

MID SUFFOLK
DISTRICT COUNCIL
ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21

Overview & Scrutiny



MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2020/21

When the Committee produced its Work Plan for 2020/21, we were aware of the pandemic and the need to meet virtually, but we could not have predicted that we would not be able to meet face to face at all during the year. It is a great credit to Officers that meetings were held using MS Teams and most of the work, which we had planned has been completed.

Most of the meetings held during the year have been joint meetings with Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Alastair McCraw (Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee) and I have alternated chairing the meetings. Joint Chairs' and Vice Chairs' meetings have been held to plan our Committees' workloads and discuss with officers the content of reports and information bulletins scheduled for future meetings and, where relevant, what data could be made available to assist scrutiny of the topics in the Work Plan. The meetings also afforded an opportunity to look at early draft reports and discuss whether or not to invite outside witnesses, who might provide information to assist effective scrutiny in committee meetings.

Our agendas have included pre-scrutiny of items prior to Cabinet or Council decisions, scrutiny of topics selected by the Committee or requested by Council, presentations of important matters by senior officers and witnesses from outside the two authorities and information bulletins requested by the Committee. Details of the topics scrutinised, together with recommendations for future actions, are included in the body of this report.

I would like to thank Henriette Holloway, Senior Governance Officer – Committee Services, Jan Robinson, Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office and Emily Yule, Assistant Director – Law and Governance for their input and support throughout the year, also Keith Scarff, who has been Committee Vice Chair throughout the year. I am grateful to members of the Committee for their commitment, and to officers for providing clear and concise responses to requests for information. Thanks, too, to Alastair McCraw, Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny, his Vice Chair, Adrian Osborne, and members of that Committee for working collaboratively with the Mid Suffolk Committee.

Looking ahead to 2021/22, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be back meeting in Endeavour House, initially in a socially distanced manner. We have produced a Work Plan for the new Municipal Year, which can be found towards the end of this Annual Report. As Mid Suffolk recovers from Covid-19, there may be a need for new services and new methods of service delivery. The Committee will have a role in helping the Council transform to 'the new normal'

Keith Welham

May 2021

Chair, Mid Suffolk Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Co-Chair, Babergh & Mid Suffolk Joint Scrutiny Committee

MEMBERS OF THE MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2020/21



Cllr Keith Welham – Chair



Cllr Keith Scarff – Vice-Chair



Cllr Terence Carter



Cllr James Caston



Cllr Paul Ekpenyong



Cllr Dave Muller

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

In May 2017 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils adopted the Leader/Cabinet model for each Council. This resulted in the Joint Scrutiny Committee being decommissioned and the formation of separate Overview and Scrutiny Committees for each Council.

The Committee consists of six members of the Council who can be any Member except Cabinet Members. No member is allowed to scrutinise a decision where they have been part of the decision-making process. Substitutes for Members on the Committee must be from the same political group and Council. The Committee sets its own workplan and can set up task and finish groups, as and when considered appropriate.

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committees also conduct joint meetings on a regular basis, where similar interests have been identified, to scrutinise topics, external stakeholders and Service providers relevant to both Councils.

THE ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is defined as having the key purposes of:

- Scrutinising the work of external stakeholders and service providers.
- Holding the Cabinet Committee to account
- Being the home of “call in”.
- Being the home of Member Call for Action.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews items in relation to the Joint Corporate Plan seeking where the Committee can add value; avoiding duplication with any other Committee or working group and ensuring that, where changes have been made, a significant time has lapsed before a review is undertaken. These suggestions are worked up by the Chairs, Vice Chairs and officers into a forward plan, which is put to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cannot make decisions or policies itself but has the power of influencing by making informed recommendations to the Cabinet, Full Council and other Committees. Cabinet can also recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee conduct detailed investigations of items considered to require further scrutiny before being referred back to Cabinet for final decision.

Overview and Scrutiny forms an important part of the democratic process within the Council and wider community by examining topics and continuing to monitor the outcome of its work. Where it is considered necessary to follow up on the outcome of a scrutinised topic, the Committee will conduct further scrutiny or receive updates on the topic to enable the Council to continue to deliver the best service for all residents in the District.

