

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 20 July 2017** 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 J.P.

Chris Barker
John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey

David Palmer
Nigel Roman

Also in attendance:

Sara Mildmay-White, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing

168. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared.

169. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rona Burt, Christine Mason and Reg Silvester.

170. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2017, were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

171. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

172. **Announcements from the Chairman regarding responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chairman attended Cabinet on 20 June 2017, and presented the Committee's report on items it considered on 6 June 2017, which was noted.

173. **Annual Presentation by the Lead Portfolio Holder for Housing**

The Committee was reminded that on 21 July 2016, it had received a presentation from the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, setting out her responsibilities covered under the portfolio.

At this meeting, the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing had been invited back to provide a follow-up presentation on her portfolio. Report No: OAS/FH/17/018 set out the focus of the follow-up presentation, which was to:

- Outline the main challenges faced during the first year;
- Outline some key successes and any failures during the first year;
- Set out the vision for the Portfolio through to 2019, and whether on target to meet that vision.

Before initially opening her presentation, Councillor Mildmay-White informed the Committee that Sara Lomax was nominated in her role of Service Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness in which she works closely with domestic abuse support services, supporting victims through homelessness prevention and encouraging agencies to work within the area. She had been at the forefront in bringing additional support to West Suffolk through the satellite accommodation project (which provides accommodation for victims of domestic abuse that were not in a refuge) and continued to bring best practice and new ideas to the area, increasing the support the councils could offer to victims of domestic abuse. Sara was presented with a certificate in recognition of her work from Cllr Tony Goldson, Chair of the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board.

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White then opened her presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation and for its support over the past year, and provided a number of examples, outlining challenges faced; successes and lessons learnt; and the vision through to 2019, such as:

- Behaving more commercially due to changes being made by Central Government (challenge)
- Bringing more empty homes back into use (challenge)
- Introduction of the Universal Credit full service goes live in Forest Heath and surrounding postcodes on September 2018 (future challenge)
- Barley Homes Group Limited which had now been incorporated (key success)
- Following a successful bid to the DCLG, the council along with Babergh/Mid Suffolk had employed a Rough Sleeper Outreach Prevention Worker (key success)
- Unable to meet the 30% affordable housing on brownfield sites (less successful)
- Delayed implementation of the data transfer to Home-link due to IT issues (less successful)
- Embedding the housing portfolio into the council in the way it delivers its commercial work (vision)

- Currently developing a Space Standards to eventually become a Supplementary Planning Document (vision)
- Barley Homes Group Limited to become an exemplar for housing standards (vision)

Members discussed the update in detail and asked questions of the Cabinet Member and officers, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

In response to particular questions raised, members were advised that:

- Delays had occurred around the negotiation of land sales to the Barley Homes Group Limited, but this had not impacted on the dividend / long-term profit margins for the councils. Terms had now been agreed for three of the four sites.
- Suffolk County Council in co-operation of the district and borough's was looking again at transit sites for Gypsies and Travellers.
- The Rough Sleeper Outreach worker was engaging homeless people with support services to try and encourage a change in their lifestyles. However, the individuals need to be willing to change and/or be open to support.
- The Strategic Housing Team was working on a Technical Advice Note for Space Standards. The Note would provide developers with the councils recommended minimum standards for developing all dwellings across West Suffolk.
- A list of registered Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) was available on the councils website at <http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/hmos.cfm>
- "Street Link" was a service whereby members of the public could report cases of rough sleepers (www.streetlink.org.uk)
- Universal Credit: two member development sessions would be held on 7 September 2017 at St Edmundsbury and 18 September 2017 at Forest Heath on Universal Credit and homeless. The sessions would be facilitated by the Department of Work and Pensions.
- The Barley Homes Group Limited Annual Report would be presented to the committee either in November 2017 or January 2018.

Discussions were also held on street begging and how members could help provide intelligence in identifying HMOs in their wards.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing for the update on her portfolio.

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

174. **Effective Member Development**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/019, which built upon recent discussions held at its meeting in March 2017 with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance regarding member development.

The report sought scrutiny input into how the member development programme could be developed to ensure it most effectively helped members to deliver their role.

Attached at Appendix A to the report was the outcomes from the recent Member Development Survey and at Appendix B was a list of previous events held an attendance figures.

The aim of the report was to serve as the basis for Committee to discuss the current strengths and weaknesses of the Development Plan, and assess how the offer could be developed further to maximise the use of training resources to best meeting Councillor needs.

The Committee discussed the various options set out in the report and asked questions to which responses were provided.

Discussions were held on the need to provide sufficient notification of training sessions; tailoring training to the committee that members sat on; holding 20 minute training sessions/updates prior to a Committee meeting; the use of webinars and e-learning; and not repeating the same training sessions each year.

The Vice-Chairman of the Committee stated that the key point was to incentivise members to attend training sessions, and it would be wrong to use the stick approach. Furthermore, members should not be treated as employees.

It was then proposed by Councillor Ruth Bowman, seconded by Councillor Nigel Roman and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RECOMMENDED:

That the Member Development Steering Group be asked to consider the following recommendations for improving the Development Plan:

- 1) Explores the use of webinars alongside work already being undertaken on e-learning.
- 2) Explores holding quick 20 minute learning sessions prior to the commencement of Committee meetings to update Committee members on legislative requirements; changes etc.
- 3) Ensure that sufficient notice / publicity is provided on planned training sessions.

175. **Use of Directed Surveillance by the Anglia Revenues Partnership (Verbal)**

The Monitoring Officer presented a verbal report, which built upon discussions held at its meeting in April 2017 regarding the use of surveillances powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 by the Anglian Revenues Partnership (ARP) for carrying out benefits checks.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) carried out fraud investigations on behalf of the Anglia Revenues Partnership. She further advised that DWP had not used these surveillance powers.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the verbal update from the Monitoring Officer.

176. **Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/020, which updated Member on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2017-2018 (Appendix 1).

The Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) informed the Committee that the following additional items were to be included in its forward work programme for 9 November 2017:

- Development of a New West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2018-2020
- Annual Report from Barley Homes Group Limited.

The Committee **noted** the update on the current status of its forward work programme for 2017-2018 and the additional items to be included in its forward work programme for November 2017.

The Meeting concluded at 7.35 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
