

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 17 March 2022** at **5.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

Chair Ian Shipp
Vice Chair Stephen Frost

Michael Anderson	Paul Hopfensperger
Trevor Beckwith	Margaret Marks
Tony Brown	Sarah Pugh
Mike Chester	Sarah Stamp

Substitutes attending for a full member

Dawn Dicker	Cliff Waterman
Clive Springett	

In attendance

David Roach, Cabinet Member for Planning
Birgitte Mager

159. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Dawn Dicker substituting for Councillor Julia Wakelam.
Councillor Clive Springett substituting for Councillor Patrick Chung.
Councillor Cliff Waterman substituting for Councillor Diane Hind.

160. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Brown, Patrick Chung, Diane Hind, Joe Mason, Marion Rushbrook and Julia Wakelam.

161. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2022 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

162. **Declarations of interest**

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

163. **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 18 February 2022 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 13 January 2022. As per the minutes confirmed above, the Chair updated Cabinet on the Committee's consideration of the update provided by Suffolk County Council on the recommendations from the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). The Chair drew Cabinet's attention to a number of additional recommendations for action made by the Committee. Cabinet formally noted, supported and endorsed the CCfA recommendations made by the Committee for Cabinet to take forward.

Cabinet was also updated on the interim report from the Markets Review Group and the Committee's forward work programme, which were also noted by Cabinet.

The Chair thanked Councillor Trevor Beckwith for all the work he had put into bringing the CCfA to the Committee's attention.

164. **Public participation**

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

165. **Response on Homes for Life and Ageing Population Housing Questions**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/22/004, which had been prepared following a request on 12 March 2020, which came from discussions relating to the West Suffolk Housing Strategy Implementation Plan 2018 to 2023: Year 1 Review. The report provided responses to two questions raised:

- How many Homes for Life are being built; and
- What is specifically being built for the ageing population?

The report explained the terminology, history of the change and current policy standards being used to meet housing need across West Suffolk.

How many Homes for Life are being built?

The Cabinet Member for Planning informed the Committee that West Suffolk Council did not hold any data for the number of homes that had been developed as "Homes for Life or Lifetime Homes". There was no longer a recognised standard and there were currently no records of homes that had been or were being built. However, the following information provided showed how the previous standard had evolved to the current development standard which replaced Homes for Life.

In February 2008 the UK Government announced its aim for all new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes Standards by 2013. By 2015, the Government's 'housing standards review' led to the Lifetime Homes standards being replaced by the building regulations standards M.

The building regulations being utilised across West Suffolk for the purpose of having accessible and adaptable dwellings was specifically M4(2) and M4(3). All developments were expected to meet this as a minimum standard.

M4(2): Category 2 – Accessible and adaptable dwellings

M4(2) was the standard which West Suffolk was recommending 100% of its developments through the Local Plan process which was currently being developed. This requirement was met when a new dwelling provides reasonable provision for most people to access the dwelling and includes features that made it suitable for a range of potential occupants, including older people, individuals with reduced mobility and some wheelchair users. This was required to go through a viability test, as all our policy recommendations, were for the Local Plan.

M4(3): Category 3 – Wheelchair user dwellings

M4(3) was the standard which West Suffolk was recommending for 25% of its affordable housing on developments and 10% on market sales on developments through the Local Plan process which the Council was currently working through. This was required to go through a viability test as all the Council's policy recommendations were for the Local Plan. This requirement was achieved when a new dwelling had practical provisions for a wheelchair user to live in the dwelling and could use any outdoor space, parking and communal facilities.

The Council met regularly with registered providers and developers that cover West Suffolk, to promote the benefits of housing that meets the need of our communities. The size and standards of housing was a regular agenda item to ensure West Suffolk promotes clear expectations for what was developed.

The planning team was currently reviewing all the policy recommendations mentioned above for the West Suffolk Local Plan. This would ensure homes would meet this standard for developments in future across West Suffolk.

What is specifically being built for the ageing population?

The Council did not keep specific figures on how many homes had been built or were proposed for an ageing population.

The policy requirements to meet the needs of an ageing population was met through the building regulations M4(2) and M4(3). These refer to accessible and adaptable dwellings, as well as wheelchair accessible homes. This ensures that homes could be adapted to meet the needs of the occupants without the need for them to move to a different property/home.

The housing needs assessment for West Suffolk was published in October 2021 and highlighted an increased need for housing to meet the needs of an ageing population. The report (OAS/WS/22/004) highlighted that there was a need to increase the supply of M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwellings and M4(3) wheelchair user dwellings. In seeking M4(2) complaint homes, the Council was also mindful that such homes could be considered as "homes for

life" and would be suitable for any occupant, regardless of whether they had a health problem or disability at the time of initial occupation.

The purpose of including this information was to illustrate how nationally set building regulations ensure homes were built to meet the needs of our ageing generation through policy in West Suffolk.

The Council had recommendations for the Local Plan M4(2) – proposal of 100% for all housing. M4(3) 25% affordable housing and 10% market housing.

The Cabinet Member for Planning explained that since 2017 there were 34 bungalows in West Suffolk:

- 14 x 1 bed
- 4 x 2 bed
- 16 x 3 bed

In Haverhill, there were two schemes for over "55" housing:

- Scheme one - 27 units
- Scheme two – 17 units

The Council was also securing more ground floor flats/apartments in urban areas to meet the needs of an ageing population. The Council was also negotiating with developers and registered providers about meeting Nationally Described Space standards. This highlighted the minimum space standards expected for the size of homes which were built within a mix of developments in West Suffolk.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which responses were provided.

In response to a question raised as to whether the number of homes being built to the new standards would be included in the new Local Plan, to which officers explained that having a policy in place would help the Council in the future to monitor numbers, but they would still need to be viability tested. The new regulations and standards moving forward would help with future proofing needs. The idea of a standard was not just a home for life, but to give people an opportunity to move to a house with a particular standard and policy.

