

## BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>TO: Council</b>	<b>REPORT NUMBER: BC/23/20</b>
<b>FROM: Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>DATE OF MEETING: 24 October 2023</b>

### OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT TO BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Babergh District Council on the business conducted and the recommendations made at the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the 24<sup>th</sup> July, 21<sup>st</sup> August, and the 18<sup>th</sup> September.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 This report is for noting.

#### 3. ITEMS FROM THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON 24<sup>TH</sup> JULY

- 3.1 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and considered the following items:

##### 3.2 Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

- 3.2.1 Councillor Derek Davis, Chair of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, introduced the report to the Committee outlining before Members the purpose of the Partnership, the priorities of the Partnership, how issues in our communities are identified, the teams and organisations that work collaboratively to form the Partnership, and commended the Officers involved in running the Partnership for their work.

- 3.2.2 For many members of the Committee who were relatively new to both the Council and Overview and Scrutiny, the level of detail of the work of the Partnership was not apparent in the report which would have helped in their understanding of the complexity of the different actions of the Partnership, both as a collective and as individual specialists.

- 3.2.3 More comprehensive training for Members and more detailed case studies that demonstrate the value of each agency were regarded as essential for the future. The Corporate Manager for Communities reassured Members that a schedule of training on the work of the Partnership would be organised and circulated.

- 3.2.4 The costs of involvement in the Partnership are not available currently as the time spent by Officers from each agency is not recorded as a Partnership cost.

The Suffolk County Council Head of Community Safety advised that any additional statutory responsibilities assigned to the Partnership would result in increased financial costs for recruiting external officers to undertake these duties and that there would be significant risks regarding the capacity of existing Officers to fulfil their standard responsibilities within their own organisations.

- 3.2.5 Criminal incidents relating to hate crime are currently dealt with by the Police under a new national delivery plan. In regard to radicalisation, this is the responsibility of each local authority to establish a PREVENT delivery programme which is dedicated to identifying and stopping radicalisation in their areas.
- 3.2.6 Members queried the level of communication from the Partnership to local community groups ranging from schools to parish councils and to grassroots organisations. The Superintendent reassured that each locality has a designated Community Engagement Officer dedicated to communicating with different community groups at a local level. The Corporate Manager for Communities responded that for schools there is a co-opted education member on the Partnership and that the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) are responsible for the dissemination of information to parish councils.
- 3.2.7 The Assistant Manager for Community Safety and Resilience presented a separate report about anti-social behaviour (ASB) and introduced the Councils' Community Safety Officers. It was clarified that the five guiding principles of the ASB Strategic Board are there to ensure there is a uniform approach to tackling anti-social behaviour across both Districts. Questions were asked about the accessibility and effectiveness of the current ASB reporting system and could be reviewed further if a request was made.
- 3.2.8 The following recommendations were made:
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and commends the Officers involved for their work within the Partnership.
  - That an All Member Briefing and further training be delivered for all Councillors regarding the topics covered by the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, including how to report anti-social behaviour and an updated contact list.
  - That a review of the current costs of Babergh and Mid Suffolk resources, and the potential impact of further statutory responsibilities, is undertaken and reported back to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
  - That the level of engagement with community groups within the Districts is incorporated into the next review of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and is reported to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
  - That a review is undertaken of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership's position within the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Significant Business Risk Register.

- That more formal communication procedures are put in place between the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and our parish / town Councils.

#### **4. ITEMS FROM THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON 21<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST**

4.1 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on the 21<sup>st</sup> August 2023 and considered the following items:

#### **4.2 CIFCO Performance Report (2022/23) and Business Plan (2023/24)**

4.2.1 Councillor John Ward, Babergh's Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments, introduced the item to the Committee and Emily Atack, Director for Assets and Investments, presented the item to the Committee outlining before Members the purpose of the business plan, the structure of the trading companies, an overview of the UK property market, the CIFCO property investment portfolio, the five-year cashflow forecast, the CIFCO Board key performance indicators (KPIs), an overview of the 2023/24 business plan, the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) improvement plan, an overview of deferred debt repayments, and introduced Henry Cooke (CIFCO Capital) and Neville Pritchard (JLL) to the Committee.