THE CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY'S FOUR PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SCRUTINY

1. Scrutiny provides a critical friend challenge to executive policy and decision makers by conducting a constructive, robust, and purposeful challenge. This challenge should be non-aggressive and non-political so as to create the optimum conditions for an investigative evidence-based process.
2. Scrutiny enables the voice and concerns of the public through innovative public communications, consultation and feedback. Meetings are conducted in public to enable transparency and openness.
3. Scrutiny is carried out by independent minded people, who actively engage in the scrutiny function so as to drive improvement. Areas are reviewed in an a-political atmosphere.
4. Scrutiny drives improvements in public services. Good scrutiny improves the quality of life by undertaking strategic reviews of corporate policies, plans, performance and budgets.

THE STRUCTURE FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OUTSIDE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cycle is based around one monthly Chairs' Briefings to which report authors and Assistant Directors are invited to attend. This enables co-operation between Officers, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when discussing the relevant content of reports. This is also an opportunity for the Chairs to provide a steer of what the Committee is expecting to achieve from upcoming items. It allows the Chairs and Officers to consider any questions, which may be asked at the Committee meeting by members of the Committee. Generally, each item will be discussed at the Chairs' briefings twice before going to Committee.

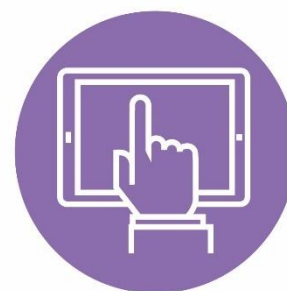
At the public meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Members are invited to attend and respond to questions within their relevant portfolio. Other Members of the Council are able to attend and are often allowed, at the discretion of the Chair, to ask questions with regards to the items presented at the meeting.

Between meetings, Officers and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees maintain an open and engaged working relationship to ensure that the scrutiny process will be efficient and beneficial to the Committee meetings.

Members may also partake in 'Task and Finish Groups' which focus on a specific item set by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This enables Members to engage with a topic separately from the Committee and then to report back on their findings to the Committee, which can then consider any recommendations or actions required.

TRAINING

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic Annual Council was held in September 2020 and Members agreed to defer any training to the next municipal year due to lock-down restrictions and time constraint.



THE ORGANISATION OF THE 2020 - 2021 WORK PLAN

The Work Plan is updated at each Committee meeting and Members propose possible items for consideration for the workplan. Each item is evaluated to determine relevance and purpose by the Committee Members. A review of the Forthcoming Decisions List is also undertaken monthly, in order to assess whether the scrutiny process adds value to any items listed. This avoids unnecessary duplication of work carried out by any other Committee or working group and ensures that sufficient time has lapsed between reviews.

Other items on the Work Plan are the Information Bulletins, brief updates on topics, areas of interests or fact-finding pieces of work for items the Committee may wish to scrutinise in the future.

COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT 2020/21

In March 2020 the Covid-19 Pandemic saw the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings suspended for a couple of months. The Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 23 March 2020 was declared inquorate, as Members were unable to attend due to the restriction of the national lock-down. The following two scheduled Committee meetings on the 16 April and 18 May 2020 were also cancelled, as the national lockdown continued. By June 2020 the Council resumed the meeting of Committees via a virtual meeting set-up system and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees resumed.

Generally, the pre-empting of issues before going to Cabinet has prevented unnecessary Call-ins during this year. The Scrutiny Committee's function as a critical friend has worked well for the Mid Suffolk Council this year, often raising concerns and receiving clarification on issues in the Committee meeting, which would otherwise have been controversial. The Committee has also frequently provided recommendations to Cabinet raising awareness of areas of concern. Cabinet has responded well to this and incorporated most of the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the past year.

The Committee is continuing to work jointly with Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in 2020/21 most meetings were joint as the Committees were scrutinising identical topics. This is partly a result of previous years' positive experiences and partly due the reduction of the number of Members on the Committee, as a result of the Ward Boundary Review which was completed in 2019. This has benefitted the scrutiny of topics as Members have been able to exchange experiences from across the two Districts and has provided officers with a cohesive and joint evaluation of the issues scrutinised. The scrutiny of joint policies and procedures and joint services have benefitted by the joint committee work. However, it is recognised that separate Overview and Scrutiny Committees will still be required when items of specific concern for the individual District Council are scrutinised.

The attendance of Cabinet Members to present reports under their Portfolios and responding to questions in relation to their area of responsibility has been a valued addition to the scrutiny process. This has enabled the Committee Members to directly address the Cabinet Member responsible for the issue discussed.

