



Babergh Overview and Scrutiny

An annual review of the work undertaken by the
Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25



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www.babergh.gov.uk/w/overview-and-scrutiny



At the end of each municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee annual report has demonstrated how the work of this Committee has encompassed change, implemented innovation, and set the bar very high for incisive, pertinent and persistent questioning. This past year has been no different.

Reviewing our programme of work shows that we have scrutinised six out of seven directorates (Housing, Property, Operations, Finance, Communities and Corporate Services) which leaves Planning for the forthcoming programme.

There have been new annual items that show how the scrutiny function has embraced the opportunity to have an overview of many different services such as the progress towards our net zero targets and the annual ombudsman complaints monitoring.

On a personal note, the outstanding innovation was the introduction of the newly formed Tenant Scrutiny Board presented to a regular twice-yearly scrutiny review by the Joint Committee. Under the leadership of David White, Head of Housing Transformation and Regulation, the in-depth scrutiny by the Tenant Scrutiny Board of the services they receive from Tenant Services has been thorough, honest and productive, with the new Tenant Handbook being one of the outcomes they have achieved over the past year.

Of course, Committees are run by people for people and our successes over the past year are people centred. The creation of a new scoping document has created an efficient tool for committee members to contribute to a dynamic work plan for 2025/26. All members of the committee fully participate in training, workshops, pre-meeting preparation and rigorous questioning.

The partnership between Councillors James Caston and Keith Scarff (Mid Suffolk) and John Whyman and myself has been open, honest, fun and successful and I want to say a very special thank you to all of them as they have shared their experience and knowledge with me over the past two years, and enabled and enriched my 2 year tenure as Chair of this very important committee.

My final thanks go to Alicia Norman as Lead Officer for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She has directed and implemented standards that are demonstrated in all the work of the Committee. She has taken the work of the Committee to another level with her commitment to the principles of Overview & Scrutiny, which is reflected in our work plan and made us the envy of neighbouring authorities. Well done, Alicia.

