Plan for 2023/24 can be found towards the end of this report. This will need to be reviewed when the newly appointed committee is able to meet for the first time. Additional topics may well need to be added as priorities for review change during the year.

## Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Keith Welham  
Chair

Haughley, Stowupland +  
Wetherden



Cllr James Caston  
Vice-Chair

Bramford



Cllr Terence Carter

Stow Thorney



Cllr Paul Ekpenyong

St Peter's



Cllr Dave Muller  
BA (Open) MCMi RAFA

Stow Thorney



Cllr Keith Scarff

Combs Ford

## Introduction

In May 2017, Mid Suffolk District Council formerly adopted a Leader/Cabinet model of governance. As per the Local Government Act (2000), all Councils that operate under this model are required to have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee plays a vital part in Mid Suffolk's democratic decision-making processes. Whilst the Committee cannot make any of its own decisions, it can exercise influence and direction over decisions, both before and after they are implemented, to ensure that the Council is delivering its services efficiently and effectively. This is done by:

- Conducting pre-decision scrutiny on key issues and making recommendations for improvement
- Reviewing the Council's budgets annually and the direction of strategic policies
- Monitoring the performance of different services and strategies
- Calling-in decisions made by the Cabinet

The Committee consists of six members (as listed on Page 4) who can be any Member of the Council except for those who are part of the Cabinet. No member of the Committee is allowed to scrutinise a decision where they have been a key part of the decision-making process (i.e. an ex-Cabinet Member). It is crucial that Overview and Scrutiny is independent of the Cabinet in order to maintain its ability to hold the Council's decision-makers to account.

In 2022, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Members agreed to a new "Cabinet and Scrutiny Protocol". The purpose of the protocol is to promote a culture of accountability, openness, and transparency within Mid Suffolk District Council and sets out how both groups will work together to deliver effective and outcome-focussed scrutiny. Full details of the protocol can be found [here](#).

Due to working in partnership, the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee often combines with the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake Joint meetings where there are items for consideration that affect both Councils to equal measure. Each Council is still able to convene an independent meeting to scrutinise specific items (e.g. the budgets) where appropriate.

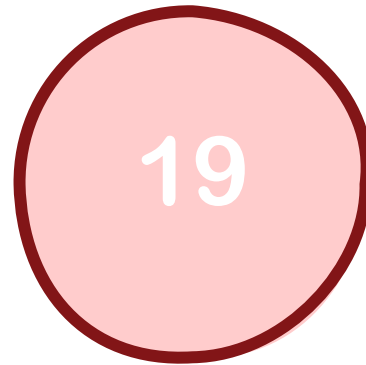
A full terms of reference for Mid Suffolk's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found in Part 2: The Responsibilities and Functions in the Constitution as linked [here](#).

## Scrutiny in Numbers

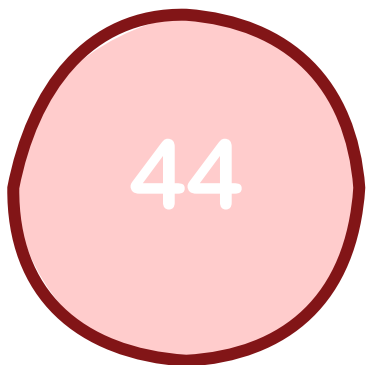
During 2022/23 the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in partnership with the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was responsible for the following:



Committee Meetings



Reports



Recommendations



Recommendations to  
Cabinet/Council



YouTube Views

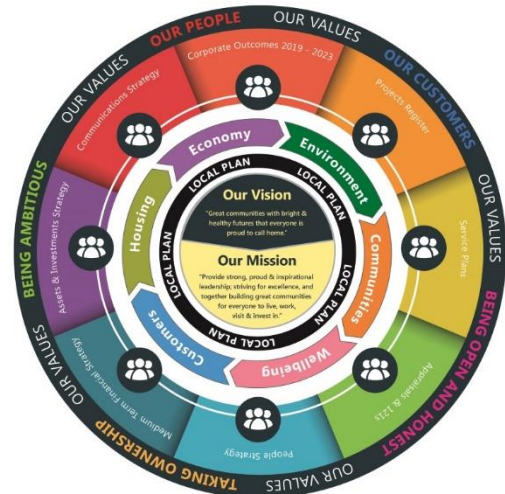
All meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are open to public attendance and streamed to YouTube. Recordings of the meetings held in 2022/23 can be found [here](#).

## Organisation of the Work Plan

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets out a Work Plan at the beginning of the year that provides Members with key areas to focus on and review. These Work Plans are put together through considering:

- The Corporate Plan
- The Forthcoming Decisions List
- Statutory Items
- Requests from Councillors
- Requests from the Public
- Call-ins of Cabinet decisions

The Work Plans are reviewed at monthly meetings between the Chairs, Vice Chairs and Officers and are then agreed monthly by the Committee.



Any Member can propose possible items for consideration for the Work Plan. Each item proposed is evaluated to determine its relevance and purpose by the Chairs. If added to the Work Plans, the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny will work with Officers to ensure that the appropriate information is presented to the Committee for review.

Other items included on the Work Plans are Information Bulletins, brief updates on specific topics and areas of interest, or fact-finding pieces of work for items the Committee may wish to scrutinise in the future.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is required to consider specific statutory items on an annual basis, such as the Budgets and the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, and these must be factored into the Work Plans appropriately.

### Work Plan Workshop – April 2022

In April, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to a workshop with the purpose of identifying topics for review in 2022/23.

Members were encouraged to pick out topics from all areas of the Corporate Plan for a balanced approach. The topics that received the most support from Members at the workshop were considered for addition on the 2022/23 Work Plan.

## 2022/23 Work Plan

TOPIC	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER
27 JUNE 2022		
CIFCO Performance Report and Business Plan	Director – Assets and Investments	Cabinet Member – Assets and Investments
19 SEPTEMBER 2022		
Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils Parking Strategy	Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	Cabinet Member - Environment
Shared Revenues Partnership – Council Tax Reduction Scheme	Director – Corporate Resources	-
Information Bulletin – Shared Legal Service Performance Monitoring and Split of New Legal Matters	Director – Shared Legal Service	-
24 OCTOBER 2022		
Annual Review of Joint Homes & Housing Strategy and Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member - Housing
21 NOVEMBER 2022		
Draft General Fund and Housing Revenue Account	Director – Corporate Resources	Cabinet Member - Finance
Review of Local Citizens Advice and the Cost of Living Crisis	Director - Communities	Cabinet Member - Communities
19 DECEMBER 2022		
Review of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils	Director - Communities	Cabinet Member - Communities
Information Bulletin – Is the Organisation Protected Against Cyber-Attacks?	Corporate Manager - ICT	-

TOPIC	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER
23 JANUARY 2023		
General Fund and Housing Revenue Account – Review of Savings, Proposals, and Updated Position	Director – Corporate Resources	Cabinet Member – Finance
Review of the Culture, Heritage, and Visitor Economy Strategy	Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	Cabinet Member – Economic Development
Call-In of the Elmswell Exemplar Housing Scheme	Director – Assets and Investments	Cabinet Member – Assets and Investments / Housing
20 FEBRUARY 2023		
"Are Planning Pre-Application Advice Customers Getting a Valuable Service?"	Chief Planning Officer	Cabinet Member - Planning
Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Civil Penalties Policies	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member - Housing
Information Bulletin – Education, Skills, and Employment: What More Can the Councils do to Raise Opportunities and Attainment?	Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	-
20 MARCH 2023		
Information Bulletin – A Review of the Impact of Bringing the Public Realm Service In House	Director - Operations	-

The 2022/23 Work Plans have included topics from most key strategic areas of the Corporate Plan. At each Committee meeting, the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are often requested to make recommendations based on the items before them.

All recommendations have the purpose of adding value to the organisation and providing benefits to our residents by improving and strengthening our strategies and outputs.



