

**BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL**

<b>From: Temporary Assistant Director - Law and Governance</b>	<b>Report Number: <big>MC/17/7</big></b>
<b>To: Mid Suffolk Annual Council Babergh Annual Council</b>	<b>Date of meetings: 22 May 2017 23 May 2017</b>

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2016/17**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 In accordance with the Constitution, the Committee must report annually to Council on its work during the last year.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Joint Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2016/17 be noted.

**3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1 The main financial implications have been the costs of officer time, normal allowances for Members and Member training costs that are included in the budget.
- 3.2 Costs of consultants being employed on the review of the social, economic and environmental impact of the Museum of East Anglian Life on Stowmarket and its surrounding area are being funded from the Transformation Fund.

**4. Legal Implications**

- 4.1 None

**5. Risk Management**

- 5.1 There are no inherent risks associated with this report. The Joint Scrutiny Committee takes account of the Council's key risks when determining its work plan and carrying out its reviews.

**6. Consultations**

- 6.1 Members of the Joint Scrutiny Committee have been consulted on an on-going basis on topics to be included in the future work plan.
- 6.2 The review of the Scrutiny function has involved consultations with a range of Members and officers including Scrutiny Members, Leaders and Senior Leadership Team.

## **7. Equality Analysis**

- 7.1 There are no inherent equality implications within this report. Equality analysis considerations for individual topics will be included in reports to the Joint Scrutiny Committee as the year progresses.

## **8. Shared Service / Partnership Implications**

- 8.1 There are no inherent shared service / partnership implications within this report. The Joint Scrutiny Committee provides a focus for scrutinising the work of external stakeholders, service providers and partners. Shared service / partnership implications are considered as part of individual scrutiny reviews.

## **9. Links to Joint Strategic Plan**

- 9.1 This report itself does not link directly to the Joint Strategic Plan. Links to the delivery of the Joint Strategic Plan are considered in the selection of topics for review.

## **10. Key Information**

- 10.1 The role of the Joint Scrutiny Committee (JSC) is defined as having the key purposes of:

- Scrutinising the work of external stakeholders and service providers.
- Holding the Strategy/Executive Committee to account
- Being the home of “call in”.
- Being the home of Member Call for Action.

- 10.2 The JSC has two Joint Chairs, one from each authority and meets every 2 months, alternating location and chairing responsibilities between the two Councils.

### **10.3 Work programme for 2016/17**

Following the June meeting the JSC took part in a workshop-style discussion to probe areas for the forward plan and consider priorities for these. Items for review were considered in light of the strategic plan priorities; where the Committee could add value; avoiding duplication with any other committee or working group and ensuring where any changes had been made that significant time had lapsed before a review was undertaken. These suggestions were worked up by the Chairs, Vice Chairs and officers into a forward plan which was then discussed with the Leaders before being referred back to JSC for agreement.

- 10.4 The following is a summary of the Committee’s main achievements during the year:

#### **Community Grants project**

In February June 2016 JSC received a second update on the work of the grants and external funding review project. JSC were informed the project was now moving to phase 3, which involved a ‘health check’ for every recipient.

The Corporate Officer – Strong Communities advised that a report detailing the outcomes of these health checks would be brought to a future Committee meeting.

## **Planning Appeals**

In August the Committee heard from the Professional Lead – Growth and Sustainable Planning about planning appeals. He provided a table of the then current ‘live’ and decided planning appeals. Members commented on various aspects of the information provided, including performance, engaging with communities and cost and resource comparison with other Councils.

Members also specifically requested that further consideration be given to the following:-

1. How does the Committee provide support in understanding why Members refer delegated matters to the Planning / Development Control Committees and how is this better managed?
2. How does the Committee make recommendations to support Planning / Development Control when we are dealing with complicated appeals?
3. How best to engage Members from Planning / Development Control Committees in appeals processes when they have overruled officer recommendations and also engage with all stakeholders to ensure, as far as possible, that appeals are avoided?

The Committee resolved that the contents of the paper presented by the Professional Lead – Growth and Sustainable Planning be noted and the items raised during the discussion be progressed appropriately.

A follow up to this topic was made to the December 2016 meeting of the JSC. At this meeting Philip Isbell, the Professional Lead – Growth and Sustainable Planning reported on possible options for considering whether there was a need for some sort of formal mechanism or other process to support the robustness of decisions taken by Members of Planning and Development Control Committees.

Members were aware of the effect of factors such as lack of a five year land supply on some decisions, and the need for Committees to fully articulate their reasons when making a proposal which was not in accordance with an officer recommendation. However, a proposal to establish a Member working group to review the area of ‘overturns’ in relation to officer recommendations and the effect on the appeals record was lost on being put to the vote.

Members agreed that the position as reported by the Professional Lead be noted.

## **Corporate Compliments, Comments and Complaints**

A proposal for a new way for the Councils to deal with compliments and complaints was presented to JSC in October 2016. Members were told about how a new Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS) would help with the staging and management of complaints. JSC noted this report and presentation.

