

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 9 November 2023** at **5.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

**Chair** Sarah Broughton  
**Vice Chair** Marion Rushbrook

Tony Brown	Andrew Martin
Susan Glossop	Andrew Smith
Luke Halpin	Julia Wakelam
Beccy Hopfensperger	Don Waldron
Rowena Lindberg	Kevin Yarrow
Birgitte Mager	

**Substitutes attending for a full member**

Tracy Whitehand

**In attendance**

Victor Lukaniuk, Deputy Leader of the Council  
Ian Shipp, Cabinet Member for Leisure  
Phil Wittam

247. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Tracy Whitehand substituting for Councillor Dawn Dicker.

248. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dawn Dicker.

Councillors Aaron Luccarini and Andrew Speed were also unable to attend the meeting.

249. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2023 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

250. **Declarations of interest**

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

251. **Public participation**

No members of the public in attendance had registered to speak.

252. **Announcements from the Chair regarding responses from the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

No announcements were made on this occasion regarding responses from the Cabinet to reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

253. **Review of West Suffolk Council Grounds Maintenance Operations**

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/23/018, presented by the Cabinet Member for Operations, which asked members to consider and discuss the intended scope as set out in paragraph 2 of report on the Grounds Maintenance Review being carried out by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, and to offer any specific perspective or issues which may help guide the review or should be considered as part of the review.

The Council owned or was responsible for a significant amount of public open space in the district amounting to over five hundred hectares. The responsibility for maintaining the grass within these areas rested with the Landscape Team within the Green Space and Heritage Service in the Operations Directorate.

The focus of the review and its report was on the cutting of amenity grass throughout the district. However, grass cutting was just one of the seasonal ground's maintenance tasks performed by the in-house Landscape Team, and it was important to also consider grass cutting and any potential changes in a wider context.

The review was also looking at the impact of the cessation of using glyphosate or any other chemicals to treat weeds on land owned by the Council which was instigated from April 2023. This was being considered in conjunction with the approach being carried out by Suffolk County Council for its treatment of weeds on the highway.

The Committee considered the report and the intended scope in detail and asked questions to which responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on listening to responses from parish/town Councils and improving communication; insurance issues; the possibility of some parish/town Councils taking on grass cutting in their areas; working more collaboratively with partners; scheduling grass cutting by level of importance; and looking at going back to using some form of weed killer.

It was suggested that the Review Group should look into the Suffolk County Council's Community Self Help Scheme and the equivalent of the Chapter 42 Safety Training.

At the conclusion of the discussions the Committee **noted** the scope of the Review Group's work subject to the above suggestion.

254. **Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group-Findings and Recommendations**

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/23/019, presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group (the Group), Councillor Marion Rushbrook which set out the Groups approach to the review, key findings and proposed recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Rushbrook wished to thank Warren Smyth, Chief Executive of Abbeycroft Leisure, who was in attendance and his Team and Trustees for the questions they had answered and for hosting the Groups visits, and also thanked Council officers for their support during the review.

The members of the Group were Councillors Sarah Broughton, Peter Armitage, Rowena Lindberg and Andy Neal.

The last review was due in 2018, which was delayed due to covid. During covid Abbeycroft coped with the challenges and helped residents in West Suffolk, for example by introducing outdoor gyms and online classes and supported programmes delivered by partner organisations.

All members of the Group had broadened their understanding of the wider health, wellbeing and community support which Abbeycroft provided alongside conventional leisure centre activities such as swimming and had concluded that it was a credit to Abbeycroft that they had recovered so well post covid in terms of usage at their centres and financial performance. With that in mind the Group was pleased to see the Abbeycroft management fee payable from the Council to Abbeycroft had reached zero from April 2023, and also felt they and the Council should be congratulated on meeting the significant challenges arising from higher utility bills in particular.

The Group visited all the Abbeycroft sites, with many of the buildings being over 35 years old with ageing plant and equipment which was not terribly efficient. With that in mind the Group felt funds should be made available from the net zero fund to support energy efficient measures within the buildings to reduce energy consumption.

The Group was also aware that officers were undertaking building condition surveys of all the sites and not pre-empting outcomes the Group anticipated a high degree of capital investment would be required in the older sites and hoped this would be supported through the Council's Asset Management Plans.

In summing up, Cllr Rushbrook explained that the Group felt there was a high degree of compliance by Abbeycroft in the existing legal agreements with the Council and the Group therefore did not recommend any significant changes to these agreements. She asked the Committee to support the six recommendations, as set out on page 16 of the report, and also encouraged all councillors to attend the Abbeycroft MS Teams member development session on Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 6pm.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked questions to which comprehensive responses were provided. In particular discussions were held

on what was specifically available for residents in rural areas and membership recovery following covid.