## Economy

### JOS/22/02 CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD) BUSINESS TRADING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT



On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the annual performance report on CIFCO Capital Ltd. The Director for Assets and Investments outlined a summary of the business plan, the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the upcoming year, the split of the portfolio between sectors, and the Council's income for the previous year.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- The impact of the pandemic on trading and performance
- Improvements to the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings of properties
- Differences in borrowing strategies and interest paid between the two Councils
- Use of funding for sustainability updates

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Full Council that future CIFCO business plans continue to be scrutinised by the Councils' Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then reported to Council.
- 1.2. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the CIFCO Business Plan and Business Trading and Performance Report and ask that the minutes of this meeting be taken into account at Full Council.
- 1.3. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the CIFCO Business Plan and Business Trading and Performance Report is robust for 2022 – 2023.

#### Value Added

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee retained their role in scrutinising the CIFCO business plan on an annual basis.

This retention was approved by both Councils at their October meetings. The minutes of this item were attached as an appendix to the official CIFCO report that was presented to both Councils and the recommendations thoroughly considered by all Members.

## JOS/22/09 SHARED REVENUES PARTNERSHIP – COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed changes to the 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction (Working Age) Scheme. The Corporate Manager for Finance Operations outlined details of the current scheme, automation of the new system which would reduce administrative costs, and the 4 options considered for recommendation.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- What neighbouring Councils have agreed as the best strategy
- Whether the scheme only applied to Universal Credit recipients
- If changes would result in a one-off or recurring cost
- The potential benefits for Suffolk County Council
- The additional costs as outlined in the report

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet Option 3 as the preferred option for the Consultation for the Council Tax Reduction (Working Age) Scheme.

### Value Added

The Chair provided an update report to Mid Suffolk Cabinet on 3<sup>rd</sup> of October and detailed the questions, debate, and recommendation made by the Committee on this item before formal decision was made.

Mid Suffolk Cabinet voted unanimously to consult on Option 3 as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **MOS/22/01 DRAFT GENERAL FUND (GF) AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2023/24 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at the assumptions and expectations for the 2023/24 Budgets before the final numbers were presented for further review by the Committee and a decision made by Cabinet and Council. This approach was requested by members of the Committee when the Budgets came for review in 2021.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- The Contingency Budget
- The assumptions made for the Vacancy Management Factor
- Short-term and long-term borrowing and potential interest rates
- Whether the General Fund could support the Housing Revenue Account
- The impact of potentially raising garage rents
- Impact of staff salaries and employee costs within the overall Budgets

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomes this earlier opportunity to consider the draft budget assumptions and thanks Officers for their presentation and clarification.
- 1.2. That Cabinet and Officers take account of the comments made at this meeting of the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3. That Cabinet explores opportunities to reduce to a minimum the recharges to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from the General Fund (GF).
- 1.4. That Officers look further at the Vacancy Management Factor assumption of 5%.
- 1.5. That Officers consider further opportunities to increase garage rents.
- 1.6. That Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggests a more prudent assumption in respect of the Pay Award 2023/24.
- 1.7. That Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends the cost assumptions for repairs and maintenance be looked at in more detail.
- 1.8. That more timely quarterly information on the General Fund's and Housing Revenue Account's income and expenditure be used to develop the budget and request that this information be made available to Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## MOS/22/02 GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (2023-24) – REVIEW OF SAVINGS, PROPOSALS, AND UPDATED POSITION

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the final position of the 2023/24 General Fund and Housing Revenue Accounts. The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report and set out the differences between these accounts and the assumptions presented to the Committee in November 2022.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- Removal of the Savings Contingency Budget and the increase in the Training Budget
- The Strategic Infrastructure Fund and Member Locality Budgets
- The Right to Buy scheme
- Access to resources and tradespeople to carry out work relating to voids
- The increase in loan interest payable

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report
- 1.2. That Cabinet considers an increase in the Locality Award allocation for each Member

### Value Added

The Committee's decision to look at the assumptions for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account early on in the process allowed for the Committee to influence the final accounts and provide guidance to Officers for areas that should be looked at in more detail.