## **The Councils' approach to community engagement**

In December 2016 members received a report on the Councils' approach to community engagement. After a wide ranging discussion on various aspects of engagement, including methods used, the merits of different approaches and how Councillors' local knowledge, members of the committee decided they wanted services and external partners to give evidence on how they engaged or, for external partners, how they felt they were engaged with and how this had changed.

In January 2017 officers from Housing and the Open for Business project attended to give members their approaches to engagement with their respective 'communities'.

In April 2017 representatives from the Tenants Forum and a local business came to JSC to give members their views on how the Councils had engaged with them. As this meeting took place after this report was prepared the JSC chairs will update the Annual meetings on the outcomes of this meeting.

## **Neighbourhood planning.**

Neighbourhood planning was a topic identified by JSC members as of concern to their residents. JSC asked the Corporate Manager – Strategic Planning to assist them in scoping a review by outlining the neighbourhood planning process and the support the councils gives to parishes preparing a plan. Following this JSC heard from 4 parishes who had reached various stages in the completion of a plan including one who had successfully completed the process and one that had decided not to continue. A JSC task and finish group was then established to investigate how neighbourhood planning was supported by other councils, how the process is supported by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils and how, or if, this support could be improved. This group reported to the April 2017 JSC meeting where the following recommendations were agreed:

- The Committee asks that the Strategic Planning service gives priority to providing an in-house critical friend service to groups that enter into the neighbourhood plan process. This service to aim to provide continuity of contact for the groups and to give a holistic approach to the support and guidance provided. In order achieve this SLT is requested to explore if an additional post in the team is required and how this can be funded.
- The councils should complete the planned development of a memorandum of understanding to be used to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the councils and the neighbourhood plan groups when a plan is being planned or developed.
- To assist with the above, officers continue developing the neighbourhood planning websites including providing a map of the neighbourhood planning process.
- To facilitate members being able to provide maximum support to groups that wish to complete neighbourhood plans a members' briefing be used to provide training on how they can best do this and enable them to signpost to the appropriate resource or officer.

- Members note that smaller villages tend to be put off starting a neighbourhood plan by a combination of uncertainty about funding and the lack of resources. Members found that funding is available for a lot of the costs of completing a neighbourhood plan. Members ask that officers look at how the development of neighbourhood plans by small villages can be encouraged through the new Local Plan and how the councils can provide support to small villages investigating whether to complete a neighbourhood plan.

#### 10.5 **Work plan 2017/18**

The detailed work plan for 2017/18 has not yet been established. A workshop of JSC members will be held in early June where existing proposed topics and further suggestions will be evaluated in terms of value added, strategic priorities and impact. The resulting draft work plan will then be discussed with Leaders and the Senior Leadership Team to avoid duplication with other activities and ensure availability of officer resource. The draft plan will then be presented to the full JSC.

Members are reminded that they can put forward any suggestions for inclusion in the JSC work plan at any time.

#### 10.6 **Review of Scrutiny Function**

- 10.7 From May 2017, the Councils will be operating under the Leader / Cabinet model of governance. In support of this change the Councils will each establish a separate Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which will have the ability to undertake joint scrutiny of topics where there is a mutual interest. There will be a series of training events and workshops to develop and strengthen the role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee within this new governance framework.

#### **Networking and Best Practice**

Members of the JSC have taken advantage of opportunities to attend meetings and events both within Suffolk and across the Eastern Region. These events have afforded the opportunity to share best practice and to explore areas and topics where joint scrutiny reviews with other councils could be beneficial. A discussion was held to identify when and how the JSC should work with other scrutineers in future.

#### 10.8 **Babergh Scrutiny Committee**

The Babergh Scrutiny Committee met twice during the year. In January they scrutinised the annual budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Scrutiny Committee supported the budget and strategy. In March Babergh Scrutiny met to scrutinise the approach to the Housing Revenue Account 30 year business plan. The Scrutiny Committee supported the approach to 30 year business plan

There have been no valid call-ins or councillor calls for action in 2016/17.

## 10.9 Mid Suffolk Scrutiny Committee

The Mid Suffolk Scrutiny Committee met twice during the year. In January they scrutinised the annual budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Scrutiny Committee supported the budget and strategy. In March Mid Suffolk Scrutiny met to scrutinise the approach to the Housing Revenue Account 30 year business plan. The Scrutiny Committee supported the approach to the 30 year business plan

There have been no valid call-ins or councillor calls for action in 2016/17.

## 10.10 Review of Museum of East Anglian Life

In September 2016 Mid Suffolk Scrutiny received a report from the task and finish group set up to review the social, economic and environmental impact of the Museum of East Anglian Life. Mid Suffolk Scrutiny made the following recommendations:

- That a recommendation be made to the Executive Committee that opportunities for wide use of impact methodology across the Council's functions be explored.
- That expert support be commissioned to enable officers to learn and apply the methodology.
- That MEAL be encouraged to take up the recommendations within the report and strengthen its data collection.
- That the Council look flexibly at the future funding arrangements and opportunities for MEAL in the light of the significant return on public investment achieved by the organisation.

## 11. Appendices

None

## 12. Background Documents

None

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