4.2.2 Members asked questions on the reasons for stopping the purchasing of more properties and whether the new KPIs and targets were too low. The Director for Assets and Investments responded that the further acquisition of properties was concluded in 2021 and that the current KPIs were reasonable due to market uncertainty.

4.2.3 The EPC targets for the Portfolio were aligned to legislation, however Members were keen to ascertain how quickly the improvement plan to achieve "B" ratings across the portfolio could be achieved. The Director for Assets and Investments responded that the outset ambition was to achieve a B rating for all properties as quickly as possible. Achieving Net Zero earlier than 2030 would be considered once the entire Portfolio had undergone an EPC Assessment.

4.2.4 Members' concerns in relation to certain debt repayments were reassured by the knowledge that power to defer debt repayments had been decided at Full Council for a three-year period. However, since then it had been decided by the CIFCO Board to implement the deferred payments each year.

4.2.5 Members were keen to ascertain how assets were sold to provide the best financial return and were advised that these were reviewed and considered regularly by the CIFCO Board.

4.2.6 The following recommendations were made:

- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the CIFCO Business Trading and Performance Report and asks that the minutes of the meeting be taken into account when CIFCO is next considered at Full Council.

### 4.3 **Cost of Living: Review of 6 Month Plan and Beyond**

- 4.3.1 Councillor Alastair McCraw, Babergh's Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation, and Improvement, introduced the item to the Committee. The Corporate Manager for Customer Services and the Cost of Living Co-ordinator presented the item to the Committee outlining before Members a look-back at the last 6 months of work, the development of a long-term approach to deal with issues, the different kinds of support delivered directly to residents, improving communication, both internally and externally, regarding the services available to support residents, digital inclusion, collaboration with Community Action Suffolk (CAS) to hire a new Food Network Co-ordinator, plans to launch a data SIM pilot to help residents get online, and communication with Town and Parish Councils.
- 4.3.2 Given that the reality of the cost of living crisis has affected all our communities and residents, Members were looking for proactive and positive action from the Customer Services team to their concerns. The following questions were raised at the meeting and the responses are helpful to all Ward Members.
- 4.3.3 Members queried what communication was sent out to residents. Officers responded that general communication was sent out to all residents but that Officers responsible for Income, Building Services, and Customers had all been trained on identifying residents that are struggling and how to signpost them to further support. Customer Access Points (CAPs) throughout the Districts could be utilised further to bring services and support directly into our communities based on a review of need in certain areas. Currently, there are banners on the main website directing residents to cost of living support and there will be a review of the effectiveness of this after the launch of the new website.
- 4.3.4 Members questioned what support was available for residents in rural areas and older residents who both may not be able to easily access online services. Officers responded that the Communities department assess and map the level of need across the Districts and use this to identify rural hotspots that might require more face-to-face support, and that digital inclusion and literacy schemes were being actioned to help support older residents to access online services confidently. Suffolk Libraries work collaboratively with the Councils to help deliver these digital inclusion sessions and have, through grant funding, been able to allocate isolated residents with iPads to help them get online.
- 4.3.5 Members asked what support was being provided to residents specifically regarding food security. Officers responded that tackling food insecurity, and making sure that residents have access to nutritional food, was a top priority and one that was being collaboratively managed with various food banks across the districts. A Food Network Co-ordinator would be hired, using the funds from the Shared Prosperity Fund re-directed from initial plans to develop a "community supermarket", who would ensure that food banks in our districts are operating sustainably, efficiently, and are appropriately meeting the needs of residents in their areas.

4.3.6 The following recommendations were made:

- To note phase 3 of the Cost-of-Living Action Plan and endorse the commitment to develop a longer-term approach to preventing poverty which seeks to understand the underlying drivers of poverty across both Districts at a hyper local level through continued work with internal and external stakeholders and to include wider engagement with Town and Parish Councils

## **5. ITEMS FROM THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON 18<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

5.1 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and considered the following items:

### **5.2 Review on Current Levels of Untreated Sewage Discharges to Waters in Babergh and Mid Suffolk**

5.2.1 The Director of Operations introduced the item to the Committee outlining before Members the approved motion from both Councils in November 2022, stakeholder responsibilities, and the background information provided by internal officers in the information bulletin.

