

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 19 July 2017** at **4.00 pm** at the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

**Chairman** Diane Hind  
**Vice Chairman** Susan Glossop

John Burns  
Simon Brown  
Tony Brown  
Patrick Chung  
Paula Fox

Paul Hopfensperger  
Richard Rout  
Andrew Speed  
Sarah Stamp  
Frank Warby

**Substitutes attending:**  
Patricia Warby

**By Invitation:**  
Ian Houlder, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance  
Sara Mildmay-White. Portfolio Holder for Housing  
Margaret Marks

## 165. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Patricia Warby for Councillor Clive Springett.

## 166. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clive Springett and Jim Thorndyke.

Councillor Jeremy Farthing was also unable to attend.

## 167. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2017, were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

**168. Public Participation**

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

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

The Chairman attended Cabinet on 27 June 2017, and presented the Committee's report on items it considered on 7 June 2017, which was accepted without any questions raised. The Chairman also reminded the Committee of the Scrutiny Workshop on 9 August 2017.

**170. Annual Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Housing**

The Committee was reminded that on 20 July 2016, it had received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Housing, setting out her responsibilities covered under the portfolio.

At this meeting, the Cabinet Member for Housing had been invited back to provide a follow-up presentation on her portfolio. Report No: OAS/SE/17/020 set out the focus of the follow-up presentation, which was to:

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

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White opened her presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation and for its support over the past year. She then 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 Bury St Edmunds and surrounding postcodes on 18 October 2017 (future challenge)
- Barley Homes Group Limited which had now been incorporated (key success)
- Purchased two properties for temporary use (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)
- 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:

- A review of the Vision 2031 document would commence in the next 18 months and the council would explore ways of engaging young people in the process.
- Delays had occurred around the negotiation of land sales to the Barley Homes Group Limited, but this should not impacted on the long-term profit margins / dividend paid to the councils.
- Suffolk County Council in co-operation of the district and borough's was looking again at transit sites for Gypsies and Travellers.
- Emergency bed and breakfast accommodation: The council understood the impact on homeless families regarding school and work life, and was looking at alternative temporary accommodation options closer to Bury St Edmunds.
- 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 delayed discharges from hospitals; space standards; bringing empty homes back into use; domestic abuse; young people and affordable housing.

Councillor Paul Hopfensperger questioned whether there was a definitive definition of affordable housing. Officers agreed to provide members with a written response, which was set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

The Chairman wished to thank the Cabinet Member for Housing for the update on her portfolio and the Housing Team for their hard work.

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

#### 171. **Effective Member Development**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/17/021, 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 in detail various options set out in the report and asked questions to which responses were provided by the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance.

In particular discussions were held on the use of webinars; e-learning which the Committee noted was currently being trialled with a number of officers and members; more joined up training with Suffolk Council, e.g. safeguarding; Group Leaders discussing training at Group meetings and acting as "training champions"; the need to inform the Learning and Development Advisor when councillors had attend external training events; and developing a councillor profile form setting out training events attended elsewhere.

In response to a question raised regarding compulsory training, members were informed that the council's constitution was being reviewed and would include increasing a number of committees for which training would become mandatory, for example the Development Control Committee.

The Committee also discussed publicising member attendance, but did not feel this would be helpful.

It was then proposed by Councillor Diane Hind, seconded by Councillor John Burns 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) Each Political Group has a Councillor as its Training Champion.
- 2) Explores the use of webinars alongside work already being undertaken on e-learning.
- 3) Explores joined up training events with Suffolk County Council in West Suffolk.
- 4) A selection of Councillors be contacted by telephone, including some of those who did not respond to the recent Member Development Survey Questionnaire, to assess member development needs.
- 5) A Councillor profile form be developed to show all training events attended but which would not be available to the public.

- 6) Members to be reminded to notify the Learning and Development Advisor of all training events they had attended, in particular training which was not facilitated by the Council.

172. **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 and had used these surveillance powers.

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

173. **Work Programme Update and Suggestions for Scrutiny**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/17/022, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2017-2018 (Appendix 1).

The Committee **noted** the update on the current status of its forward work programme and that the Annual Report on Barley Homes Group Limited would be presented to the Committee in either November 2017 or January 2018.

Also attached at Appendices 2 and 3 to the Report were two completed "suggestion for scrutiny" forms, submitted by:

- 1) Councillors Susan Glossop and Sarah Stamp, suggesting the Committee considers inviting back the Anglia Revenues Partnership to provide a follow-up presentation on its debt management work; and
- 2) Councillors Diane Hind and Susan Glossop, relating to concerns raised by residents regarding various highways issues.

The Committee was asked to consider each suggestion in turn as to whether they would be appropriate for scrutiny, including potential outcomes and if added to the work programme to decide on appropriate timescales for future reporting.

Anglia Revenues Partnership (Appendix 2)

This suggestion advised members that in June 2015, the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) gave a presentation to the Committee on their joint debt management and recovery policy.

It was suggested that the Committee might wish to receive a follow-up presentation from ARP to enable scrutiny members to gain a better understanding of how they carry out their debt management work and write offs.

The Committee agreed to include this item in its forward work programme for 2017.

The Chairman informed the Committee that two Member Development Sessions were scheduled for 7 September 2017 at St Edmundsbury, and 18 September 2017 at Forest Heath on "Housing Options, Homelessness and Universal Credit". She wished, to encourage all members to attend one of the sessions as this would be useful background research for members when posing questions to representatives of the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

It was then proposed by Councillor John Burns, seconded by Councillor Susan Glossop and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That representatives from the Anglia Revenues Partnership be invited to its scheduled meeting on 8 November 2017, to provide a follow-up presentation to the Committee on its Debt Management work.

Suffolk County Council Highways (Appendix 3)

This suggestion set out concerns which had been raised by a number of West Suffolk residents relating to highways issues, such as potholes; lack of tree maintenance; cutting back of verges; resurfacing roads etc.

Also attached at Appendix 3A to the report was background information on the ongoing work being undertaken by the Suffolk County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Highways Services Contract and Highways Infrastructure Asset Management.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman informed members that they would be observing the SCC Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 July 2017 to listen to the progress report on the "Highways Services Integrated Teams".

The Chairman suggested that the Committee hold an extraordinary meeting on 25 October 2017, and invites the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport from Suffolk County Council; and appropriate officers from Suffolk County Council and Kier Limited to listen to the Committees concerns; finds out about planned maintenance work in West Suffolk, the benefits of the new highways structure and to answer questions from the Committee.

The Committee agreed to include this item in its forward work programme for 2017.

It was then proposed by Councillor John Burns, seconded by Councillor Richard Rout and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**RESOLVED:**

That the Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport; appropriate officers from Suffolk County Council and Kier Limited be invited by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to an Extraordinary Committee meeting on 25 October 2017, to discuss various highways issues affecting residents in West Suffolk.

The Meeting concluded at 6.10 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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