

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 21 July 2016** at **6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Ruth Bowman

Chris Barker
John Bloodworth
Christine Mason
Reg Silvester

Brian Harvey
Nigel Roman
David Palmer

89. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

90. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Rona Burt.

91. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2016, were accepted by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.

92. **Public Participation**

Mrs Sara Beckett, a resident of Newmarket, wished to address the Committee on Item 5, presentation by the lead member for housing.

Mrs Beckett advised the Committee that she also wished to speak on car parking as an article was published in the Newmarket Journal today. She explained that she belonged to a group that was looking at car parking issues within Newmarket, and attended a meeting about car parking last week on decriminalisation of parking. Newmarket Town Council had been given the impression by Councillor Chris Barker, that this was all going to be resolved in about two weeks time. That is clearly not the case and from the meeting last week it's going to be a long process. Parking is getting worse by the day, and the article in the Journal stated that the police were not bothered, which she

felt was unfair. Its not that the police are not bothered they just don't have the resources, like most people, and have had to face cuts.

With regards to the homelessness issue in Newmarket, over the last 6-8 weeks some gentlemen have been living in a doorway. This is on the agenda for the Town Council on Monday. It is a matter of great concern, and she questioned what measures could be taken to address the issue. A family are also alleged to be camping out in the Severals ward. She therefore wanted to express that Newmarket does have great concern particularly at the moment.

Mrs Beckett thanked the Committee for their time.

93. **Presentation by the Lead Member for Housing**

(Councillor Chris Barker arrived at 6.07pm during the consideration of this item)

Prior to the start of the presentation, Councillor Sara Mildmay-White thanked the public speaker for her information and advised that the housing team would look in the homelessness situation she had raised.

As set out in the Council's Constitution, at every ordinary Overview and Scrutiny meeting at least one Cabinet Member would be invited to attend to give an account of his or her portfolio and answer questions from the Committee. Therefore, to carry out this constitutional requirement, members were asked to consider the responsibilities of the Cabinet Member for Housing, who had been invited to the meeting. Report No: OAS/SE/16/017, set out the overall responsibilities of the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, which were:

- Choice based lettings;
- Homelessness advice;
- Public health;
- Private sector housing and Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs);
- Safeguarding;
- Social care; and
- Strategic housing and housing policy.

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing opened her presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation. She then set out the broad areas of responsibility including structure; recent performance; key challenges and priorities for the year. There were three services areas which covered development and partnerships; housing options; and housing standards.

The presentation also included information on the West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018 and key themes which were:

- Increasing the supply of new homes;
- Making the best use of existing housing; and
- Specialist housing and support.

Members discussed the presentation in detail and asked a number of questions of the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing and officers, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

In particular detailed discussions were held on the affordable housing figures and starter homes; Barley Homes Group Limited and the number of sites they were proposing to develop; future housing stock; Home-link's new software operating system; houses in multiple occupation including the value of ward walks to identify properties; the lack of developers currently building houses and what could be done to stimulate building.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing on her informative presentation.

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

94. **Review and Revision of the Constitution**

As set out in the Council's Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis would receive a report from the Monitoring Officer setting out minor amendments made arising from changes to legislation; changes to staffing structures/job descriptions or changes in terminology.

The Monitoring Officer had advised that in Quarter 1, no such amendments had been undertaken by the Monitoring Officer under delegated authority.

Therefore, there being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the update.

95. **Directed Surveillance Authorised Applications (Quarter 1)**

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 required that Members should scrutinise the authority's use of its surveillance powers on a quarterly basis.

The Monitoring Officer had advised that in Quarter 1, no such surveillance had been authorised. Therefore, there being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, Quarter 1 update.

96. **Decisions Plan: July 2016 to May 2017**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/019, which requested that Members peruse the Cabinet Decisions Plan for the period July 2016 to May 2017 for which it would like further information on or might benefit from the Committee's involvement. The Committee considered the Decisions Plan, and there being no decision required, **noted** the contents of the Decisions Plan.

97. **Work Programme Update and Suggestion for Scrutiny**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/020, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2016-2017 (Appendix 1).

The Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) informed the Committee of two additional meetings which the Chairman had agreed to take place in October 2016:

- Tuesday 4 October 2016, Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting to be held at 6pm at West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds. Item to be jointly considered - Devolution;
- Thursday 20 October 2016, an Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Meeting to be held at 6pm at Forest Heath District Council. Item to be considered - Rural Transport. Transport providers to be invited to the meeting to discuss the rural transport services provided, and their integration in Red Lodge.

The Service Manager (Planning –Development) attended the meeting to update Members on the current position of the New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group. A briefing paper had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting, which provided an overview; highways adoption/maintenance conditions; and planning conditions and smarter corporate working.

The Joint Task and Finish Group (the Group) was formed to look into the problems of adoption sometimes encountered on larger housing developments. The adoptions related to both open space and highways matters. Problems had been encountered in the past when houses were occupied before the promised open space or access roads had been completed and adopted. The Group considered ways in which the Development Management Service and other corporate teams such as parks and SCC Highways could work smarter together to avoid these problems in the future with major housing schemes. The introduction of standard conditions regarding adoption would improve the situation the Council currently had and the good practice of pre-application advice and the development team approach would also provide benefits to address the concerns raised by the Joint Task and Finish Group. It was reported that whilst the adoption conditions for Highways had yet to be agreed across the Suffolk Authorities, officers would continue to work to achieve this.

The Service Manager (Planning –Development) confirmed that a final report including recommendations would be presented to the Committee on 15 September 2016.

Members considered the update from the Service Manager (Planning – Development) and asked a number of questions in relation to the work of the Joint Task and Finish Group to which responses were duly provided.

The Committee **noted** the update on the current status of its forward work programme; the additional meetings schedule in October 2016 and the verbal update on the Joint Task and Finish Group.

Finally the Committee considered a "suggestion for Scrutiny attached at Appendix 2 to the Report, which had been submitted jointly by Councillor Chris Barker and Councillor Robin Millar, Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, suggesting the Committee considers looking at the "lack of

parking enforcement". Councillor Chris Barker presented the suggestion to the Committee and advised members that Newmarket Town Council was looking at parking as well as the Transport Vision Group. He explained that the recent press article had created some confusion, which was regrettable. He questioned why the Council was not looking into taking over the responsibility of parking enforcement from the police. He felt a decision needed to be made as to whether the Council should take over parking enforcement. He also advised the Committee that Newmarket had a problem with parking especially in the All Saints Ward.

The Committee was asked to consider whether the issue presented would be appropriate for scrutiny, including potential outcomes and if added to the work programme to decide on appropriate timescales for future reporting.

The Director informed the Committee that the Public Sector Leaders in Suffolk had commissioned a report on civil parking enforcement, which included three options, with the findings to be reported in autumn 2016.

The Chairman felt that the suggestion form was not currently focused enough, and questioned whether the intention was just to focus on parking issues specifically in Newmarket, to which Councillor Chris Barker confirmed that the intention was solely to look at Newmarket.

The Vice-Chairman informed the Committee that the Committee should not ideally be duplicating the work of others and the consideration of the future decriminalisation of parking was currently being considered by all Councils in Suffolk with the Police. The Committee was informed in March 2016 by the Police and Crime Commissioner that they had not relinquished their responsibility regarding parking enforcement, just adjusted their resources and priorities. It was suggested that in order to be meaningful the suggestion form needed to be reworded and more specific. If the issue was about not enough parking being available, that was another issue and the Council had a Parking Strategy in place.

A lengthy debate on the issue was held and taking into account information provided by Councillor Chris Barker, the Committee agreed that a reworded work programme suggestion form should be submitted to the Committee for further consideration in September 2016. With the vote being unanimous, it was:

RESOLVED

That a reworded suggestion form be completed by Councillor Chris Barker, with help from Councillors Ruth Bowman and Brian Harvey so that the revised work programme suggestion contained more detail in relation to the issues faced in Newmarket.

The Meeting concluded at 7.43 pm

Signed by:

Chairman