

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 3 September 2020** at **5.00 pm** facilitated by MS TeamsLive virtual meetings platform.

Present **Councillors**

Chair Ian Shipp

Michael Anderson
Mike Chester
Patrick Chung
Terry Clements
Stephen Frost
Diane Hind

Paul Hopfensperger
Lisa Ingwall King
Margaret Marks
Joe Mason
Andy Neal
Jim Thorndyke

In attendance

Robert Everitt, Cabinet Member for Families and Communities
Joanna Spicer, Chair of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

67. Substitutes

The following substitutions were declared:

Councillor Andy Neal substituting for Councillor Tony Brown.
Councillor Jim Thorndyke substituting for Councillor Marion Rushbrook.

68. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Brown, Tony Brown, Simon Cole and Marion Rushbrook.

Councillor Jim Meikle was also unable to attend the meeting.

69. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

70. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

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

The Chair informed member he attended Cabinet on 21 July 2020 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 9 July 2020. As per the minutes above, the Chair updated Cabinet on the presentation given by the Leader and Chief Executive on the Council's Response to Covid-19 and the development of the Committee's work programme, which was noted by Cabinet.

72. **Public Participation**

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

73. **Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Monitoring Report (April 2019 to March 2020)**

It was the duty of the Committee, as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee designated under the Police and Justice Act 2006, to scrutinise the work of the Partnership.

The Committee received Report No: OAS/WS/20/012, presented by the Chair of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, Councillor Joanna Spicer, and the Council's Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, Councillor Robert Everitt.

The report set out the background to the partnership and the statutory bodies involved which Councillor Joanna Spicer expanded on, as well as updating Members on the community safety activity in West Suffolk, including the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) for 2019-2020.

Over the past year the WSCSP had continued to meet and discharge its statutory duties by carrying out an annual assessment of crime and disorder in the area, continuing to deliver the three year plan and action plan to reflect the priorities of the partnership, and carrying out Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Attached at Appendix A to the report, was the WSCSP Plan 2019-2022, which was required to reflect the Suffolk Police and Crime Plan published by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

In June 2019, the WSCSP considered its priorities for 2019-2020. It was agreed a review of the current action plan and a more in-depth strategic assessment would be conducted over the year, with a draft to be presented to the WSCSP Responsible Authorities Group in March 2020. However, this meeting was cancelled due to Covid-19 and it was now anticipated the review of the action plan would be completed by the end of September 2020.

Based on the outcomes of partnership discussions and a strategic assessment of crime, the following priorities were identified as the focus of the WSCSP:

- County Lines;
- Violence against women and girls (including men and boys);

- Domestic homicide reviews;
- Hate crime; and
- Prevent

Councillor Robert Everitt, the Council's Cabinet Member for Families and Communities explained that the WSCSP covered a large geographical area, which included a number of important organisations, which were set out on page 21 of the report. He and Councillor Spicer also wanted to thank Helen Lindfield, who was the previous support officer at St Edmundsbury Borough Council and West Suffolk Council for all the work she had put in over many years at the WSCSP.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which comprehensive responses were provided by Councillor Spicer and officers.

Detailed discussions were held on modern day slavery where Councillor Diane Hind informed the Committee that the former St Edmundsbury Borough Council had adopted in 2017 a modern slavery statement. She felt at the time this was a tick box exercise rather than an effort to do anything regarding modern day slavery. In view of today's report, she felt that modern day slavery was currently only covered by safeguarding training, an e-learning module and a national referral form. She questioned whether the Committee needed to put forward something more robust. The Modern Day Slavery Act did not specifically require local authorities to comply with Section 54 of the Act, but many councils were voluntarily preparing a slavery and human trafficking statement and she felt West Suffolk Council should be among them and should declare that it deplored all forms of slavery that existed and it would do all it could to help stamp it out. She suggested that the Committee should put a motion to council stating it will train its corporate procurement team to understand modern slavery through the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply and that it requires its contractors to also fully comply with the Modern Slavery Act.

In response, officers explained that the WSCSP had identified the cross-over with modern day slavery and county lines. As part of the work being carried out by the WSCSP, modern day slavery would be adopted at its next meeting and would be looking to incorporate it into its plan. As a council it was very much active on this issue and modern-day slavery was included in its procurement policy.

Councillor Spicer stated it was a matter for the Committee to decide on what it wanted to take forward as a council for action, which would have the support of the Community Safety Partnership.