Councillor Mary McLaren

Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee | Babergh



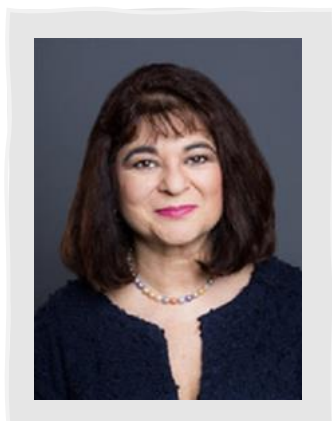
Cllr Mary McLaren
(Chair)
Stour



Cllr John Whyman
(Vice Chair)
Capel St Mary



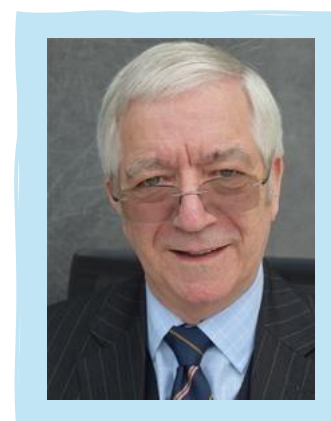
Cllr Leigh Jamieson
South East Cosford



Cllr Kathryn Grandon
Hadleigh South



Cllr Ruth Hendry
Great Cornard



Cllr Brian Riley
Sproughton & Pinewood



Cllr Laura Smith
Sudbury South West
May 2023 - Sept 2024



Cllr Michael Holt
Chadacre
May 2024 - Sept 2024

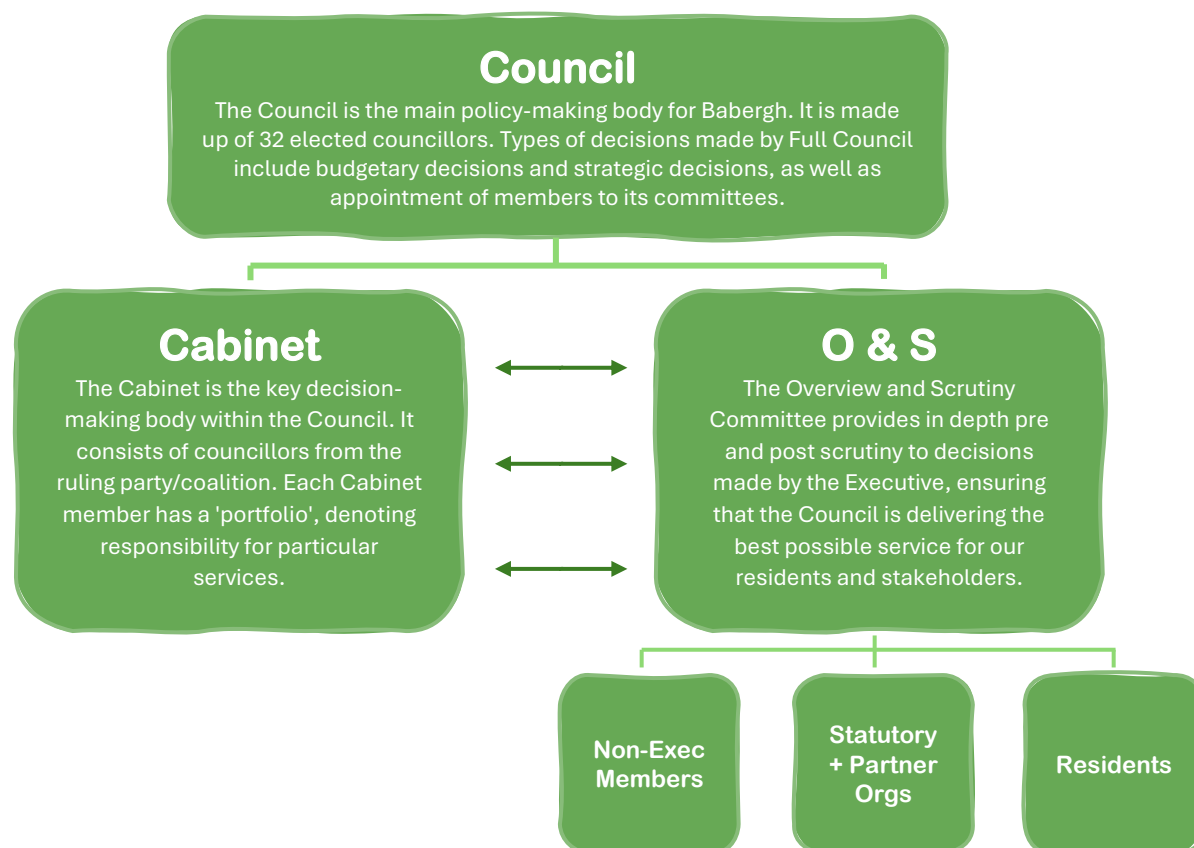


Since the introduction of the Local Government Act (2000), the implementation of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee was deemed a statutory requirement for all Councils which operate on a Leader / Cabinet model of governance, such as Babergh. The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to act as a 'critical friend' to the decision-makers of the Council, also known as the Executive, and to provide steer and direction to ensure that the Council are delivering the best and most effective services for our residents.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee acts as an independent body within the Council's governance structure. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must not be members of the Executive, and must not be involved in the scrutiny of any decisions / strategies that they have had a part in developing.

Due to working in partnership, the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee often combines with the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake joint meetings where there are items for consideration that affect both Councils to equal measure. Each Council is still able to convene an independent meeting to scrutinise specific items (e.g. the budgets) where appropriate.

A full terms of reference for Babergh's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found in Part 3: Rules of Procedures in the Constitution as linked [here](#).





During 2024/25 the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee, often in partnership with the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee in a joint capacity, was responsible for the following:

7

Committee
Meetings

11

Reports

400

YouTube Views

6 / 7

Directorates
Scrutinised

4

Cabinet
Members

19

Directors and
Officers

8

External
Representatives

46

Recommendations
Overall

10

Recommendations
to the Executive



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets out a work plan at the beginning of the year that provides Members with key areas to focus on and review. These work plans are put together through considering:

- The Councils' Plan
- The Forthcoming Decisions List
- Statutory Items
- Requests from Councillors
- Requests from the Public
- Call-ins of Cabinet decisions

The work plans are reviewed at monthly meetings between the Chairs and Vice Chairs, and are also presented monthly to the Committee for further discussion and agreement.