At the conclusion of the discussions, it was recommended by Councillor Tony Brown, duly seconded by Councillor Andrew Smith and with the vote being unanimous it was:

**RECOMMEDED: That**

- 1. Cabinet instructs officers to update the Collaboration Agreement noting no fundamental revisions are required on the principles of the current agreement. However, some technical changes may be required and the approach to health funding which is currently dealt with through side letters should be clarified.**
- 2. Cabinet requests Abbeycroft and West Suffolk Council to work collaboratively to promote the activities and programmes delivered at the leisure centres, ensuring residents are aware of what they deliver and provide (which can be reflected in further revisions to the Collaboration Agreement).**
- 3. Cabinet and officers work with providers and partners to secure additional long-term and sustainable external funding streams (particularly on health improvement interventions).**
- 4. Cabinet asks officers to explore further capital investment in the leisure offer and facility mix across the leisure centre sites through business cases where appropriate to provide outcomes and financial benefits through invest to save/earn initiatives with Abbeycroft.**
- 5. Subject to the outcome of the condition surveys of each Leisure Centre, Cabinet to consider the extension of the Council's Net Zero fund as part of the 2024 to 2025 budget development process to include a programme of improvements (where appropriate and where they meet the outcomes of the fund) to upgrade and improve the facilities to maximise energy efficiency, support Net Zero and carbon reduction targets, and extend the life span of the facilities.**
- 6. As part of the 2024 to 2025 West Suffolk Council budget development, consideration should also be given to whether the extraordinary utility support grant should be continued and phased out in the short-term (linked to market expectations around utility costs).**

**255. Exclusion of Press and Public**

With the vote being unanimous, it was

### **Resolved:**

That, under Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as prescribed in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and indicated against each item and, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

#### **256. Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group - Findings and Recommendations: EXEMPT Appendix 1**

The meeting moved into private session to allow for the Committee to pose specific questions on the information which related to the exempt Appendix.

Once the discussion was concluded, the Committee then moved back into the open session of the meeting.

#### **257. Re-admittance of press and public**

The press and public were re-admitted to the meeting.

#### **258. Suffolk County Council: Police and Crime Panel - 6 October 2023**

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/23/020, which was presented by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny on behalf of Councillor Mike Chester who was unable to attend tonight's meeting as he was at the National Police and Crime Conference in Warwick.

Attached at Appendix 1 to the report was a summary of topics discussed at the Police and Crime Panel meeting held on 6 October 2023, being:

- The Panel ratified the appointment of Simon Furlong as an Independent Co-opted Member.
- The Panel scrutinised the effective exercise of the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) functions by reviewing actions he had taken under Police and Crime Plan Objectives 1.
- The Panel reviewed and commended the PCC's Annual Report 2022 to 2023.
- The Panel questioned the PCC on the 2013 to 2024 financial position.

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

There being in decision required the Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

#### **259. Suffolk County Council: Health Scrutiny Committee - 11 October 2023**

Councillor Andrew Martin, the Council's appointed representative on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee presented report number OAS/WS/23/021, which set out what was considered at its meeting held on 11 October 2023. The primary focus of the meeting was:

- Pharmacy provision

Attached to the report was the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 – Report from Councillor Martin

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked questions to which Councillor Martin responded. In particular discussions were held on: whether there were any plans for addressing the pharmacy closures; the impact of prescriptions being delivered to your door; and the reduction of pharmacies offering services on Sundays and the national shortage of the pharmacy workforce.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the report presented by Councillor Andrew Martin.

#### 260. **Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 November 2023 to 31 May 2024**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/23/022, which informed members on forthcoming decisions to be considered by the Cabinet for the period 1 November 2023 to 31 May 2024.

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 November 2023 to 31 May 2024 Decisions Plan.

#### 261. **Work programme update**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/23/023, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2024 (Appendix 1).

The Committee considered the rolling work programme and did not raise any issues. However, some members raised concerns about the recent increases in service charges, in particular for Havebury Housing tenants, during the cost-of-living crisis which was putting even more pressure on tenants and suggested inviting them to its January 2024 meeting. Concerns were also raised about the disposal of housing units by Flagship Homes in certain wards.

It was agreed that officers would brief Councillor O’Driscoll, Cabinet Member for Housing, on these concerns so that he or officers could speak to the Registered Social Landlords and update the Committee accordingly. The outcome of these discussions could also be included as an additional update at the Committee’s January 2024 meeting when Cllr O’Driscoll he was due to attend to present the West Suffolk Housing Strategy and Homelessness Rough Sleeping Strategy.

It was further suggested inviting Registered Social Landlords to a future meeting of the Committee.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the current states of its rolling work programme, and the Chair agreed to submit a work programme suggestion form, setting out key lines of enquiry to invite Registered Social Landlord's to its meeting in March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 6.30 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chair**

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