The Committee has also invited outside witnesses to provide information on areas outside the Councils' remit, or in matters where specific knowledge, expertise or experiences have been sought to provide a better foundation for the scrutiny process. Scrutiny of the Local Citizens Advice, CIFCO and the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership were assisted by the contributions from representatives of these and other outside organisations.

The Work of Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21

1. JOINT COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

In July 2020 the Joint Committee received a presentation of the Joint Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy, which had been requested by the Committee as a result of a report brought to the Joint Committee in December 2017. Members' main concerns were how residents accessed the service, response times to enquiries and face to face contact for those, who needed support accessing the service provided for residents. Generally, Members were satisfied that the Customer Service Centre was providing a good service to residents, that the policy was sound and that complaints were dealt with in a timely manner.



RESOLVED



- 1.1 **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Corporate Manager for Customer Services and commended the work of the Customers Service Team, noting the significant improvement of the work undertaken during the last three years.**
- 1.2 **That the Committee asked for visits to be arranged when appropriate to the Customer Access Points.**
- 1.3 **That an annual Information Bulletin be brought to the Committee in July 2021, focusing on face-to-face customer services performances.**

VALUE ADDED

Since the first presentation of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy in 2017, the Customer Service Team have reviewed their service provision and have subsequently implemented changes, including the introduction of a new software program for the management of customer contacts. The scrutiny of the customer service provision and the changes in customers' interaction with the Councils, satisfied Members that the Customer Services Team provides a sound and robust service for residents in the District.

2. FUTURE DELIVERY MODEL FOR PUBLIC REALM

In September the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee held an additional Committee meeting to receive a report from the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships. The purpose of the report was for the Committee to consider the four options for bringing Public Realm service in-house for Babergh District Council and to maintain the current in-house service for Mid Suffolk District Council. Members' concerns included the impact on the services provided to communities and residents, the cost to the Councils, and the consequences for staff employed by the current provider for Babergh District Council. In addition, some Members raised concerns for transfer of land to the Council from developers and the maintenance of the significant number of small areas of public land in villages and rural areas. Members considered the proposed options for Public Realm and the measures put in place to manage an in-house service. They also discussed that there currently were no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the services against and asked that these be established. They agreed that currently Option 2, a joint in-house service delivery, was the preferred option, however Option 4 should also be considered as a long-term solution.

RESOLVED



- 1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnership and Consultants for the detailed report and recommended to Cabinet that the Committee endorses Option 2 as the preferred option.**
- 2. That further work be undertaken in respect of developing the KPIs and contract management.**
- 3. That Option 4 (LATCO) be retained as an option for future consideration by both Councils.**

VALUE ADDED

Members of both Councils had expressed concerns regarding bringing the Public Realm Service in-house and the consequences of making this a shared service. The Committee was able to scrutinise the proposed options, including the budget arrangements and identified issues that required to be resolved in the contract management of the service.

3. SCRUTINY AND FIRST REVIEW OF THE BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLANS

The Committee met again later in September and considered the annual report for the Housing Delivery Test Action Plans (HDTAP) for both Councils. The Professional Lead – Key Sites and Infrastructure provided the introduction. This report should have been presented to the Committee in March 2021, however due to the Covid-19 Pandemic the

report had been deferred. It was mandatory for any Planning Authority without a 5-year housing land supply to produce an Action Plan. Both Councils now had a 5-year supply, but it was nevertheless considered beneficial to continue to produce an Action Plan.



The updated report and appendices were scrutinised by Members and questions were raised including the level of 5-year housing land supply and the delivery of sites by developers, outstanding planning permissions, engagements with developers and communities and target figures for the housing supply. Other issues debated were the delivery of bungalows, affordable housing and stalled development sites.

RESOLVED



That the contents of this report and appendices together with verbal contributions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted and taken forward as part of the HDT Action Plan review (for both Councils) so that new HDTAPs produced for 2021 are informed in part by this scrutiny process.

VALUE ADDED

Housing delivery in relation to the 5-year Housing Land Supply has been a challenge for the Councils in the past and both Overview and Scrutiny Committees have considered reports in relation housing land supply. Previously scrutiny of the HDTAP formed part of fulfilling requirements from Central Government, whilst this was not a requirement in 2020, the Committee had asserted that the established process continues to maintain openness and transparency for both Councillors and the public.

4. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY AND HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING REDUCTION STRATEGY, 2019-2024

These two separate strategies were adopted by both Councils in March 2019 and covered the period 2019-2024.