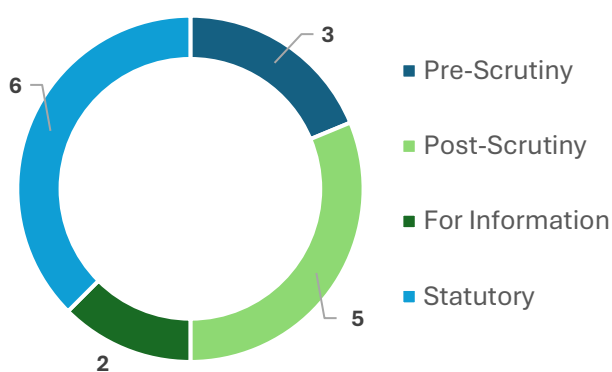
In 2024, the scoping document (as seen above) for the Overview and Scrutiny committee was refreshed. This document can be used by any Member of the Council to put forward a topic / item for potential inclusion on the Overview and Scrutiny work plans. By encouraging a clear scope to be explored as part of initial discussions Members have more autonomy and direction over what information needs to be presented as part of an item, and the value that the committee can add is clearly defined. These documents are reviewed by the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny, and signed off by the Chair of the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Scoping Document

The purpose of this scoping document is to enable Councillors and officers to propose topics for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which have a refined remit and focus. This document provides the Committee with a clear purpose, rationale, and measurements of success that will result in a thorough review of the topic proposed and value added to the processes and delivery.

Topic Title	
Purpose of the Review	
Rationale / Links to Corporate Plan	
Supporting Documents	
Out of Scope	
Risks	
What Value Will Scrutiny Add?	
Measures of Success	
Officers Required	

Types of Item



Items on the work plans range from statutory items, information bulletins, brief updates on specific topics and areas of interest, or fact-finding pieces of work for items the Committee may wish to scrutinise in the future.

The following work plans were devised by Members of the Committee at a workshop meeting in May 2024:



TOPIC	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER
13 MAY 2024		
CIFCO Performance Report (2023/4) and Business Plan (2024/5)	Director – Property, Development and Regeneration	Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments
Is the Councils' Housing Stock Inspection Ready?	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
15 JULY 2024		
Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership	Director – Sustainable Communities	Chair of WSCSP
14 OCTOBER 2024		
Annual Review of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
Tenant-Led Scrutiny: 6 Month Review	Director – Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
11 NOVEMBER 2024		
Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Reduction Management Plan Update	Director – Operations	Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Nature Recovery, and Biodiversity
16 DECEMBER 2024		
Draft General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (2025/6)	Director – Finance Director - Housing	Cabinet Members for Finance & Housing
13 JANUARY 2025		
Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman Annual Complaints Update	Director – Corporate Services	Cabinet Member for Performance and Resilience
17 MARCH 2025		
Tenant-Led Scrutiny: 6 Month Review	Director – Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing and Property



Property, Development & Regen Items



CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD) PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) AND BUSINESS PLAN (2024/25)

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee are committed to reviewing the CIFCO performance report and upcoming business plan on an annual basis, as decided by Full Council. The Committee's purpose is to oversee these reports, which include details on the Company's KPIs, the current investment portfolio, and the five-year cashflow forecast, ahead of their consideration by Council.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments
- Director for Property, Development, and Regeneration
- Head of the Councils Companies and Development

Members asked questions on issues including:

- The acquisition of properties to the portfolio
- Works to improve Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings
- Repayment of key loans
- Factors that impacted the valuation of properties
- Impact of interest rates
- Implementation of renewable energy and carbon saving

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Committee notes the CIFCO Performance Report (2023/4) and the Business Plan (2024/5) ahead of its consideration at Full Council.
- 1.2. That Officers explore means of providing more details about redacted information without disclosing identifying features.
- 1.3. That more details are provided in the report to Council on the proposed strategy to reach the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) target and requests that localised benchmarking is introduced to measure the effects of EPC ratings.
- 1.4. That future reports provide financial information about each property, including comparative data and forecasting.
- 1.5. That a risk management key is provided within future reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Full Council.
- 1.6. That further training is provided for all Members on CIFCO and the Councils' Companies.
- 1.7. That a glossary of key terms is provided within future reports to Overview and Scrutiny.



Economy Items



DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET (2025/26) AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL POSITION

The Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee have a statutory responsibility to scrutinise the draft general fund budget and medium term financial plans ahead of further discussion and approval by the Cabinet and Council. The Committee are able to provide a steer on areas within the budget that may require further detail and exploration by the Cabinet in order to ensure the Council are delivering robust services in line with priorities.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments
- Director for Finance and Procurement
- Senior Finance Business Partners

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Increasing council tax
- Quarter 2 forecasted premises costs
- The robustness of the assumptions that underpin the Budget
- Spend on external contracts and services
- The potential impact of a business rates reset
- The increase in employee insurance costs in comparison to decreasing payroll costs
- The implementation of car parking charges and impact on the Budget
- Identification of new income streams
- The split and adjustment of pooled investment funds

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the draft General Fund budget proposals for 2025/26 and the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 1.2. That Cabinet re-examines the viability of delivering non-essential services and schemes, and considers this in-line with their costs to the budget.
- 1.3. That Officers review Point 8.23 and reassess whether this should be included in the final report to Cabinet and Council, with the wording changed to "Cabinet" instead of "Administration".



Housing Items



IS THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK 'INSPECTION READY'?

In 2024, a new proactive inspection regime was introduced by the housing regulator resulting in a 4-year inspection cycle on the Council's social housing stock to ensure that it was up to decent standard. The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee were tasked with ensuring that appropriate measures were being put in place to adequately prepare the Council for these inspections and to ensure our housing service was running smoothly. The Committee were also requested to oversee the creation of a Tenant Scrutiny Board to ensure that tenants' voices were being heard by the Council and taken into account through decision-making processes.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Housing Transformation Officer

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Training provisions for tenants wanting to sit on the Tenant Scrutiny Board
- Introduction of competence and conduct standards
- Training provisions for housing managers and staff
- Standards for allocation in relation to Gateway to Homechoice
- Implementation of a new repairs interface for tenants
- Accessibility of information provided to tenants
- Officer support available for members on the Tenant Scrutiny Board
- The terms of reference for the Tenant Scrutiny Board
- Advertising positions on the Board and upholding engagement

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Committee notes the report and commits to supporting the new Tenant Scrutiny Board, welcoming the opportunity for our tenants to engage with the Councils.
- 1.2. That a quorate for holding a meeting is established within the Tenant Scrutiny Board's terms of reference.
- 1.3. That a Vice Chair position on the Tenant Scrutiny Board is created.



Housing Items



TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATES

As part of the Council's response to the new inspection regime, a Tenant Scrutiny Board was created to ensure that the voices of tenants were integrated into the delivery of all housing services. As part of the Board's terms of reference, it was agreed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive updates from the Board on a 6-month basis.

The Board presented their first update in October, and provided a presentation on the work undertaken so far by the group regarding the creation of a new Tenant Handbook and improvements to communication between Tenants and the Council.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Housing
- Director for Housing
- Housing Transformation Officer
- Tenant Engagement Co-Ordinator
- Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Support provided to tenants with complex needs
- Return rates for the tenant survey
- Equality assurances within support provided to tenants
- Competency measuring for housing managers and staff
- Support provided for new council housing tenants
- Information provided within the new tenant handbook
- Target completion time for repair works
- Number of homes successfully meeting decent standards

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the work undertaken so far by the Tenant Scrutiny Board, in particular the creation of the Tenant Handbook.
- 1.2. That the Committee endorses the suggestion that the Tenant Scrutiny Board reviews housing complaints and anti-social behaviour in the near future.



Housing Items



TENANT SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATES

The Board presented their second update in March and provided a presentation on their most recent scrutiny project, which involved assessing anti-social behaviour within tenant properties and deriving various recommendations to the housing service to assist in improving delivery.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Housing Transformation Officer
- Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey
- Overall implementation of the Board's recommendations
- Tenant grievances related to the closure of their complaints
- Criteria used to rank actions as 'low effort' or 'high effort'
- Methods of reporting anti-social behaviour for tenants
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion measures
- Support provided to non-tenants facing anti-social behaviour
- Digital software provided to housing staff

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends the work undertaken by the Tenant Scrutiny Board and is assured that this work is meaningful and that tenants are successfully influencing services.
- 1.2. That future Tenant Scrutiny Board reports presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee contain data on meeting key performance indicators and tenant satisfaction measures.
- 1.3. That officers further review the 'Our Tenants' webpage to ensure that all appropriate information is included, such as support for overall tenant wellbeing.
- 1.4. That the Tenant Handbook is amended to outline accessibility adjustments and different languages available at the top of the document.
- 1.5. That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports Tenancy Services' business case for procuring up-to-date housing management digital solutions.



