

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Notes of a non-decision making meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 10 June 2021** at **5.00 pm** facilitated by MS TeamsLive virtual meetings platform.

Present

Councillors

Chair Ian Shipp
Vice Chair Stephen Frost

Trevor Beckwith
Simon Brown
Tony Brown
Mike Chester
Patrick Chung
Terry Clements

Paul Hopfensperger
Margaret Marks
Joe Mason
Sarah Pugh
Marion Rushbrook

Substitutes attending for a full member

John Burns
Cliff Waterman

In attendance

Paul Corney, Head of Anglia Revenues Partnership
Councillor Robert Everitt, Cabinet Member for Families and Communities
Councillor Joanna Spicer, Chair of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

106. **Substitutes**

The following substitutions were declared:

Councillor John Burns substituting for Councillor Michael Anderson.
Councillor Cliff Waterman substituting for Councillor Diane Hind.

107. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Anderson and Diane Hind.

108. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021 were reviewed and no amendments were noted. These minutes would be formally confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a question raised by members regarding whether a written response had been sent to Frank Stennett relating to minute number 101 (public participation), officers agreed to follow this action up.

109. Declarations of interest

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

110. 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 25 May 2021 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 18 March 2021. As per the minutes above, the Chair updated Cabinet on the report presented on Exiting the European Union: West Suffolk Council's preparations and current status and update on the Mildenhall Hub, which was noted by Cabinet.

111. Public participation

No members of the public had registered to speak.

112. Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Monitoring Report (April 2020 to March 2021)

[The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Ian Shipp experienced ongoing technical IT issues during the consideration of this item. To ensure the MS TeamsLive meeting was able to continue, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Stephen Frost took over chairing the meeting, with Councillor Ian Shipp joining the remainder of the meeting via the telephone].

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/21/006, 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. She explained that the WSCSP covered a large geographical area, which included a number of important organisations, and updated Members on the community safety activity in West Suffolk, including the work of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) for 2019-2022. Councillor Spicer confirmed that West Suffolk had a new Western Area Commander, Superintendent Janine Wratten who was introducing herself by making contact with councillors and other organisations.

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.

A review of the WSCSP action plan and strategic assessment was completed in June 2020 and following discussions with statutory partners the strategic assessment and action plan was formally agreed by the WSCSP Responsible Authorities in September 2020. Based on the outcomes of partnership discussions, the following priorities remained the focus of the WSCSP:

- County Lines.
- Violence against women and girls (including men and boys).
- Hate Crime.
- Prevent.
- Domestic homicide reviews.

Councillor Joanna Spicer wanted to thank Councillor Robert Everitt for his support over the past year and welcomed Councillor Trevor Beckwith who would be joining the WSCSP, representing West Suffolk Council, following the sad passing of Councillor Jim Meikle.

Finally, Councillor Joanna Spicer wished to thank Lesley-Ann Keogh (Families and Communities Team Leader) on producing the report through a challenging year, both in supporting the WSCSP and West Suffolk Council in her Covid work.

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

In response to a question raised regarding paragraph 2.2 in the report "violence against women and girls including men and boys", members felt this was an unusual acronym and asked whether this could be expressed in a better way. Officers explained this worked linked to a government strategy which focused language on violence towards women and girls. However, it was agreed at the first county wide steering group to also include "men and boys", so all people affected by domestic abuse and sexual abuse were included. The strategy took into account 10 different types of offences, including sexual violence, stalking and harassment. The Community Safety Partnership took a holistic view to commissioning domestic abuse services.

In response to a question raised regarding Suffolk Rape Crisis, officers agreed to look into what type of programmes they offered for male victims and would provide a written response. Officers explained that Survivors in Transition and Fresh Start New Beginnings did support male victims.

In response to a question raised, Councillor Robert Everitt explained that the past year had been very difficult due to Covid-19 in that the WSCSP had not been able to engage as much as it would have liked too. However, this year the Crucial Crew initiative was being held virtually, and training packages went online to ensure engagement with partners continued.

Discussions were also held on Public Space Protection Orders, the different types of Orders, how they were enforced and how often they were reviewed; the need for more public engagement around community safety from all the agencies involved; how the WSCSP supported county lines and alcohol and drug user initiatives, and whether there were any statistics to show how initiatives had performed over the years, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

113. **Collection of Council Tax and Business Rates**

[Councillor Simon Brown left the meeting at 6.09pm during the consideration of this item].

Prior to presenting the report, Paul Corney, Head of Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) explained it was a partnership of five councils being Fenland District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, East Suffolk Council, West Suffolk Council and Breckland District Council. ARP dealt with the collection of council tax and business rates and awarded housing benefits and council tax support for the partner councils.

