

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY 4 JULY 2019
GIPPING ROOM, GRAFTON HOUSE
6.00 PM

Present: Councillors C Allen, S Gage, J Gibbs, S Handley, D Heaps, A Leeder, C Shaw, C Smart, J Smith, E Harsant, R Pope, T Lockington and S Connelly (Substitute)

1. **Election of Chair**

It was **RESOLVED:**

that Councillor L Harsant be elected as Chair of the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

The Chair welcomed the recently elected Councillors, Councillors Cracknell, Heaps, T Lockington, Richardson and Smith to the meeting and also welcomed those Councillors newly appointed or re-appointed to the Committee, Councillors Armitage, Gibbs, Grant and Maguire.

2. **Election of Vice-Chair**

It was **RESOLVED:**

that Councillor S Gage be elected as Vice-Chair of the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

3. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maguire. Councillor Connelly attended as substitute for Councillor Maguire.

4. Unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2019

- 4.1 Councillor Allen commented that a question she had asked regarding the outcomes for those people involved in Modern Slavery had not been recorded in sufficient detail.

It was RESOLVED:

that subject to the addition of ‘Councillor Allen asked whether the Police knew what happened to each of the people who had been found as part of the operation. Supt. Cutler explained that the Police did not know what happened to all of those people’ at the end of minute 58.13 the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2019, be signed as a true record.

5. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

6. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business

It was RESOLVED:

that the Order of Business be as printed on the agenda.

7. OS/19/01 Annual Portfolio Holder Update - Housing and Health

- 7.1 Councillor Neil MacDonald explained that his portfolio covered Housing and Health, which referred to Public Health. Councillor MacDonald explained that the Council’s Public Health budget was small and that the service was supported by one officer who spent only part of their time working on the service. Despite these limited resources the Council ran important initiatives especially the campaign to make Ipswich a Dementia Friendly Town. Councillor MacDonald reported that a Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing initiative had been run at Murrayside Primary School which had been very successful.
- 7.2 Councillor MacDonald reported that the Council was trying to develop an Ipswich Lettings Partnership which would allow the Council to signpost households on the housing waiting list to private landlords. Councillor MacDonald noted that there were difficulties with affordability, with average private rents being double Council rents and many landlords averse to taking on tenants from the housing waiting list; the Council would offer letting guarantees and property and tenancy management support to try to overcome the latter issue.
- 7.3 Councillor MacDonald noted that rent arrears in Ipswich were very low at just 1.9% which compared favourably to national statistics. Councillor MacDonald reported that strong financial management allowed for significant investment to have been made in energy saving measures.

- 7.4 Councillor MacDonald explained that there was significant Council house building taking place in Ipswich with developments at Cauldwell Hall Road, the former Tooks Bakery, Grimwade Street, and a number of small, mostly former works and garage sites, across the South of Ipswich. There was also a garage refurbishment and replacement programme which was nearing completion with the final contracts having recently been awarded.
- 7.5 Councillor MacDonald explained that there were 3,000 applicants on the housing waiting list, with 1285 for these being in priority need. During 2018/19 450 Council homes had become available and been allocated to people, and 238 people had been housed in housing association properties. Around 100 people had also moved out of Ipswich through the Gateway to Homechoice scheme, often to parts of the Greater Ipswich area beyond the borough boundary.
- 7.6 Councillor Pope commented that the Council's record on keeping homeless families out of bed and breakfast accommodation was very good and that the work being done to prevent homelessness was pleasing. Councillor Pope also commended the work done to reduce the number of empty properties in Ipswich.
- 7.7 Councillor Pope queried whether the statistics for the LI496S – Anti Social Behaviour New Cases performance target were for Council Homes or for all of Ipswich. The Head of Housing and Community Services, Ian Blofield, explained that this indicator related only to Council homes.
- 7.8 Councillor Pope asked why the number of court related actions to enforce tenancy conditions was so high. Councillor MacDonald explained that more court actions were needed to help deal with the increase in drug problems which was affecting parts of the town. Mr Blofield added that as a result of multi-agency working it was now easier to get the required evidence to take such action. It was agreed that a breakdown of LI318S by Ward would be provided to Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 7.9 Councillor Pope asked whether Councillor MacDonald was disappointed that no new Council homes had been completed during the 2018/19 reporting year. Councillor MacDonald said that he was indeed disappointed as he was passionate about seeing more homes built.
- 7.10 Councillor Gage asked what barriers existed to building new Council homes. Councillor MacDonald explained that the Council could only build homes in Ipswich, where the land supply was severely restricted, noting that the Ipswich Garden Village would only contain housing association properties. Councillor MacDonald also explained that the high cost of land and significant construction costs inflation meant that developments were often not financially viable. Councillor MacDonald explained that he hoped that Suffolk County Council would release some of the land they owned for the Council to buy and noted that partnership working was important in getting new homes built.