Housing Items



ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee are committed to reviewing the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy on an annual basis. Members are invited to review the progress made towards the main aims and objectives of the Strategy, as well as the reconfigurations made throughout the year to the action plans and the key themes that underpin this delivery.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Housing
- Director for Housing
- Housing Transformation Officer

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Level of control over the types of housing that gets constructed in the District
- Service level agreement for grounds maintenance on council estates
- Recharge of public realm work to the housing revenue account
- Implementation of a housing inspection regime
- Use of external contractors
- Work undertaken to reach an EPC rating of C or above by 2030 in council properties
- Input of Cabinet Members into the formulation of the Joint Local Plan
- Measures to support tenants with rising costs of energy and heating

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Committee notes the contents of the Annual Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and endorses the improvements made to the service.
- 1.2. That the Committee encourages the Cabinet Member for Housing to create social housing development opportunities during the formulation of the Joint Local Plan Part Two and the Housing Allocations policies.
- 1.3. That the Committee encourages the Director for Housing to start conversations with ward members about Alms Housing and what can be done to support residents who live in this type of accommodation.
- 1.4. That the Committee asks the Housing department to prioritise retrofitting properties to assist tenants with the costs of heating their homes.



Housing Items



REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2025/26 DRAFT BUDGET AND 30 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

Much like with the General Fund, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have a statutory responsibility to scrutinise the draft housing revenue account and upcoming business plans ahead of further discussion and approval by the Cabinet and Council. The Committee are able to provide a steer on areas within the accounts that may require further detail and exploration by the Cabinet in order to ensure the Council are delivering a robust service in line with priorities.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments
- Director for Finance and Procurement
- Director for Housing
- Finance Business Partner

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Types of complaints made by residents
- Varying performance levels in relation to rent arrears between Babergh and Mid Suffolk
- Repairs and maintenance work
- Application of Tolerance to houses being re-let
- Compliance with electrical inspection regulations
- Spend on external and contracted services
- Work carried out by Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs)

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the draft Housing Revenue Account for 2025/26 and the 30 Year Business Plan.
- 1.2. That officers explore the reasons why Mid Suffolk is outperforming Babergh in regard to tenant arrears.
- 1.3. That officers explore whether the Councils are getting best value for money for the works undertaken to our housing stock.
- 1.4. That officers include figures for the amount of homes that do not meet Decent Standards and the transformation plans in a future report on the Housing Revenue Account.



WESTERN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Community Safety Partnerships were established nationally in response to S.17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998), comprising of the following partner organisations: local authorities, the police, probation services, fire and rescue services, education providers, and the Youth Justice Service. Under S.19 of the Police and Justice Act (2006) and the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Regulations (2009), it is a requirement that every local authority annually reviews and scrutinises the activity and effectiveness of their Partnership.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Head of Communities
- Manager for Community Safety
- Head of Community Safety at Suffolk County Council
- Inspector of Suffolk Constabulary

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Resolving instances of anti-social behaviour
- Funding for the Partnership
- Use of the Suffolk Domestic Abuse Helpline and Anglia Care Trust
- The loss of the Suffolk Rape Crisis and further support services for sexual abuse
- Cost of officer and partner time
- Delivery of safeguarding training to Members and

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Committee notes the report and commends the partners for their work undertaken as part of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.
- 1.2. That Officers provide Members with access to e-learning and training modules concerning PREVENT.
- 1.3. That Officers provide a catalogue of training concerning issues covered by the Partnership to Town and Parish Councils through Town and Parish Liaison Meetings and District Forum Meetings.
- 1.4. The Cabinet engage with third-sector organisations to identify ways of leveraging funding to support the delivery of the Partnership's key strategic areas.
- 1.5. That the Community Safety Team review the current format of the report and presentation of the information ahead of the 2025 annual review.
- 1.6. That Officers review the motion approved by Full Council concerning modern slavery and put in place a business accreditation scheme.