The Homes and Housing Strategy set out the Councils' vision for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

In September 2020 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee also received a report and presentation from the Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions. Both Councils had adopted a Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and the report reviewed and updated Councillors on the progress and the performance of the strategy. This year Councillors' main concerns were the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on homelessness, rough sleepers, sofa surfers and temporary accommodation provision. Members debated the impact on the services provided by the Councils and areas which still needed to be addressed in the Joint Homes

and Housing Strategy. Generally, Councillors were reassured that the services provided by the Housing Team and the work undertaken with other authorities and partners delivered the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy to the action points set out in the strategy.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 That Members had reviewed and noted the contents of this report and appendices, along with verbal contributions.
- 1.2 That Members thanked the officers for the report, presentation and the work conducted, especially at the commencement of Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions and the innovative approach to the work undertaken.
- 1.3 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognise the importance of these strategies and stresses that housing continues to be recognised by Cabinets and Council as primary functions.

VALUE ADDED

The scrutiny of the report and the presentation indicated that the strategies were robust, and that the delivery of services had been met despite the difficult circumstances of 2020. The Committee was satisfied that residents received a good standard of support and Members thanked the Housing Team for the effective response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

5. BMSDC INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICE - A NEW MODEL FOR DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

This report was presented in a closed session to the Committee, as the areas of concern related to the delivery of the independent living service, the impact on service users and the financial implications for implementing the operational model. Councillors' concerns included the availability of resources to deal with the back log of occupational therapy assessments, collaboration between the service providers and authorities and the provision for communication and information for residents and communities.



RESOLVED



That Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Committee endorses Option 3, and the recommendations listed in Appendix 3, to create an in-house Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Independent Living Service.

VALUE ADDED

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee had previously raised concerns for the service provider for the Disabled Facilities Grants and the availability of occupational therapy services. The scrutiny of the proposed new model ensured that these areas had been considered and that plans had been put in place to address the issues in the new model for Disabled Facilities Grants and would provide an improved service to residents.

6. REVIEW OF OUTSIDE BODIES



In November 2020 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised Representation on Outside Bodies. The report was presented by the Corporate Manager for Law and Governance. This was a scrutiny process which had started in 2019 and which had resolved that an annual review of Representation on Outside Bodies should be conducted. Members reviewed each Outside Body separately, supported by witnesses who attended the various Outside Bodies meetings. This generated a good debate and identified several organisations which no longer required Member representation. Consideration was given to the appointment of an observer to be appointed in respect of Stowmarket Citizens Advice in line with Babergh District Council, who have an observer appointed to attend meetings at Sudbury Citizens Advice.

Councillors voted as sovereign authorities for the recommendations which included training for those who were to represent the Councils on the Outside Bodies and annual updates from Representatives. The recommendations were presented to each Council and noted.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Councils named that the following appointments to Outside Bodies, no longer requiring representation, be removed from the appointments made, based on the information received.**

Babergh District Council

Babergh Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum

East West Rail Consortium

Joint Waste Management Board

Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Policy Panel

Suffolk Rail Policy Group

Mid Suffolk District Council:

Joint Waste Management Board

Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Policy Panel

- 1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that both Councils consider withdrawal from the Haven Gateway Partnership as the Committee feels that the Partnership cannot demonstrate Value and relevance.
- 1.3 That Babergh District Council considers that a member representative be appointed to Home-Start in line with Mid Suffolk District Council.
- 1.4 That consideration be given by Mid Suffolk District Council that an observer be appointed to Stowmarket Citizens Advice in line with Babergh District Council.
- 1.5 That a reporting mechanism in the form of a template for Representatives on Outside Bodies be established to provide valuable information to Members and Public, the information be presented as part of the annual review of Member Representation on Outside Bodies to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.6 That support and training be established for Members when appointed as representatives on Outside Bodies.
- 1.7 That Mid Suffolk District Council considers taking up the appointment of a representative to the East West Rail Consortium by making a payment of the subscription fees required for full participation.

Omitted recommendation (Agreed by Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2021)

That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Mid Suffolk District Council approaches the Suffolk Disabilities Forum to establish whether formal councillor representation on the forum would be appropriate and possible and that any appointment to the Suffolk Disabilities Forum be made by resolution of the Full Council.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee identified several Outside Bodies which no longer required member representation and the debate revealed that further information was required for some of the organisations, before a decision could be made on representation. The Committee reiterated the need for representatives to report back and update all Members on the work of the Outside Bodes.

7. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT – TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

In December the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the progress on the on the transformation project for planning enforcement, which included a new software, new processes and training of officers. The Chief Planning Officer provided the background for the

transformation project and then the Officers for Heritage and Planning Compliance, the Performance and Quality Officer and the Business Practice Manager provided a progress update for their particular area. As working practices had changed during the Covid-19 Pandemic, Planning Enforcement team had been dealing with various complaints relating to building sites and delivery restrictions. Members' concerns included a backlog in enforcement cases, complaints processes, resources and planning application processes. Public perception of planning enforcement was also an issue. The number of alleged breaches reported had increased year on year, but the increase in 2020 might have been partly due to people spending more time in their neighbourhoods due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. Not all reports were planning breaches and it was important to sieve these out at an early stage and inform the complainant.



Improved process mapping and workflow management have assisted officers to deal with high personal workloads. Most cases could be resolved but, in exceptional circumstances, legal proceedings are necessary. These could be costly without any certainty of reimbursement of costs when cases were successful.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 That the contents of this report be noted.**
- 1.2 That a further update on progress with service transformation work within planning enforcement be provided to the Committee at the conclusion of the work of the Joint Member/Officer Task & Finish Group recommended under 3.3.**
- 1.3 That the Chief Planning Officer establish a Joint Member/Officer Task & Finish Group (comprising as a basis of the Members of the Joint Local Plan Member working group together with further Member input resolved with the chief planning officer in consultation with Political Group Leaders) to review and make recommendations on the Joint Local Planning Enforcement Policy (JLPEP) and that this group have regard to best practice and other examples of published local enforcement policies in that process of review.**

VALUE ADDED.

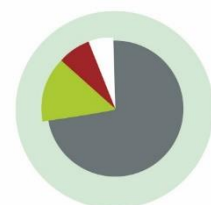
Members were able to scrutinise the Planning Enforcement Transformation Project in detail and gain insight into the work undertaken by the Planning Enforcement Team. The establishment of the Task and Finish Group added value to the Joint Local Planning Enforcement Policy and an update would be provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.

8. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the draft General Fund budget, which this year had been affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic and lock down restrictions. However, Central Government had provided funding to mitigate some of the incurred costs associated with the Pandemic. After a substantial introduction by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Members scrutinised aspects of the budget such as business rates, the New Home Bonus, investments in CIFCO and Gateway 14, service charges for Endeavour House, the waste contract and Empty Homes Grants. Some services such as the Waste Service had been affected by staff absences due to the Pandemic. Members were also concerned that the budget responded to the Council's commitment to the environment, carbon reduction, Climate change and sustainability.

The need for extra resources for planning enforcement and planning enquiries was discussed. Members also felt that extra resources for the legal costs associated with planning were required.

In respect of the over-arching principles set out in the report, Members felt that staff welfare and mental health were of great importance and the principles should ensure a focus on the wellbeing of staff. Members asked for further clarification of the biodiversity fund to be included in the report to Council. Members recognised the uncertain financial future and concluded that the budget was sound, given the circumstances under which it had been prepared.



RESOLVED



- 1.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that Officers and Cabinet take into consideration the comments made at this meeting, when submitting the General Fund Budget 2021 and Four-year Outlook for consideration at the Cabinet meeting and Council in February 2021.**
- 2.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that Cabinet considers funding be allocated for planning enforcement and legal costs associated with planning.**

VALUE ADDED

The scrutiny of the General Fund Budget supports the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a critical friend and holding the executive to account. Members highlighted areas of concern and lack of clarity for Officers to address before the budget was presented to Cabinet.

9. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2021/22 BUDGET AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to scrutinise the Housing Revenue Account Budget at the January Meeting and the Cabinet Member for Finance provided a detailed introduction to the Committee. Some Members queried the increase in tenant service charges for sheltered housing and others queried the Right to Buy receipts and how the Council funded further investment in the Council's housing stock. Members felt that the increase in the service charges and Council rents were reasonable and the increases in the HRA budget were modest. The Committee endorsed the HRA budget.

RESOLVED



That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22 and Four-Year Outlook but asks that Officers and Cabinet Members take into consideration the comments made at this meeting, when submitting the budget for consideration at the Cabinet and Council meetings in February 2021.

VALUE ADDED

All Members had received several briefings for both the General Fund Budget and the HRA Budget before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however Members ensured that the HRA Budget was sound and would provide the best services for the Council's residents.

10. REVIEW OF LOCAL CITIZENS ADVICE (LCA)

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee had scrutinised the Local Citizens Advice service in August 2019 and had recommended to Cabinet a three-year rolling funding for the LCA. Cabinet had approved the funding.



The Committee had invited the following:

Nicky Willshere, Chief Officer – Citizens Advice Ipswich
Simon Clifton, Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice
Colleen Sweeney, Chief Officer – Sudbury and District Citizens Advice

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the representatives in February 2021, as part of the scrutiny process of the services provided by the LCAs in the Districts. The Corporate Manager for Communities outlined the cooperation between the Councils and the LCAs. The Chief Officers from each of the participating LCAs presented the past year's statistics and outlined the services provided in each area. Each LCA had maintained services and support to residents despite the Covid-19 Pandemic. There had also been a change in the Mid Suffolk District as Diss, Thetford and District LCA were now mostly providing services to residents outside Mid Suffolk District. This had implications for the funding arrangements which were being addressed. Members' questioning included recruitment of staff and volunteers, services provided to both towns and rural areas and funding. Members were keen to ensure that the funding

was index linked and the LCA provided support to residents and by doing so alleviate some of the pressure on the services provided by the Councils.

The merits of a Mid Suffolk appointed observer to attend meetings at Mid Suffolk LCA were discussed and it was concluded that such an appointment would be beneficial to the Council and the LCA and welcomed by the LCA.

RESOLVED



- 1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied and notes the content of the report and commends the work of the Mid Suffolk Local Citizens Advice, Ipswich Citizens Advice and Sudbury and District Local Citizens Advice.**
- 1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirms the previous resolution made at the last review that the three-year rolling funding arrangements review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis, finances permitting, as a measure of importance we attach to ongoing LCA funding.**

VALUE ADDED

The continued scrutiny of the Local Citizens Advice provides Members with an opportunity to identify the issues for the LCAs in the Districts and how they relate to the services provided by the Council. The Council provides funding to the LCAs in the Districts and whilst the services provided by the LCAs are in addition to the services of the Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the funding is consistent and maintained. Both parties benefit from the scrutiny process and an additional benefit has been a broader understanding of the services provided by the LCAs.

11. INFORMATION BULLETIN – COMMUNITY GRANTS REVIEW UPDATE

Members also received an Information Bulletin in the form of a Presentation provided by the Corporate Manager for Communities. A Grants Review Task and Finish Group had been working with the Communities team to review the grants process.

VALUE ADDED

This Information Bulletin provided Members with an update on issues which could be considered for scrutiny in due course.

12. TO REVIEW THE ACTIVITY OF THE WESTERN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (WSCSP)

In March 2021 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the WSCSP as part of the Council's statutory requirement to sit as the Crime and Disorder Panel. Due to the increased workload in respect of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Members received a truncated report from the Corporate Manager for Communities, however the witnesses invited provided substantial updates for Members to consider. The witnesses were:

Councillor Joanna Spicer – Chair of WSCSP and Suffolk County Councillor

Clair Harvey – Suffolk County Council Specialist Lead - Public Health

Janine Wratten - The Superintendent for Suffolk Constabulary

Jane Reason - Albany Pupil Referral Unit

Councillor Derek Davis – Babergh representative on the WSCSP

Councillor Sarah Mansel – Mid Suffolk representative on the WSCSP

Councillor Spicer provided an introduction for the role and work of the WSCSP, after which each witness supplemented with further information for their specific area and addressed in turn the five identified priorities, which the WSCSP focussed on; Criminal Exploitation; Violence against Women and Girls, Men and Boys; Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHA); Hate Crime and Prevent.

Members asked questions relating to all five priorities and in addition concerns were raised regarding hard to reach victims in rural areas, anti-social behaviour, youth offenders, and increased violence against parents/carers, as a result of the long periods of lockdown in 2020/21. There were also questions relating to drug offences, County Lines and exploitation of young persons as couriers for criminal activities.

The debate focused on the availability of reliable statistics and the inclusion of further details in the report. Members were also concerned that the Councils' own representatives updated all Members on the progress of the WSCSP. They also asked that the confidential WSCSP information pack was updated and distributed to all Members.



RESOLVED:



That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, having reviewed the activity of the WSCSP and noted the content of the officer's report, have the following observations:

That the previously prepared Confidential Member WSCSP information pack be prepared, updated and additional information added and distributed to all Members;

That arrangements be made for a briefing for Members of the Councils on the procedures, processes and the action plan in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour;

That the next annual review of the WSCSP to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the activity of partnership.

VALUE ADDED

The Committee scrutinises the WSCSP annually and this has added value not only to the questioning process, but also to the expectation for witnesses to provide intelligible analysis and evaluations against the priorities.

13. REVIEW OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2020/21



The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee completed the municipal year by scrutinising the work of the Committees during the past year to evaluate the processes and the lessons learnt. Observations and suggestions are then provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2021/22.

As this Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review takes place immediately before the Annual Councils in May it will not be possible to provide a summary of this scrutiny process at this stage.

MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2021/22:

TOPIC	PURPOSE	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER	PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED TO COMMITTEE
24 May 2021 – JOINT Chair – Cllr Welham				
Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21	Review of the work conducted throughout 2020/21 – Lessons learnt, improvements and achievements	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services Senior Governance Support Officer		
17 JUNE 2021				
Overview and Scrutiny Training for Members of the Committee	Training on the principles and approach to Scrutiny	Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office		
CIFCO Business Plan	To scrutinise the Business Plan	Assistant Director for Assets and Investments	Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments	June 2020
Information Bulletin Public Realm	A review of management of public open space secured in relation to planning the adoption policy	Assistant Director – Environment and Commercial Partnerships	Cabinet Members for Environment and Commercial Partnerships	
15 JULY 2021				
Annual Review of Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy		Assistant Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing	
Customer Service Update	An Information Bulletin brought to Committee as a result of the presentation update on 20 July 2020, to include a general update but focusing on Face-to-Face customer services performance.	Assistant Director – Customer, Digital Transformations and Information Corporate Manager Customer Operations	Cabinet Member for Customer, Digital Transformations and Information	

19 AUGUST 2021				
16 SEPTEMBER 2021				
14 OCTOBER 2021				
18 NOVEMBER 2021				
Annual Review of Local Citizens Advice	To review the Funding Arrangements for LCA in the two Districts.	Assistant Director – Planning for Growth	Cabinet Member for Communities	
16 DECEMBER 2021				
13 JANUARY 2022				
Draft General Fund (GF) 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook	Scrutiny of the GF Budget for 2022/2023	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources Corporate Manager – Finance	The Leaders Cabinet Members for Finance	BDC 14 January 2021
Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Four - year Outlook	Scrutiny of the HRA Budget and Business Plan	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources Corporate Manager – Finance	The Leaders Cabinet Members for Finance	BDC 14 January 2021
17 FEBRUARY 2022				
Representatives on Outside Bodies	A review of the Representatives on Outside Bodies and an update on the work undertaken	Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office Senior Governance Officer		
17 MARCH 2022				
Crime and Disorder Panel meeting	The Committee to conduct a scrutiny review of the WSCSP to fulfil the Councils Statutory requirements	Assistant Director – Sustainable Communities Community Safety Professional Lead - Communities	BDC Cabinet Member for Communities MSDC Cabinet Member for Communities	22 March 2021

21 APRIL 2022				
19 MAY 2022				
Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021/22	Review of the work conducted throughout 2021/22 – Lessons learnt, improvements and achievements	Corporate Manager – Democratic Services Senior Governance Support Officer		

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s latest workplans are on the Council’s website and can be viewed on the following link:

[OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKPLAN](#)

TOPICS IDENTIFIED FOR REVIEW BUT NOT CURRENTLY TIMETABLED



Underspend of Grants for bringing empty homes back into to use

A report to be brought to Committee for the effect of the underspending of grants for bringing empty homes back into use – **To be reviewed by the Chair in February/March 2021** **NOTE:** Whilst in emergency response mode SLT deemed this was not a high priority.



Crime and Disorder Panel meeting

Required to take place at least once a year, provisionally agreed to take place in **March 2022**.



Annual Review of Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy to be reviewed in **June/July 2021**



Customer Service Update July 2021 – an Information Bulletin brought to Committee as a result of the presentation update on 20 July 2020 to include a general update but focusing on Face-to-Face customer services performance.



Improving Access to the Private Rented Sector - Chairs to discuss the timing for bringing this to Committee

Other topics identified:

- Home ownership review
- Suggestion: Scrutiny of ABS projects and policies – Suggested at the meeting on the 22 March 2021