Having looked at the Budgets whilst they were being developed, many of the questions asked at Committee were able to be answered at a point where appropriate changes could be made to the accounts if necessary and more information could be supplied to Councillors if required before they came to a formal decision.

The Director for Corporate Resources has agreed to look into the Locality Award allocation for each Member and analyse individual spend to steer direction on the amounts allocated in the future.

## Environment



### JOS/22/08 BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS PARKING STRATEGY

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the process of the development of the Councils' first parking strategy. The Director for Economic Growth and Climate Change outlined the consultation, key stakeholder engagements, and collaborations with organisations that had taken place.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- The Joint Area Management Plan
- The potential impact of Covid-19 on the results of public consultation
- Virtual and in-person public engagement workshops
- The timeframe for implementation of the Strategy
- The impact on the Councils' planning processes
- Reducing environmental damages within the Districts

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report and that a verbal presentation of the comments made at this meeting be provided to the Cabinet.
- 1.2. That Cabinet is requested to carry out further work to replace carparking demands with alternatives by looking at other areas that have done so successfully.
- 1.3. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that a report be provided to the Committee in due course to review the progress on the Parking Strategy implementation plan.

#### Value Added

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to request to strengthen, if necessary, the engagement that had taken place to develop the Strategy before being signed off and the implementation phase began.

The Director for Operations and the Cabinet Members have confirmed that regular progress reports will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny for review, further feedback, and directional steer.

## Communities

### JOS/22/23 REVIEW OF LOCAL CITIZENS ADVICE AND THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS



On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the effectiveness of the Districts' Local Citizens Advice centres and their service in assisting residents with the Cost of Living Crisis.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- Total volunteer hours at both Citizens Advice Centres
- The increase in under 25s using the Citizens Advice service
- Support offered to residents for dealing with their heating and electricity bills
- The delivery of community supermarkets and their mobility within the Districts
- The distribution of the Household Support Grant

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of the report.
- 1.2. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the 30% uplift to Local Citizens Advice and the work being conducted as a result and recommends that this support continues for a further 2 years.
- 1.3. That the Councils facilitate a more collaborative approach between organisations by encouraging the promotion of joint working.
- 1.4. That Officers work with relevant agencies to understand the situation for young people under 25, specifically men, to build a proactive response to support them as an at-risk group.
- 1.5. That Cabinet and Officers explore how we can embed the Cost of Living into the culture of the organisation for all staff when working with residents across all departments as part of a more integrated system of support.
- 1.6. That a Joint All Member Briefing be arranged for all Councillors on the Cost of Living crisis with input from Local Citizens Advice.

#### Value Added

As per the Committee's recommendation, a cross-Council steering group including the Citizens Advice Centres has been set up to deal with the Cost of Living Crisis and partnerships are being explored to provide additional support to younger residents.

## JOS/22/32 REVIEW OF SUFFOLK ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (SALC)

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee invited the CEO of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) to attend and provide an update on the work undertaken to provide effective support to our Town and Parish Councils to ensure that they are delivering the best service possible to our communities.

The CEO of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils provided the Committee with a presentation outlining the purpose of the association, the support services offered to all involved with the running of Town and Parish Councils, the Association's business plans and objectives, the outcomes of the latest annual report, and the specific training and development modules offered.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- Liaison and collaboration between SALC and Babergh and Mid Suffolk
- Uptake on training courses by both Councillors and Clerks
- Financial support for Town and Parish Councils
- Involvement from SALC regarding Code of Conduct issues
- The impact of face-to-face training on the costs of services provided

Members debated on the item and raised the need for more collaboration and communication between the Suffolk Association of Local Councils and both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. The Councils' role as a key disseminator of information and provider of key support to Town and Parish Councils, through liaison with Members, was highlighted.

The report was noted.

### Value Added

Having external companies and associations present to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides the Councils with the opportunity to ensure that our residents are receiving a good quality level of service and support across the board.

Our Councillors play a key role in supporting our Town and Parish Councils through their role as Ward Members. Inviting the Suffolk Association of Local Councils to the Committee gave our Councillors a better understanding of the services that the Association provides and key information to relay to our Town and Parish Councils to ensure that they are receiving an appropriate level of support in delivering their services for our residents.