5.2.2 Anglian Water provided a presentation to the Committee outlining before Members the operational background of the organisation, the current strategic goals, the five “Get River Positive” commitments, investment into the reduction of storm spills, water recycling programmes, storm overflows and their designated permits, and event duration monitors (EDMs) installation and maintenance. Representatives from the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the River Stour Trust introduced themselves to the committee and outlined before Members their organisation’s purpose in managing rivers in the districts.

5.2.3 Given the intense interest and the very wide and specific concerns of the Committee it is impossible to reflect the specific and wide questioning that was generated by members. It resulted in a very long session before recommendations were agreed. The following responses to questions have been divided by the Agencies present.

#### **5.2.4 Anglian Water**

5.2.4.1 Frequency of storm spills are not determined by the amount of rainfall in an area. External factors such as fats in the sewage system and blockages were affecting activation of storm spills and a third of activations were false events.

5.2.4.2 Verification checks are now taking place to improve the accuracy of storm spill devices, however there is always a risk that not all would be identified.

5.2.4.3 Anglian Water are not statutory consultees in the Planning Process and there are legislative restrictions to the information they can provide.

- 5.2.4.4 Hadleigh Water Recycling Centre was due for the delivery of a phosphorous scheme which would reduce levels of phosphates in the system therefore reducing plant growth and encouraging wildlife to return. If necessary, an aerator would be added to the water supply to increase oxygen levels to improve the habitat of wildlife.
- 5.2.4.5 Educating the public about the inappropriate disposal of wet wipes into the sewage system had resulted in consultations to consider banning the use of plastic in wet wipes. Currently running a “Keep it Clear” communications campaign to remove “unflushables” from the sewage system.
- 5.2.4.6 Sudbury Water Recycling Centre and the installation of phosphorous removal equipment is already planned and would be concluded by 2024.
- 5.2.4.7 Anglian Water are not paying more in dividends than is invested in improved infrastructure. Their annual public report is provided annually for the public to review.

## 5.2.5 Environment Agency

- 5.2.5.1 Raising the status of water quality from poor to good is subject to regulations to make improvements with a deadline of 2027. However, it was possible that only one measurable aspect of the river was resulting in its “poor” status rather than the whole river being below standard quality.
- 5.2.5.2 Storm spill records are provided by Anglian Water to the Environment Agency and their subsequent investigation and tests are carried out dependent of frequency and risk.
- 5.2.5.3 Should an application for bathing water status be granted then the area will go into a monitoring programme where the water will be tested regularly for pathogens and that improvement measures could be made to the quality of the water once it has received a classification from the government.
- 5.2.5.4 The EA has legal powers to bring pig farms into compliance with the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone Regulations should there be a run-off from farms (e.g. open pig farms) and there was a dedicated team for such pollution incidents. Natural England are also able to get involved if the pollution is affecting protected sites.
- 5.2.5.5 Some collaboration is taking place with DEFRA regarding certain chemicals and their impact on the river system (e.g. by-products of drugs in the sewage system)

## 5.2.6 Natural England

- 5.2.6.1 Natural England have agreed to assist with the provision of education and training for Councillors regarding catchment sensitive farming so that Members can work collaboratively with farmers in their Wards to protect water quality.

5.2.7 The following recommendations were made:

- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thank Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the River Stour Trust for their attendance and for the answers provided.
- That the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny provide a report and verbal update on the contents and outcomes of the Committee meeting at the next Full Council meetings in October.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for more information from the external representatives, specifically including the phosphate reducing programme, and asks that this be fed back to the Committee via an Information Bulletin.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for a wider publicity campaign for residents, staff, and Councillors regarding materials that cannot be put into the sewage system.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Cabinet to investigate the possibility of running a campaign regarding the provision of water butts for residents.
- That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Council to consider supporting “citizen science” projects.

## 6. STATUTORY DOCUMENTS

6.1 At each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the action tracker and the future work plans are considered by Members and adjustments made as appropriate. The Work Plans can be found on the Councils’ websites. The Action Tracker has been attached to this report.

## 7. ATTACHMENTS

Title	Location
(a) Overview and Scrutiny Work Plans	<a href="https://www.babergh.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/overview-and-scrutiny">https://www.babergh.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/overview-and-scrutiny</a>
(b) Overview and Scrutiny Action Tracker	Attached

## 8. REPORT AUTHORS

Councillor Mary McLaren – Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny

Alicia Norman – Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny