

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 18 January 2024** at **5.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

Chair Sarah Broughton
Vice Chair Marion Rushbrook

Tony Brown	Andrew Martin
Dawn Dicker	Andrew Smith
Susan Glossop	Andrew Speed
Beccy Hopfensperger	Julia Wakelam
Birgitte Mager	Kevin Yarrow

Substitutes attending for a full member
David Smith

In attendance
Richard O'Driscoll, Cabinet Member for Housing

262. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor David Smith acting as temporary substitute for Councillor Rowena Lindberg.

263. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aaron Luccarini, Luke Halpin, Rowena Lindberg and Don Waldron.

264. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

265. **Declarations of interest**

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

266. Announcements from the Chair regarding responses from the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chair informed members that the Vice-Chair attended Cabinet on 5 December 2023 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 9 November 2023. As per the minutes confirmed above, the Vice-Chair presented the recommendations from the Committee on the Abbeycroft Strategic Partnership Review, which were approved by Cabinet.

267. Public participation

There were no members of the public in attendance on this occasion.

268. Housing Update

[Councillor Mager arrived at 5.25pm during the consideration of this item.]

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/24/001, presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing, which set out:

- Progress and challenges against the current Housing Strategy and the current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- The council's strategic priorities for housing for the period 2024 to 2028.
- Emerging actions and plans for the development of the new Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 onwards. Emerging actions would be the subject of further investigation and consideration as the council moved forward with its planning of the new strategy.
- The current situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk and how the council was addressing issues being faced in the district.
- Responses provided to questions which the committee had raised with the Cabinet Member for Housing in advance of tonight's meeting.

The report also set out a number of known challenges, including:

- An insufficient supply of some types of housing, particularly affordable housing in West Suffolk in meeting housing needs.
- Providing and retrofitting homes to reduce the impact on the environment. Providing good quality housing which were a safe place to live in and thermal comfort which would impact positively on people's lives and reduce costs to residents.
- The cost-of-living crisis was making affordability of housing more challenging for many families. This had a detrimental impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing with long-term negative impacts on the population and placing additional demand on the wider Suffolk system. The lack of affordable housing placed additional demands on the housing

register with people finding it difficult to maintain a tenancy in the private rented sector.

The Committee was then asked to consider the report, and in particular the emerging actions currently being considered for inclusion in the new strategy; plans on how the new strategy should be developed, including consultation and engagement and how the committee would like to be involved.

The Committee scrutinised the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which the Cabinet Member for Housing provided comprehensive responses. In particular discussions were held on the differentiation between affordable housing and social housing; how the council was addressing empty homes across the district; the various refugees and asylum housing schemes; Houses in Multiple Occupation; barriers being faced by young people accessing housing; the ageing population and appropriate housing; retrofitting heritage homes; house conditions in the private sector; disabled facilities grants and stalled housing development sites.

In response to a question raised in relation to the types and number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation, officers agreed to provide a written responses on the breakdown of the types of people in bed and breakfast, for example young people; single people; families.

In response to a question raised on shared equity to help young people to access housing, the Cabinet Member for Housing advised he would look into the options around shared equity.

In response to a question raised on what the definition was for social housing and affordable housing, the Committee was advised that social rent was 60% of the market value, and affordable rent was 80%.

In response to a question raised on houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), the Committee was informed that the council's priorities included targeted work in the small number of problematic HMOs. The Cabinet Member was considering ways to have a wider conversation around HMOs with members (linked to the future housing strategy).

In response to a question relating to registered housing providers, the Cabinet Member informed the Committee that an agreement had been made with two registered housing providers to hold regular meetings with the council on its stock condition and improving the standard of housing. He then explained the council did not have any powers to act on registered housing providers stock conditions.

In response to a question relating to self-build housing, the Cabinet Members advised that the council had retained the broad principle of self-build in the development of the new local plan. Any self-build would however need to be negotiated with a target of 10%. Self-build was an affordable product but did not fall under the affordable housing definition in planning terms therefore self-build was separate to the requirement of 40%

affordable which remained a requirement and an uplift to the existing adopted policy.

The Committee considered the development of the new strategy including the consultation and engagement plan and confirmed that it would like to be involved and that it would like to receive an update report following the consultation process.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Housing for the comprehensive report, and **noted** the following:

- **Noted** the progress and challenges against the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan 2018 to 2024.
- **Noted** the progress and challenges against the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan 2018 to 2024.
- **Noted** the Council's priorities for housing as set out in the Strategic Priorities for 2024 to 2028.
- Considered and **noted** the emerging actions to be investigated and explored and plans for the development of the Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 onwards.
- The Committee to be involved by way of an update report on the consultation for the Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 when available.
- **Noted** the situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk and how the Council is addressing the issues being faced in the district.
- Considered and **noted** the responses provided to questions raised by the Committee from the Cabinet Member for Housing.

269. **Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/24/002, which informed members on forthcoming decisions to be considered by the Cabinet for the period 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan and did not request any further information on items contained in the Plan.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024 Decisions Plan.

270. **Work programme update 2024**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/24/003, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2024 (Appendix 1).

In response to a question raised in relation to the Transport and Infrastructure Task and Finish Group, the Chair advised that officers were working in the background on the topic, and the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group would be arranged in due course.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the update.

The meeting concluded at 6.14pm

Signed by:

Chair