## JOS/22/39 REVIEW OF THE CULTURE, HERITAGE, AND VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the work undertaken in the development of the above Strategy including internal and external stakeholder and public engagement. This Strategy has been developed as part of a response to several recommendations within the Corporate Peer Review.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- A planned Food Enterprise Zone for Stowmarket at the Gateway 14 site
- Hotel accommodation available to support increased tourism in the Districts
- Collaboration and consultation with other Local Authorities
- Support for those travelling through the Districts using sustainable methods i.e. walking, cycling, etc.
- Consultation on existing accessibility issues within the Districts
- The impact on the Councils' planning processes
- Consultation with appropriate heritage, history, churches, nature, and sustainability organisations / associations.

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and requests that Officers take account of the comments made by Members.
- 1.2. That a review of the implementation plan's progress be undertaken by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2024.

### Value Added

Reviewing the development of the Strategy has allowed Overview and Scrutiny to ensure that all of the appropriate consultee bodies have been communicated with before the implementation of the Strategy. Officers have agreed to have further consultation with the organisations and associations that Members of the Committee identified as being missing in this engagement phase and feed in findings to the final Strategy proposal.

Officers have also agreed to bringing the Strategy back before the Committee at various stages for further review and input.



## Housing



### JOS/22/17 ANNUAL REVIEW UPDATE OF THE JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING / HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY (2019 – 2024)

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny carried out their annual review of the above Strategies. The Housing Strategy and Policy Officer outlined the progress of the Strategy to date, the re-focussed delivery plan, and the actions still to be delivered.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- Whether houses are being designed with lifelong use in mind
- The amount of smaller properties available for downsizing
- The number of homeless people within the Districts
- Accommodation provisions for homeless people, refugees, and those escaping domestic violence
- Developing links between the Housing Strategies and the Communities Strategy

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Members have reviewed the contents of report JOS/22/17, including the appendices, and requests that the Portfolio Holders and Officers take account of verbal comments made by members of the Committee. Also, that Cabinet bears these comments in mind when debating the refocussed delivery plan, the refreshed Joint Homes and Housing Strategy, and the Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 1.2. That the Committee members support the strategic aims of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and agreed that the newly refocussed plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the housing sector whilst continuing to deliver the aims set out in the strategy.
- 1.3. To ask Portfolio Holders and Officers to consider further provision of financial and physical support to all residents wishing to downsize.

#### Value Added

Minutes of the meeting were provided to both Cabinet Members for Housing who have agreed to give significant consideration to the comments and recommendations made by the Committee when moving forward with the delivery of the Strategies to ensure their effectiveness.

## JOS/22/46 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT AND CIVIL PENALTIES POLICY

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the new Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Civil Penalties Policy as presented to the Committee for questioning before going to Cabinet for a final decision.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- The number of prosecutions within the last 18 months
- The types of enforcement action that could be taken and when
- The starting points and band ranges for financial penalties
- Identifying landlords linked to bad practices and criminal activities

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That Overview and Scrutiny recommend to Cabinet to adopt the new private rented sector housing enforcement policy including the use of civil penalties as an alternative to prosecution. Agree a fair charging regime to recover the costs of housing enforcement action taken by the Council.
- 1.2. To recommend that Cabinet approve and authorise the use of civil penalty and financial penalty powers provided by the Housing and Planning Act 2016 (Appendix 2), Electrical Safety Regulations (Appendix 3) and Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) Regulations (Appendix 4).
- 1.3. To recommend to Cabinet the proposed charges for relevant housing enforcement action based on officer time taken and that any revenue arising from civil penalties will be retained within the service to meet the legal or administrative costs and expenses incurred under the relevant housing law.
- 1.4. To recommend to Cabinet that comments made at this meeting be made available to them when they discuss implementing the Private Sector Housing Enforcement & Civil Penalties Policy

### Value Added

At the Mid Suffolk Cabinet meeting in March 2023, a draft of the minutes which included the comments and recommendations made by the Committee were attached as an Appendix to the report and given full consideration by the Cabinet.