Mr Corney then presented report number OAS/WS/21/007, which set out the approach to council tax and business rates debt recovery. The report informed the Committee on how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on business rates and council tax recovery, and how the recovery approaches have had to be flexed accordingly during the last year and into 2021 to support residents and businesses.

The report included information on its debt recovery approach; Covid-19 impact on recovery processes and collection; re-starting recovery; comparison of arrears and challenges for 2021, which was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation.

The Committee considered the report and asked questions to which comprehensive responses were provided.

In response to a question raised as to whether there was likely to be any government intervention and support when furlough and self-employed income support ended in September 2021 to help with genuine hardship which might occur and the impact of income to the council, which might be severe, Paul Corney explained that ARP was yet to see what the impact might be. The Bank of England's most recent projections were more optimistic than they had been suggesting in that unemployment might not rise by as much as they had originally thought, and that the economy could bounce back a lot quicker. However, it would be a waiting game to understand how good the bounce back would be and on how many people become unemployed through the impact of covid on businesses.

In response to a question raised on how well West Suffolk Council compared with other areas for debt collection due to Covid-19, Paul Corney explained that the council had performed well compare to other Suffolk authorities.

However, there was a picture across the country of everyone suffering collection wise, with certain areas hit harder than others. Within the same period last year, the government was helping councils by helping to fund the loss of income, such as council tax. However, it was going to be interesting moving forward as there was potentially a number of people with more arrears than they would have had in previous years and therefore ARP needed to be especially sensitive to the position that people had been put in through no fault of their own due to Covid. ARP was only two months into the collection year and arrears from previous years were being paid, which ARP would continue to monitor.

At the conclusion of discussions, and there being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

114. **Website Review Group Findings**

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/21/008, which set out the findings from the Website Working Party. The Group was set up following a work programme suggestion submitted by Councillor Terry Clements, attached as Appendix 1.

The Working Group comprised four councillors and met on three occasions to understand data on how the website was used; discuss their experience of using the website and agree an action plan. Between meetings members of the Group tested the website, including attempting to undertake the 10 most commonly used website functions and testing "Find My Nearest". At its last meeting the Group considered progress made on an Action Plan, which was developed during its second meeting (Appendix 2).

The Group had identified 15 improvements (Appendix 2) as result of its work, and subject to endorsement by the Committee, these were with officers to progress. Some of the actions had already been completed or were in progress.

Councillor Robert Everitt, Cabinet Member for Families and Communities wished to thank Councillor Terry Clements and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for allowing the Working Group to carry out this piece of work and to officers for guiding the Working Group through the process.

The Committee considered the report and asked questions to which responses were provided.

In response to a question raised as to whether there was a requirement in law to have pages on its website in different languages, officers explained that there was no requirement by law to provide alternative languages as people mainly used their own language readers. The council did have a contract which made it cheaper, with a company called "language line" who were qualified translators, for example to translate documents when required. On its website, the council had an accessibility statement, and it tried to be as compliant as possible with accessibility requirements. Officers are able to undertake weekly reviews of accessibility compliance. A selection of officers across the council had also been trained as editors in uploading accessible documents and making sure information was up to date.

In response to a question asked as to whether the council's website had been created in-house, officers explained that the website was predominantly maintained by council staff.

In response to a question raised as to why councillors were not asked for their input, the Chair of the Work Group, Councillor Stephen Frost, referred members to the original terms of the review and to Appendix 2, recommended action 15 being proposed to "inform councillors of where they can raise website issues and improvements within the council", which would be an ongoing aspect of keeping the website up to date. This was specifically included to ensure that in future Councillors would have a clear avenue through which to raise any concerns they may hold about the website.

Discussions were also held on the planning portal, links to other organisations websites and search words (terminology used), to which responses were provided.

At the conclusion of discussions, the Committee **endorsed** the action plan developed by the Website Review Working Group, attached at Appendix 2 to the report, to be implemented with the support of the Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities.

115. **Review of Council Markets - Terms of Reference**

[Councillor Joe Mason left the meeting at 6.57pm during the consideration of this item].

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/21/009, which set out the proposed terms of reference for the markets review. It was proposed that five members be nominated to sit on the Working Group, which would be supported by officers to find out more about the current market trading environment, engagement would be held with key stakeholders and research undertaken, with a view to then forming a view on the strategic direction of the markets.

Councillor Ian Shipp explained that it was important that the Working Group looked at the markets strategically. The proposed five members would need to be committed to the review. The review was about looking at how the council could sustain markets for the future and put himself forward to sit in the Working Group.

Councillor Paul Hopfensperger suggested having market traders sitting on the Working Group as co-optees alongside members. In response, officers explained that the council needed to engage with the various stakeholders in the right way. Furthermore, Councillor Ian Shipp suggested holding a market trader specific meeting. Market traders would be able to feed information throughout the review process.