In response to a question raised as to why solar panels and other sustainable materials were not being put on new buildings, the Cabinet Member for Planning advised that environmental issues/environmental policies were being picked up and built into the new Local Plan. However, the Council was bound by developers due to the viability test.

In response to a question raised regarding the lack of bungalows being built, the Cabinet Member for Planning explained that developers do not like building bungalows, but the Council was looking at this as part of the development mix in the new Local Plan.

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

166. **Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2022**

Councillor Margaret Marks, the Council's appointed representative on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee presented report number OAS/WS/22/005.

The report, prepared by Councillor Margaret Marks, set out what was considered at its meeting held on 26 January 2022. The primary focus of the meeting was to consider:

- Dentistry Services in Suffolk and make recommendations for improvements.

Attached to the report were the following appendices:

- Appendix 1: Covering report from Councillor Margaret Marks from the meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee held on 26 January 2022.
- Appendix 2a: Agenda Item 5 – Access to Dentistry in Suffolk
- Appendix 2b: Evidence Set 1 – East Suffolk Council Scrutiny Committee report on Dentistry
- Appendix 3: Evidence Set 2 – Healthwatch Suffolk Dentistry Report

Councillor Marks informed the Committee that the biggest problem was that 50% of children had not seen a dentist, as they were unable to register with a dentist.

Councillor Marks explained that NHS England was the only body which had the power to change everything. The budget would follow the service to the clinical commissioning. However, that money was now not available until next year, meaning we had a year to make NHS England improve its service and adopt some of the Health Scrutiny recommendations. Some of the work was now happening, but only through default. There needed to be a change in the dentist contracts; making sure the paperwork for overseas dentists was not onerous; getting dentists back into schools; supporting dentists better and providing the support they needed.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked questions to which Councillor Marks provided comprehensive responses. In particular discussions were held on the number of bodies involved in dentistry; needs assessments; and whether there was a shortage of private dentists.

In response to a question raised that if you do not see a dentist for two years, you drop off the register, Councillor Marks explained that in reality there was no registration or continuity of care. One of the recommendations made by the Health Scrutiny Committee was that people should be able to register with an NHS dentist. The current dentist contract did not support people going to the dentist regularly, which was unacceptable.

In response to a question raised regarding dental contracts, Councillor Marks explained that there needed to be a national policy to make things right. The will was there, but just needed to get NHS England onboard.

In response to a question raised about NHS dentist income, Councillor Marks stated that the biggest problem was with dentists leaving the NHS due to the low income and they did not feel respected in their profession. They were not allowed to use some of their skills in the NHS, only in private practice. Some dentists were upskilling some of their nurses to do for example, x-rays and dental cleaning.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the report on the Suffolk County Health Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 26 January 2022 from Councillor Margaret Marks, and in particular supported the work being carried out by the Health Scrutiny Committee around the provision of dentistry services in Suffolk.

167. **Work programme update 2022**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/22/006, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2020-2021 (Appendix 1). The Chair then drew the Committee's attention to two issues:

- 1) The Committee's next meeting was scheduled to be held on 9 June 2022, which coincided with the "Platinum Jubilee Parade and RAF Honington 50th Anniversary Parade", and therefore advised that the meeting would be moved to the following week, Thursday, 16 June 2022.
- 2) "20mph zones" – the Chair proposed two options in progressing this piece of work, either:
 - Inviting Suffolk County Council to a "virtual informal Overview and Scrutiny" meeting between April and May 2022 to brief the Committee on the "20mph zone" process; or
 - Inviting Suffolk County Council to the Committee's June to provide a briefing.

The Vice-Chair suggested holding a virtual meeting between April and May to progress the "20mph zone" topic, which was also **agreed** by the Committee.

Councillor Cliff Waterman then, on behalf of Councillor Diane Hind raised the issue of anti-idling. He explained that at the Committee's meeting held on 2 September 2021 it considered a work programme suggestion on anti-idling and resolved that, members be provided with monthly figures on the number of drivers spoken to informally by Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) officers, subject to a further update report on air quality and anti-idling campaigns being brought back in November 2021 meeting. A further meeting was held on 11 January 2022 with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, Councillors Diane Hind, Julia Wakelam, the Director of Operations and the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) to discuss anti-idling. At this meeting

the possibility of continuing collecting figures on the number of drivers spoken too was rejected by the Director of Operations because there was not the mechanism to record interactions for idling and issue them as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Currently the Council had no powers to do the work and were not resourced to do the work (staff/systems) and corporate KPIs were therefore not appropriate. KPI's were reviewed by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee and agreed by Cabinet/Council, and idling was not currently part of the agreed dataset. However, the Director of Operations had suggested two options which were:

- 1) Agree for CPE Officers to continue to have an informal word with idling motorists in the course of their duties (but not record/report interventions); or
- 2) Seek to establish the full impact and cost of obtaining formal powers to enforce idling with the requisite resources, training and back-office system modifications. If the Committee agrees, then make a recommendation to Cabinet.

Given the importance to our residents' health of reducing air pollution Councillor Waterman asked the Committee to agree that the Director of Operations be tasked with establishing the costs and impacts of establishing a full anti-idling policy.

The Committee considered the request, which was proposed by Councillor Cliff Waterman, seconded by Councillor Paul Hopfensperger, and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That "Vehicle idling interactions" be included into the Committee's forward work programme and the Director of Operations be requested to establish the full impact and costs of obtaining formal powers to enforce idling, including the requisite resources, training and back-office system modifications, and provide a report to the Committee by September 2022.

The meeting concluded at 5.50pm

Signed by:

Chair