The Chair informed the committee that this could be discussed further under item 11 on the agenda (Work Programme 2020-2021).

In response to a question raised regarding county lines the committee was informed that the number of county line drug supply operations frequently changed, with a number active in West Suffolk, despite activity being severely reduced during the Covid-19 lockdown. Councillor Spicer explained that at the beginning of lockdown things did go quiet but her understanding after

having spoken with the police, was suppliers had found other ways to use other routes trying to infiltrate existing drug supplies in the county.

In response to a question raised a breakdown of county lines by ward in West Suffolk, officers agreed to looking into after the meeting how numbers could be provided confidentially to members. Noting that this information was subject to frequent change.

In response to a question raised regarding what else was being done to tackle hate crime, members were informed that in October 2020 there would be a Hate Crime Awareness Week which would also include modern day slavery. With regards to training, the council had concentrated on training staff, so they were aware of how to identify hate crime and modern day slavery as well as identifying the different avenues for reporting. Hate crime had also been adopted as a priority by the WSCP and was looking at providing more preventative work.

In response to a question raised on what more could be done to support victims of domestic abuse, members were informed that victim support was one of the WSCSP priorities. Over the last few months, the partnership had been concentrating on support. During the Covid lockdown specialist services in Suffolk had adapted extremely quickly. Between March and July 2020 there had been a 27% increase in domestic abuse compared to the same period last year. Additional measures had been put in place when lockdown began, such as ensuring services had online and telephone avenues to get help. Call handlers on the Home but Not Alone scheme set up by the council during lockdown were alert to potential domestic abuse and were able to provide contact numbers. Funding had also been secured for general practitioners to text their vulnerable patients. The council had also established a page on its intranet so that staff and councillors could seek sources of advice, support and reporting concerns, and the Police and Crime Commissioner had received funding from the government to help support victims of domestic abuse.

Discussions were also held on working with perpetrators of domestic abuse, as well as the postponement of crucial crew and its future delivery.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report, subject to comments made during the meeting to the Chair of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and officers.

74. **Reflections on the Community Response to COVID**

The Committee received a presentation on West Suffolk Council's community response role to Covid-19.

The presentation provided information on West Suffolk Council's community response role; an overview of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) Covid response; reflections from our communities and VCS; the impact on our VCS and funding allocated to VCS groups.

The presentation also included recommendations/actions identified by officers as follows:

- Our investment over many years in the Families and Communities approach meant there was a solid foundation on which to build and respond very quickly. Continue to support and develop relationships with our communities through our Families and Communities Approach, working in partnership with West Suffolk Alliance and Community Action Suffolk.
- Co-produce the Volunteering Strategy with partners and volunteers to build on volunteering we have seen throughout the pandemic, so to capture this new wave of socially minded good neighbours. Out of this developing a Volunteer Passport/Pool scheme for West Suffolk.
- Work with Parish and Town Councils, Emergency Planning groups and other interested volunteers/groups in the community to rework Community Engagement Plans in light of the recent pandemic. This work to be led by the Emergency Planning team and supported by the Families and Communities team with local intelligence and connections.
- If we need to restart Home but Not Alone, we should facilitate “connecting group sessions” to support one another and to share ideas. WE could also look at how we bring some of the larger support functions across the area into the conversation at an earlier point, so there is more local ownership.

The Committee was asked to add their thoughts in addition to the above recommendations/actions.

The Chair opened the discussions by stating that the investment made in families and communities had really paid dividends during the lockdown period, and also applauded the excellent work carried out in our communities across West Suffolk.

[At 6.16pm the Chair of the meeting experienced technical issues. It was therefore agreed by members of the Committee to adjourn the meeting at 6.18pm.

The meeting recommenced again at 6.19pm when the Chair re-joined the meeting].

In response to a question raised regarding social distancing not being observed and how could the council influence and educate children on the importance of wearing a mask so they could then tell their parents. Officers explained the council was working with colleagues across Suffolk on the “Stick with it Suffolk” message but would raise this with the Communications Team to see what else could be done.

In response to a question raised regarding community emergency planning and reviving groups, officers confirmed this had been picked up as a particular learning point and would be progressed with colleagues in the Suffolk Emergency Planning Team.