- 7.11 Councillor C Smart asked why tenants might refuse works and what the new process for dealing with this might be. Ian Blofield explained that there were many reasons for refusals, often relating to people who had been in their homes for many years and not wanting the disruption works could cause. Mr Blofield confirmed that any safety critical works would be completed and that any non-safety critical works not done would be carried out when the property became void. The new approach to dealing with refusals was to try to engage with residents with a history of refusal earlier and to provide them with additional support when works were planned.
- 7.12 Councillor C Smart asked whether leaseholders could refuse works. Mr Blofield explained that, with regards to leaseholders, the Council would normally only carry out works to the fabric of buildings and not to individual flats. Mr Blofield explained that there was a statutory process to follow and that so long as the Council followed the process correctly works could not be refused, and the leaseholders would have to pay their proportion of the cost. It was hoped to improve the way that leaseholders were engaged in these works, with housing officers potentially talking to all residents of a block of flats rather than just tenants.
- 7.13 Councillor Shaw asked whether the Council had any plans to improve its engagement of tenants. Councillor MacDonald explained that there had been staffing changes in the tenant participation team but that the Council was reviewing options to make improvements to this service. Mr Blofield commented that the present model was relatively formal and that it was hoped to use Social Media to engage residents in less formal ways. The University of Suffolk and other experienced partners were assisting with this review. Mr Blofield noted that successfully engaging with tenants was an issue faced by most housing authorities. In response to a question Mr Blofield confirmed that Tenants Times was printed twice a year with more regular 'bitesize' email versions.
- 7.14 Councillor Shaw asked how residents knew who their housing officer was. Mr Blofield explained that new tenants would meet their housing officer as part of their moving in day. Mr Blofield explained that each tenant would be visited at least once a year by their housing officer and that a list of housing officers was available to residents.
- 7.15 Councillor Pope asked whether all properties were visited each year. Mr Blofield confirmed that all properties were visited to carry out gas safety checks. Mr Blofield explained that other property inspections were more targeted, with properties in poor condition visited four times each year, those in fair condition visited annually and those in good condition visited every two years.
- 7.16 Councillor Gibbs noted that there had been a significant rise in the number of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in certain parts of Ipswich which had caused issues for neighbours, and asked how the Council planned to address this issue. Councillor MacDonald explained the Council was gathering evidence to introduce an Article 4 direction preventing conversions to HMOs without

- planning permission. The Council was already using its Environmental Health powers to serve improvement notices where properties were in dangerously poor condition.
- 7.17 Councillor T Lockington noted that the Sheltered Housing service was being reviewed and commented that it would be helpful if people were not forced to move homes. Councillor MacDonald noted that Ipswich Borough Council was a housing provider rather than a care provider and so whether someone had to move was dependent on what support could be provided by other agencies.
- 7.18 Mr Blofield explained that the only support provided by the Council in sheltered housing schemes was the HEARS service, which, whilst providing reassurance and assistance to those able to live independently, was not a substitute for proper care and support. Mr Blofield explained that the current model of sheltered housing was over 40 years old and that the Council needed to review it to meet current needs, especially considering the ageing population. Mr Blofield said that current thinking was to try to get people to remain in their communities for as long as possible. Mr Blofield noted that the Council's adaptations programme spent £75k per annum on changes for disabled Council tenants, and that Disabled Facilities Grants were available for those living in the private sector or housing association properties.
- 7.19 The Chair asked what period someone had to live in a council home for before they became eligible to purchase their home and whether this scheme had been extended to housing association properties. Councillor MacDonald explained that the minimum qualification period for a Right to Buy Discount was 3 years and noted that whilst the pledge to allow housing association tenants to buy their properties had been made by the Conservative Party in their 2015 manifesto, so far only a small scale trial had been held.
- 7.20 The Chair asked for an explanation of the rules around succession. Mr Blofield explained that Ipswich Borough Council allowed one succession and that housing officers would give advice to tenants on their rights.
- 7.21 Councillor Handley asked what strategies the Council had to help vulnerable tenants to accept support from the Council and other appropriate agencies. Mr Blofield explained that housing officers would build up relationships with tenants living in their areas and that they were often the best people to encourage tenants to accept other support. The Council also had a Tenant Support team to signpost people to appropriate support and persuade them to make use of it. Mr Blofield noted however that there were some very difficult cases where it was hard to get people to accept help.
- 7.22 Councillor Handley asked whether the Council provided support for residents whose homes had been 'de-cluttered'. Mr Blofield explained that support was indeed provided after 'de-cluttering' to help people to adjust and stop them from returning to old habits.
- 7.23 The Chair thanked Councillor MacDonald and Mr Blofield for their time and contribution to the session.