Councillor Marion Rushbrook suggested increasing the proposed membership on the Working Group from five to six, so all of the market towns were covered. In response officers explained it was useful to have that representation, but the markets review was about the whole of West Suffolk's strategic vision. Looking at the membership of the Committee, there were no Brandon

members on Overview and Scrutiny, but officers could see after the meeting if any Brandon members would be interested in sitting on the Group.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **endorses** the terms of reference as attached at Appendix 1, subject to increasing the membership to six members, and nominated the following members to sit on the Markets Review Group:

- 1) Ian Shipp (Mildenhall)
- 2) John Burns (Haverhill)
- 3) Marion Rushbrook (Smaller Markets/Clare)
- 4) Patrick Chung (Bury St Edmunds)

It was also advised that following the meeting, the Chair and officers would speak with Councillor Anderson to see if he wished to be on the Working Group for Newmarket (and if not, seek an alternative member representative for Newmarket), as well as Brandon members to seek a nomination.

[Councillor Sarah Pugh left the meeting at 7.11pm following the conclusion of this item.

Councillor Paul Hopfensperger left the meeting at 7.13pm following the conclusion of this item].

116. **Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/21/010, which informed members on forthcoming decisions to be considered by the Cabinet for the period 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022.

The Committee considered the Decision Plan, in particular "Public Access to West Suffolk Council Offices" being considered by Cabinet on 29 June 2021. Councillor Burns had read the proposals for staff working and asked how that would interact with public access and staff being in the office to see people, and whether that was covered in the proposed report to Cabinet. Officers explained that the council was working through the Government's rules and regulations and was looking at various options for the different offices, how people access our services and taking lessons learnt from the past year, which would tie in with the decision made about staff coming back into the offices.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022 Decisions Plan.

117. **Work Programme Update and Councillor Call for Action Submission**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/21/011, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2021-2022 (Appendix 1), the submission of a Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) request by Councillor Trevor Beckwith and the nomination of at least one member to the Modern-day Slavery Working Group.

Councillor Trevor Beckwith introduced the CCfA entitled "Impact of the Eastern Relief Road and A14 Junction 45 on the Moreton Hall Residential Area, attached at Appendix 2 to the report. Councillor Beckwith referred to the CCfA Protocol and explained that his submission met the requirements of the Protocol as the matter directly affected his ward; accepted that there was no guarantee of a successful resolution but was optimistic that the Committee would consider the issues and merit recommendations; and the CCfA was the last resort and had provided evidence set out in Appendices 2 – 7 that all relevant mechanisms and resources available had been exhausted.

Councillor Beckwith explained that the construction of the Eastern Relief Road was a joint venture between Suffolk County Council, the then St Edmundsbury Borough Council and the LEP, to provide access to the huge expansion at Suffolk Park/Suffolk Business Park. Additionally, Junction 45 of the A14 trunk road underwent a major upgrade to improve access to the new road. The project cost was estimated to be £15m but there was an overspend of £4.8m. Much of the overspend was to comply with Highway England requirements at Junction 45. The business parks include massive warehousing and distribution centres that generate increasing numbers of HGV journeys. Unfortunately, the HGV increase was adversely impacting on several residential areas of the Moreton Hall estate despite the junction upgrade.

Documents attached to the CCfA demonstrated that all reasonable attempts to resolve the issue had been taken over the last three years, but the responses demonstrate that the matter was not being progressed. This was not part of a personal agenda but the response by an elected member to the frustration and annoyance at the avoidable loss of amenity for a large section of the residential community.

Councillor Beckwith hoped the committee would agree to a formal hearing so it could hear from local residents, a representative from the local residents' association and representatives from the business parks, increasing reasons to be optimistic that the committee would be able to make recommendations to benefit all concerned. This was a reputational issue for everyone involved.

Councillor Cliff Waterman supported the CCfA requested and explained the issue also impacted on his ward and acknowledged there was a high level of frustration with resident's and agreed it was a reputational issue.

Other members of the Committee also indicated they supported Councillor Beckwith's CCfA submission for inclusion in its forward work programme.

The Committee then considered the request to nominate at least one new member from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Ingwall-King on the Modern-Day Slavery Working Group who resigned as a West Suffolk Councillor in March 2021. The Committee felt that Councillor Julia Wakelam who would be replacing Councillor Ingwall-King on the Committee might be interested in sitting on this Group and agreed to defer this item to its next scheduled meeting on 8 July 2021 for further consideration.

At the conclusion of discussions, the Committee:

- 1) **Noted** the current status of topics currently scheduled in its rolling work programme for 2021, attached at Appendix 1;
- 2) **Deferred** nominating a Councillor to sit on the Modern-Day Slavery Working Group until it's 8 July 2021 meeting; and
- 3) **Accepted** the CCfA for inclusion into its forward work programme.

The meeting concluded at 7.29pm

Signed by:

Chair
