

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 9 July 2020** at **5.00 pm** facilitated by MS TeamsLive virtual meetings platform.

Present: **Councillors**

Chair Ian Shipp
Vice Chair Simon Cole

Simon Brown
Tony Brown
Mike Chester
Patrick Chung
Terry Clements
Stephen Frost
Diane Hind

Paul Hopfensperger
Lisa Ingwall King
Margaret Marks
Joe Mason
Jim Meikle
Marion Rushbrook

In attendance:
John Griffiths, Leader of the Council
John Burns

59. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

60. **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

Councillor Michael Anderson was unable to attend the meeting.

61. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

62. **Announcements from the Chair Regarding Responses from the Cabinet to Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chair informed members he attended Cabinet on 26 May 2020 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 12 March 2020. As per the minutes above, the Chair updated Cabinet on the presentation from Havebury Housing and their ongoing strategy development and the Cabinet joined him in thanking Councillor David Nettleton for his work over the past year.

Councillor David Nettleton had since resigned from the Committee but the Chair was pleased to formally welcome Councillor Margaret Marks on to the Committee.

63. Public Participation

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

64. Council Response to Covid-19

[Councillor Simon Brown joined the meeting at 5.07pm]

In June 2020, the Committee met informally to talk about its future work programme, and the general feeling was that the impact of Covid-19 would feature strongly. As a Committee, it recognised that it needed to gain further insight from the Leader and Chief Executive about the Council's response, and how the crisis was impacting on the Council, businesses and our communities so that it could understand where it could add value by looking in depth at specific areas. It was therefore agreed to invite the Leader and the Chief Executive to its next scheduled meeting to discuss the Council and community response to the Covid-19 crisis.

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council, Ian Gallin, Chief Executive, Jill Korwin, Director and Alex Wilson, Director to the meeting.

The Leader and the Chief Executive thanked the Committee for being given the opportunity to address the Committee on their perspective on how Covid-19 was impacting the Council and its communities and in doing so, covered the 10 core topics identified by the Committee, as set out on the Agenda.

The Leader explained that in many ways the Council was still dealing with an emergency. The Council was starting to think about recovery and was working through the budget and the Governments wider support in dealing with direct covid-19 costs. The Committee was reassured that the Council would be able to balance the budget for 2020-2021 from its own reserves. The families and communities work had been extremely successful throughout the pandemic including its partners and local communities and had proved to be the right model for the Council in delivering initiatives such as safer places, home but not alone and homelessness provision in responding to getting people off the streets.

Discussions took place on the extra costs incurred by the Council to meet the statutory requirements set by Government in tackling the pandemic. The overall impact from Covid-19 on the Council's budget for 2020-2021 was £10.2m. The Council had so far spent £2.2m from its general fund reserve directly on Covid-19 and incurred a reduction in its income, currently £8m. However, to date the Government had only provided £1.8m in funding support. On 2 July 2020 the Government had set out how they might cover some of the direct costs. In the meantime, the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders and national local authorities were lobbying the Government to fairly fund councils and to recognise the role they had and would continue to have during

the pandemic. The Committee emphasised their support to this important lobbying activity.

In response to a question raised on how prepared was the council if there was a local outbreak, members were informed that a Local Outbreak Engagement Board had been established across the County which was formed of all the leaders in Suffolk, the CCG (East and West) and the CCG covering Waveney near the Norfolk/Suffolk border, Suffolk County Council and the Director of Public Health. It was an engagement and co-ordination board, which had some powers if a local lockdown was required. The second meeting of the Board was scheduled for 10 July, which was a training session so that all leaders, chief executives and various bodies all understood the processes and procedures.

In response to the home but not alone initiative, members were informed the Government would be ending some of the key components, such as food parcels. However, the Council would be keeping the phone number operational to maintain the legacy of the service.

Members of the Committee discussed the impact that the crisis had on operational arrangements within the Council. It was noted that a significant proportion of staff were now working from home and members were reassured to hear that work had been undertaken to support staff wellbeing. The Chief Executive agreed to provide further information to members on the work undertaken and recent workshops held with staff. In addition, it was noted that the pandemic would have some impact on current and future planned programmes and initiatives being undertaken by the Council, but the full extent of this would need further assessment.