In response to a question raised regarding continuing to support those vulnerable and how this would be funded, officers explained it was currently doing a piece of work on “newly vulnerable” groups of people who might be financially vulnerable for the first time due to the furlough scheme ending and unemployment etc. The council was working with colleagues across the system to look at what support could be put in place for those people who might have particular financial worries or when the moratorium eviction ends. Some of this work might be to sign post people to existing organisations, but the council would need to ensure those organisations were robust enough to help. It is not going to be easy going forward, but the council still needs to continue to support the voluntary sector and how it can support those who might be able to volunteer for the first time. There was also the Winter Planning in the health system and this year there was a section within the Plan which talked about the voluntary sector and some of the work that District Councils could do otherwise hospitals might find it difficult to cope. With regards to funding the council was working on the basis of trying to use resources across our communities and across the public sector in the best way possible.

Discussions were also held on the Home but Not Alone Scheme and food parcels; accessing data and data sharing of vulnerable persons and digital isolation to which comprehensive responses were provided.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the Chair thanked officers for the report and presentation which was very comprehensive. As a Council it was in a good position to respond to future emergencies.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair wished to record its thanks and appreciation to the Families and Communities team for its outstanding work.

The Committee **noted** the presentation and supported the four recommendations identified by officers as part of the reflection process, in particular to rework Community Emergency Plans in light of the recent pandemic.

75. **Suffolk County Council: Health Scrutiny Committee - 8 July 2020**

Councillor Margaret Marks, the Council’s appointed representative on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee presented Report No: OAS/WS/20/013, which was also emailed to members of the committee on 17 July 2020.

The report, prepared by Councillor Margaret Marks, set out what was considered at its meeting held on 8 July 2020. The focus of the meeting largely related to the effects of Covid-19 on services.

The Committee considered the report and did not raise any issues.

There being no decisions required, the Committee **noted** the report on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 July 2020, from Councillor Margaret Marks.

76. Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 September 2020 to 31 May 2021

The Committee received Report No: OAS/WS/20/014, which informed Members on forthcoming decisions to be considered by the Cabinet for the period 1 September 2020 to 31 May 2021.

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 September 2020 to 31 May 2021 Decisions Plan.

77. Work Programme 2020-2021

[Councillor Joe Mason left the meeting at 7.01pm during the consideration of this item, and prior to the vote taking place.

Councillor Diane Hind left the meeting at 7.06pm during the consideration of this item, and prior to the vote taking place].

The Committee received Report Number OAS/WS/20/015, which set out the current position of its work programme and items currently agreed but had yet to be programmed for the 2020-2021 as attached at Appendix 1.

The report also referred to the Chair's meeting with officers, following the Committee's meeting on 9 July 2020 and based on the principles discussed, the following items have been scheduled as follows for 2020-2021:

12 November 2020: Major council programmes and how Covid-19 had impacted upon some projects.

14 January 2020: Inviting the Anglia Revenues Partnership to discuss with members in more detail about their debt recovery programmes.

In addition to the above, the Chair informed members he had been made aware that a number of members were interested in the current and future operations of the West Suffolk markets. The Committee briefly discussed markets and agreed in principle for this to be progressed as a scrutiny topic.

Councillor Diane Hind referred to Minute Number 73 above and discussions held on modern day slavery. She was encouraged by Councillor Spicers comments and committee members being supportive of developing a motion/proposal on modern slavery.

The Committee briefly discussed modern slavery and agreed in principle for this to be progressed as a scrutiny topic.

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

Councillor Andy Neal then moved the recommendation in relation to West Suffolk Markets, this was duly seconded by Councillor Patrick Chung, and with the vote being unanimous, the Committee:

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports in principle, looking at the "Operation of West Suffolk Markets", subject to the Chair of the Committee holding discussions with the Cabinet Member for Operations, the Assistant Director (Operations) and the Chief Executive on the scope of the review, and presents the proposal back to the Committee in November 2020 for further consideration.

Councillor Ian Shipp then move the recommendation in relation to Modern Slavery, this was duly seconded by Councillor Mike Chester, and with the vote being unanimous, the Committee:

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports in principle, looking at a motion for "Modern Slavery", subject to Cllr Hind holding discussions with the responsible Cabinet Member and the Assistant Director (Families and Communities) and the Chief Executive on the scope of the review, and presents the proposal back to the Committee in November 2020 for further consideration.

The meeting concluded at 7.14pm

Signed by:

Chair