8. OS/19/02 Work Programme 2019/20

- 8.1 The Chair noted that there was only a small amount of business on the agenda for the meeting on 1 August 2019 and proposed that it be cancelled, assuming that no call-in requests were received.
- 8.2 The Chair noted that the meeting on 26 September was scheduled to consider the Annual Report on the Write-Off of Bad Debts 2018/19 but commented that she did not feel that it was necessary for this report to be brought to the committee. Councillor Leeder commented that it might be more appropriate for the Audit and Governance Committee to consider the report. The Clerk agreed to investigate whether it was necessary for the report to be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 8.3 Councillor Gage suggested that Councillor Mary Evans, Suffolk County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs be invited back to the committee to provide an update on planned Suffolk County Council roadworks in Ipswich.
- 8.4 Councillor Gage asked that the report of the Task and Finish Group on GP Hubs be delayed from 24 October as it was unlikely that that group would have finished their work by then. Councillor Handley agreed that this would be helpful and commented that once the group had re-convened a more accurate estimate on timescale might be available.
- 8.5 The Chair invited Councillor Pope to present proposal form 28. Councillor Pope explained that the purpose of the proposal form was to look into food waste recycling options following the alteration to what could be composted through Ipswich Borough Council's brown bin service. Councillor Pope noted that improving recycling was a topical issue with scope for significant improvements possible nationally.
- 8.6 Councillor Connelly suggested that the Task and Finish Group should also consider kerbside glass recycling. Councillor Pope commented that he had previously been told by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change that it would cost circa £1 million to introduce kerbside glass recycling and that 75% of glass in Suffolk was already recycled, and this was the reason he had not included it in the proposal form. Councillor Pope confirmed however that he would be happy for the Task and Finish Group to also consider kerbside glass recycling. Councillor Connelly commented that the Suffolk Waste Partnership should be invited to participate in the review.
- 8.7 The Chair invited Councillor Xhaferaj to present proposal form 29. Councillor Xhaferaj explained that residents had raised issues with an increase in waste bags being left outside overnight. Councillor Xhaferaj suggested that the collection times offered by Wastesaver needed to be considered and that street cleaning schedules could also be reviewed. Councillor Xhaferaj also suggested that gull-proof bags and enforcement options also be discussed by the Task and Finish Group.

- 8.8 Councillor Allen noted that a similar issue had been raised as a question at the Council meeting on 28 November 2018 and had been responded to by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change. Councillor Xhaferaj said that he felt a more detailed consideration of the issue would be useful.
- 8.9 Councillor Pope noted that Ipswich had been named the country's cleanest town in 2007 and said that he supported the creation of a Task and Finish Group as he hoped it would lead to improvements to cleanliness in Ipswich.
- 8.10 Councillor Gage said that she was concerned about the wording of the proposal form, noting that it drew conclusions before evidence had been heard. Councillor Gage listed a number of revisions to the proposal form with the effect that all operators be invited to participate in the review rather than just Wastesaver and that work be done to establish what had changed in the night time economy and how commercial waste collection had met these changing needs. Councillor Xhaferaj explained that he had referenced Wastesaver as they were owned by the Borough Council, but was happy if other operators were involved.
- 8.11 Councillor Connelly commented that an important part of this issue was understanding why waste was left on the streets overnight by businesses.
- 8.12 Councillor Gibbs suggested that further clarification of the scope of the Task and Finish group was needed. The Chair noted that this could be discussed at the first meeting of the Task and Finish group.

It was RESOLVED:

- 1. that subject to no call-in requests being received the meeting on 1 August 2019 be cancelled and that the business proposed to be transacted be re-programmed for alternative meetings.**
- 2. that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, attached at Appendix 1 to report Ref No: OS/19/02, be agreed, subject to the changes detailed in these minutes.**
- 3. that a Task and Finish Group be set up to discuss Proposal Form No 28 about household waste collection, with the addition of kerbside glass collection, and that Councillors Connelly, Gage, Harsant, T Lockington, Pope and Shaw take part.**
- 4. that a Task and Finish Group be set up to discuss Proposal Form No 29 about commercial waste collection and street cleaning within the Town Centre that Councillors Harsant, Heaps, Leeder, C Smart, Smith and Xhaferaj take part.**

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm

Chair