Arising from the detailed discussion a number of areas were highlighted, which it was felt the Council would need to consider as it moved into learning from the pandemic, as follows:

- There had been an outstanding response by the Families and Communities team, its partners and the local community to the pandemic, demonstrating the value of the investment the Council had made in the Families and Communities Strategy. It was acknowledged that there was a need to ensure the benefits of initiatives such as the "Home but Not Alone" service were not lost but were built upon and remodelled to continue supporting people in a new way.
- The way the Council had worked closely with Town and Parish councils though the pandemic. There was the potential to examine those areas where the response from the community, including Parish and Town Councils, had been strongest and learn why this was the case.
- How local members and community leaders had worked differently during the pandemic, and what this might mean for the future.
- The impact that the pandemic had on the health and wellbeing of residents across West Suffolk, and what steps could be taken to support residents in future.

- How had other partners, housing associations, town/parish councils found working with the Council during the pandemic over the short term and how did they see this continuing over the medium to long-term as part of the recovery process.
- The resilience of council staff stepping out of their comfort zones and being deployed to other parts of the Council to provide much needed help and support; reviewing lessons learnt; building on flexibility and managing the welfare of staff.
- Ensuring the Council retained the legacy and the momentum which had come out of the pandemic by working even closer together with partners, agencies, volunteers etc.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee was seeking to identify areas where it might wish to undertake further review to support the Council and its Communities. However, the Chair recognised in summarising the debate, the breadth of the issues covered meant that further reflection would be required before determining the specific future Committee work. What had been prominent in the discussion was the outstanding work carried out throughout West Suffolk during these unprecedented times.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive for a comprehensive update on the impact that Covid-19 has had on the Council.

The Committee **noted** the briefing provided by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive on the Council's response to Covid-19 and thanked them for their attendance and time.

65. **Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 July 2020 to 31 May 2021**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/WS/20/010, which was latest version of the Cabinet Decisions Plan, covering the period 1 July 2020 to 31 May 2021. New decisions which had been included since the Decisions Plan was last published had been highlighted.

Members reviewed the Decisions Plan and asked questions relating to Public Space Protection Orders and the West Suffolk Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Conditions Policy Handbook.

Officers confirmed that due to the need to conclude the review of the Public Space Protection Orders before the end of September 2020, this would now not be subject to a review by the Committee and agreed to update the wording in the current Decisions Plan. However, all members would be able to submit comments as part of the consultation process.

Officers also confirmed that the Licensing and Regulatory Committee had acted as a consultee in the review of the West Suffolk Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Conditions Policy Handbook in October 2019, January 2020 and on 6 July 2020.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the 1 July 2020 to 31 May 2021 Decisions Plan.

66. **Scrutiny Work Programme 2020-2021**

[Councillor Mike Chester left the meeting at 7.43pm during the consideration of this item, and prior to the vote taking place.

Council Terry Clements left the meeting at 7.47pm during the consideration of this item, and prior to the vote taking place].

The Committee received Report No: OAS/WS/20/011, which set out the current position of its work programme and items currently agreed but had yet to be programmed for 2020-2021 as attached at Appendix 1.

The report also referred to the Committee's informal scrutiny workshop held on 11 June 2020, where members identified potential new topics of work. In addition to the Covid-19 topics identified (Minute No: 64 above), members had also suggested other topics they might wish to consider over the forthcoming year.

Reflecting on discussions held earlier in the meeting, the Committee agreed with the principle of the Chair and Vice-Chair working with officers to develop proposals on which aspects of the Covid-19 response to consider through the scrutiny process in detail; how they should be reviewed, and when. These would then be subject to consultation with members of the Committee, before inclusion on the formal work programme.

The Committee also agreed to reschedule the Community Safety Monitoring Annual Report for its September 2020 meeting as it was a statutory requirement and many aspects of the Community Safety Partnership's priorities crossed over with the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on communities including domestic violence and anti-social behaviour.

Members discussed the four topics identified at its informal meeting held in June 2020 and agreed to invite the Anglia Revenues Partnership to a future meeting to discuss Council Tax and Business Rates collections.

Discussions also took place on:

- Parking metres as some members felt that due to Covid-19 there should be minimal contact with payment machines and where possible RingGo should be used as alternative to cash payments. In response, officers agreed to ask for a written response from the Service Manager (Property) on the current use of RingGo in its car parks across West Suffolk.
- Pedestrian Crossing and physical contact with buttons due to Covid-19. In response officers suggested the Council could look at raising this with Suffolk County Council to seek an answer.

At its conclusion, the Committee, **noted** the current status of topics currently scheduled in its rolling work programme for 2020-2021 (Appendix 1).

Councillor Paul Hopfensperger then moved the revised recommendation, this was duly seconded by Councillor Stephen Frost, and with the vote being unanimous, the Committee:

RESOLVED:

To agree to develop the work programme based on the principles discussed in the Committee meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.55pm

Signed by:

Chair