GREENHOUSE GAS AND CARBON REDUCTION MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

In an effort to ensure that the Council is on track to meet its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested annual reports on the work undertaken as part of our agreed Carbon Reduction Management Plan (CRMP). The first of these annual reports was presented in November detailing the recently achieved reduction in emissions as well as the Council's plans for further saving measures. These reports go to the individual Scrutiny committees, due to the different budget pressures and level of priority between Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Nature Recovery, and Biodiversity
- Director for Operations and Climate Change
- Climate Change Manager

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Integration of ambitions into the Joint Local Plan
- Impacts of the implementation of the Simpler Recycling scheme
- The scale and cost of the current ambitions detailed within the Plan
- Emission hotspots, such as the leisure centres, and proposed carbon reduction work
- Financial costings of the Plan

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.1. That the Committee notes the report and supports the work undertaken by the Climate Change team so far to reach the Council's net zero targets.
- 1.2. That the Climate Change team, in collaboration with the Housing department, explore setting up a maintenance scheme for solar panels on the Council's social housing stock and leisure centres.
- 1.3. That officers present an information bulletin to the Committee in June 2025, including the financial costings and savings of work undertaken to reach the Council's climate targets as well as individual profiles of each leisure centre.
- 1.4. That officers present update reports on greenhouse gas reduction and the progress of the Carbon Reduction Management Plan to the Committee on an annual basis.
- 1.5. That the Cabinet, alongside officers, re-examine the financial viability of reaching the Council's target of net zero emissions by 2030, with due consideration being given to Babergh's current financial situation.



ANNUAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS UPDATE

As per the Housing Ombudsman's new complaints code, Councils are now required to present annual complaint reports to their Overview and Scrutiny Committees for review. These reports contain information on the number of complaints submitted and those upheld by both Ombudsman bodies. An overview is also provided on the Council's own complaints processes, its accessibility and functionality, and the transformational work undertaken to better support residents across the District.

The following Cabinet Members and officers were in attendance:

- Cabinet Member for Performance and Resilience
- Director for Corporate Services
- Head of Customer Experience
- Complaints and Feedback Officer

Members asked questions on issues including:

- Frequency of communication with a complainant
- Hot spot areas for complaints, such as Housing and Planning
- Work undertaken to reduce the number of complaints received
- External audit mechanisms to review the Council's complaint handling procedures
- Involvement of officers across service areas in investigating complaints

The following recommendations were made:

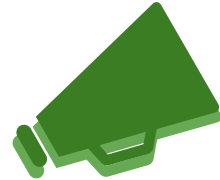
- 1.1. That the Committee receives an annual complaints performance report as per the new Housing Ombudsman complaint code.
- 1.2. That officers take on board the Committee's suggestions about additions to future reports including: clearer language, illustrative complaint handling maps, lessons learnt, and the number of unique complainants.
- 1.3. That the Committee supports the introduction of a vulnerable persons policy.
- 1.4. That the Committee conducts a further in-depth review into complaints received by Housing and Planning at a future meeting.
- 1.5. That the Head of Customer Experience explores introducing more training for officers to assist with investigating complaints.
- 1.6. That the Communications department explores using pre-communication as a means of potentially reducing the number of complaints.



CALL-INS AND COUNCILLOR CALLS FOR ACTION

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the home of the call-in function. Any decision taken by the Cabinet or by an officer under delegated powers is subject to the call-in procedure, apart from those decisions that are sufficiently urgent to the point where being called in would cause a significant impact.

Councillor Call for Action provides councillors with the opportunity to ask for discussions at scrutiny committees on issues where local problems have arisen and where other means of resolution have been exhausted. Any Councillor is entitled to enact the above functions.



In the 2024/25 municipal year, the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered 0 call-ins or councillor call for actions.

ACTION TRACKER

Since 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has utilised an 'action tracker' to review progress made on the implementation of their recommendations. This action tracker

helps to demonstrate where the Committee has added value to a range of processes and service areas, and quantifies the impact that the Committee has successfully had on shaping the direction of the Council.

This action tracker is updated by the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny and is presented monthly to the Committee for oversight and discussion.

TRAINING

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to assess their own training needs at the start of each municipal year, based on the work undertaken in the last 12 months and identifying any potential gaps in knowledge and skills. In 2024/5, Members identified that training on budgets and finance was most needed to conduct successful scrutiny on the Council's accounts.



In November, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny provided bespoke finance training to Overview and Scrutiny members based on information detailed in the Council's own budget.

Report Authors

Cllr. Mary McLaren

Chair of Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee
May 2023 – May 2025

Alicia Norman

Lead Officer – Overview and Scrutiny
committees@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk



Babergh District Council
Endeavour House
Ipswich, IP1 2BX
www.babergh.gov.uk