The Cabinet implemented both the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and the Civil Penalties Policy exactly as recommended by the Committee.

## Customers

### JOS/22/45 “ARE PLANNING PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE CUSTOMERS GETTING A VALUABLE SERVICE?”



On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the results of the annual survey of pre-application advice customers and a survey of Officers who have provided pre-application advice. The Chief Planning Officer invited users of the service to attend the Committee to answer questions, detail their experiences with the service, and suggest areas for improvement.

Members asked questions on topics including:

- Changes in Officer recommendations concerning approval / refusals of applications
- Training and mentoring of new Planning Officers
- Communication between Planning Officers and planning agencies
- The customer satisfaction rating and potential future targets
- The quality differences between different types of advice given

The following recommendations were reached:

- 1.1. That the contents of the report be noted by the Committee.
- 1.2. That Officers be requested to alter the frequency and content of the survey of customer experience of the pre-application service to “open” rather than annual.
- 1.3. That Officers be requested to undertake an annual survey of Development Management Planning Officers of their experience of customer service.
- 1.4. That Officers develop a model for quarterly audit of timeliness, quality and customer service including to assess the effectiveness of the pre-application advice process in the validation of applications and correlation of advice with outcome.
- 1.5. That the Corporate Director for Planning and Building Control and the Chief Planning Officer review the results of the above-mentioned surveys and audit with the Client Side Panel and report at least bi-annually to the Cabinet Members for Planning.
- 1.6. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests the Director for Planning and Building Control and the Chief Planning Officer consider arrangements to provide adequate training and mentoring opportunities for all planning staff with a view to providing an improved level of pre-app service.

- 1.7. That the Corporate Director for Planning and Building Control and the Chief Planning Officer aim for an overall quality of advice level of satisfaction of 60% by 30th April 2025.

#### Value Added

Through the above recommendations, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were able to influence change across many different areas of our Planning service to ensure that our customers are getting the best service possible.

The survey has now been changed to an open survey, with customers encouraged to fill it out after every interaction with the Councils, and further training opportunities for Officers are currently being explored with the intention of improving expertise and providing customers with more in-depth advice.



## Information Bulletins

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered several Information Bulletins over the last year. These bulletins are short reports, often without any pre-set recommendations, that have the purpose of updating the Committee on the progress of certain strategies and schemes.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received Information Bulletins on the following topics:

- Shared Legal Service Performance Monitoring and Split of New Legal Matters
- "Is the Organisation Protected Against Cyber-Attacks?"
- Education, Skills, and Employment – What More Can the Councils Do to Raise Opportunities and Attainment?
- A Review of the Impact of Bringing the Public Realm Service In-House

These Information Bulletins were noted by the Committee.

## Call-Ins

One of the powers of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the ability to “call-in” a decision that has been made by the Cabinet. This is one of the key ways in which the Committee provides a check-and-balance to those making the decisions and ensures that resolutions have been made with all the facts present and will deliver the best service for our residents.



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered one Call-In during 2022/23. This was to review MCa/22/27 Elmswell Exemplar Housing Scheme decided on by Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

The Committee came to the following resolution:

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee refers the matter back to the Cabinet for reconsideration with the following observations:

- That Officers undertake further public engagement regarding the scheme
- That Officers and Cabinet consider locating other sites within the district for the scheme
- That Cabinet takes into consideration the planning advice provided



## Action Tracker

In 2022/23, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee saw the introduction of an action tracker as a statutory item on the agenda. This was brought about as part of the Cabinet / Overview and Scrutiny Protocol with an aim of improving the communication between both bodies.

This action tracker is updated monthly by the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny and details all the recommendations reached by the Committee over the last year. Key Officers and Cabinet Members are required to give frequent updates on the progress of the implementation of the Committee’s recommendations into strategies and policies.

Updates to the action tracker are taken to the Committee at every meeting to allow members of the Committee to track such progress and see how they have successfully added value to the Council and its strategic outputs.

## Report Authors

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Chair of Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
(2019-23)

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