

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 12 January 2023** 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

Trevor Beckwith
Mike Chester
Patrick Chung
Diane Hind
James Lay

Margaret Marks
Joe Mason
Sarah Pugh
Marion Rushbrook
Julia Wakelam

Substitutes attending for a full member

John Augustine

In attendance

Ian Houlder, Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee
Victor Lukaniuk, Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee
Cliff Waterman, Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee
Sara Mildmay-White, Cabinet Member for Housing and Strategic Health
Andrew Smith, Chief Executive, Havebury Housing Partnership
Scott Bailey, Director of Development and Deputy Chief Executive, Havebury Housing Partnership
Jenny Spoor, Director of Operations, Havebury Housing Partnership

199. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor John Augustine substituting for Councillor Sarah Stamp.

200. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Palmer and Sarah Stamp.

Councillors Michael Anderson and Simon Brown were also unable to attend the meeting.

201. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

202. **Declarations of interest**

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

203. **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 6 December 2022 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 10 November 2022. As per the minutes confirmed above, the Chair updated Cabinet on the Committee's consideration of the Air Quality and Vehicle Idling report and recommendations, which were endorsed.

Cabinet was also updated on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny meeting and the Committee's forward work programme, which were also noted by Cabinet.

204. **Public participation**

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

205. **Registered Provider of Social Housing (Havebury Housing Partnership)**

[Councillor Diane Hind declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Havebury Housing Partnership's Scrutiny Panel]

Councillors Joe Mason and Margaret Marks left the meeting at 6.10pm during the consideration of this item].

Prior to this item being considered by the Committee the Chair welcomed Andrew Smith, Jenny Spoor and Scott Bailey from Havebury Housing Partnership and members of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee who had been invited to the meeting in relation to hearing about Havebury's performance.

The Committee received Report No: OAS/WS/23/001, which reminded members that at its meeting on 12 March 2020 the Committee received a presentation from Andrew Smith, Chief Executive of Havebury Housing Partnership and appropriate officers. At that meeting it was resolved to invite back Havebury Housing Partnership to a future meeting to provide a progress update on the following strategies which were in their early stages of being revised/developed:

- New Older Persons Strategy
- New Homelessness Strategy; and
- New Community Investment Strategy.

Andrew Smith, Chief Executive, Jenny Spoor, Director of Operations and Scott Bailey, Director of Development and Deputy Chief Executive from the Havebury Housing Partnership were in attendance and gave a presentation.

In June 2022 Havebury celebrated its 20-year anniversary and held a number of activities to reconnect with the community following Covid.

During 2022 Havebury developed a Corporate Plan 2021 to 2026, which included six key objectives:

- Being a great landlord
- Developing new affordable homes (Havebury was ranked in the top quartile provider)
- Investing in its existing homes and communities
- Playing its part in addressing Climate Change
- Building a great team (hybrid working with staff working flexibly. Havebury was also in the top 100 as a great place for women to work)
- Remaining a thriving business.

The presentation included information on corporate measures and performance on the above six key objectives.

A Community Investment Strategy 2022 to 2024 was developed, which included three specific strands:

- Community projects
- Environmental improvements
- Individual support

Each year £50,000 was spent on community projects; £60,000 on environmental improvements; and £250,000 on its support fund.

A Support Strategy 2022 to 2025 (including older people) was developed, which:

- Look at technology and how it can help tenants to stay safe and live independently, for example aids and adaptations
- Financial and hardship support
- Emotional and wellbeing support
- Home – what tenants need to live safely and independently, including the aids and adaptations service.

As a housing provider, Havebury Housing Partnership played a role in helping with homelessness. Tayfen House in Bury St Edmunds offered emergency and long-term accommodation up to 18 months. In October 2021 Havebury secured a further five-year contract to enable it to continue its street homeless work and getting people settled into accommodation. As well as the two rooms and 19 ensuite bedrooms in Tayfen House, there was also 32 homes within the community where residents lived independently but had support to manage life skills to transition to successful permanent accommodation.

The presentation also included information on performance indicators; tenancy sustainment, forming a group called Independent East to encourage working together and looking at joint research with other registered housing providers; the Governments Planning for the Future White Paper; Draft Building Safety Bill; The Charter for Social Housing Residents White Paper, and Havebury's governance review in 2022 and renewed structure chart including a new range of chair's on the Havebury Board and Committees', refocusing its governance to being more customer eccentric.

Following the presentation, discussions and responses were provided on the following:

- Clarification of the meaning of affordable rent.
- Performance and overall satisfaction score (81.90%) – ambition was to be in top quartile.
- Being less reliant on burning oil and gas to heat homes.
- Rent arrears (just over 2%) – eviction being the absolute last resort.
- Increases in hoarding.
- Land ownership and community space issues, for example finding out who the landowner was to clear up litter and fly tipping.
- Education around Havebury being independent from West Suffolk Council.
- Flexible working

In particular detailed discussions were held on Havebury's target on its housing stock being Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C by 2030. Members asked questions on what the current EPC breakdown was for Havebury's 7,000 homes and how old was their oldest house, to which Havebury agreed to provide a written response on the breakdown and age of properties. Havebury explained its housing stock was above average for EPC and had been carrying out for example, cladding and roof insulation to improve energy performance in its housing stock.

In response to a question raised on what the breakdown was of the 1,800 residents Havebury had helped to access benefits, Havebury advised it had carried a campaign to push universal credit and agreed to provide a written summary of the various types of benefits which had been accessed.

In response to a question raised on the 210 houses being built per year Havebury explained that they operated across the whole of Suffolk and East Cambridgeshire. As a consequence, about half of the 210 houses built were in West Suffolk and the remaining homes being allocated through a bidding process. Havebury agreed to provide a written response setting out more detail.

In response to a questions raised on what percentage of homes were social rent, Havebury agreed to provide a written response following the meeting.

In response to a question raised regarding the support fund, Havebury confirmed that all of the £250,000 would be fully utilised by the end of the financial year.

The Chair then welcomed members of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee to ask questions to which responses were provided. In particular a request was made to consider Brandon for additional housing developments; and discussions were also held on tenants being a focal point and at the heart of Havebury.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Strategic Health informed the Committee she had done her first village estate walk-about with Havebury since Covid and encouraged all councillors to take the opportunity to do the same.

The Cabinet Member raised concerns that some properties were reliant on oil and there was no Government cap on pricing and asked what assistance Havebury could provide. In response Havebury explained that there was no specific answer, but there was a support and a hardship fund available if tenants were struggling with paying for oil.

The Cabinet Member then raised the issue of the Goodfellow flats in Bury St Edmunds, which Havebury had recently sold and asked whether the 12 tenants had been rehoused in Bury St Edmunds. In response Havebury confirmed that the majority of those tenants had been rehoused in Bury St Edmunds.

In response to a question raised about Havebury not having a contact centre, Havebury explained that telephone lines were set by service/teams. This was currently being reviewed and agreed to provide contact numbers in a written response.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the Chair wished to thank Andrew Smith, Jenny Spoor and Scott Bailey for attending its meeting which all members, including those from the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee found informative. The Chair informed members that a copy of the presentation would be emailed to members following the meeting.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the update provided by Havebury Housing Partnership and written responses being provided on areas discussed during the meeting.

206. **Work programme update**

[Councillor Sarah Pugh left the meeting at 6.30pm prior to the consideration of this item].

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/23/002, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2023 (Appendix 1).

The Chair reminded members that its next meeting on 9 March 2023 was being held at the Mildenhall Hub.

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

The meeting concluded at 6.32pm

Signed by:

Chair
