

MINUTES OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT THE
COUNCIL OFFICES, CORKS LANE, HADLEIGH ON WEDNESDAY
26 NOVEMBER 2014 AT 5.30 PM.

PRESENT:

BABERGH

Jenny Antill
Peter Burgoyne (Chairman)
Bryn Hurren
David Wood

MID SUFFOLK

David Burn
Rachel Eburne
Kathie Guthrie
John Matthissen
Derek Osborne
Martin Redbond
Jane Storey
Charles Tilbury

1 SUBSTITUTES AND APOLOGIES

The following Members were unable to be present:

BABERGH

James Long
Neil MacMaster
Mark Newman
Jack Norman

MID SUFFOLK

Elizabeth Gibson-Harries
Samantha Powell

Substitutes were in attendance as follows:-

David Burn (substituting for Samantha Powell)
Kathie Guthrie (substituting for Elizabeth Gibson-Harries)

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Jane Storey declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to [Paper JSC/19/14](#) – Business Rates and Pooling, having been the relevant Portfolio Holder when the original SRP Agreement was signed.

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

4 PETITIONS

None received.

5 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None received.

6 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

None received.

7 BUSINESS RATES AND POOLING

Members had before them a report from the Head of Corporate Resources ([Paper JSC/19/14](#)) setting out information requested by Members regarding the business rates retention system and the pooling arrangements, including the availability of rate reliefs.

Barry Hunter, Corporate Manager – Finance made a presentation on the key aspects of the report and together with Evelyn Crossland, Head of Shared Revenues Partnership and Peter Quirk, Head of Corporate Organisation, responded to Members' questions.

Arising from their consideration of this item, Members reiterated the importance of ensuring that small businesses which were eligible for any form of rate relief were made aware and encouraged to apply. Evelyn Crossland referred to the current means of publicity which included door-knocking, letters, leaflets, website and targeting those businesses which appeared to be struggling. She would welcome suggestions on other ways to reach the relevant people.

Members recognised the increased reliance on business rates and that growth in income from this source could only be achieved through the development of new, and expansion of existing, businesses. They noted the contribution which might be expected through the Suffolk Growth Strategy, including the promotion of funding opportunities, and via the Public Sector Leaders group's 'invest to grow' initiatives for encouraging new, local business. Barry Hunter referred to the forthcoming rate review of 2015 (effective from 2017) on which further information is awaited, and advised Members that this would be raised with the relevant Relationship Manager.

In response to a specific question about how the delivery programme projects will deliver business rate growth, Peter Quirk described the relevant projects and expected outcomes. In relation to a further question, he confirmed that David Benham, Corporate Manager – Economic Development and Tourism is the lead for a number of these projects including 'Open for Business' and the business growth agenda, and that, as requested by Members, he would also provide an update at the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the information provided in [Paper JSC/19/14](#) and the accompanying presentation on the operation of the business rates retention system and the Countywide Business Rates Pooling arrangements be noted.

8 SCOPING OF A JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM ON RENT COLLECTION AND VOIDS

The Head of Corporate Organisation introduced [Paper JSC/20/14](#) asking Members to agree the proposed scoping document (Appendix A to the report) for carrying out a joint scrutiny review. Anne Bennett, Financial Inclusion Project Officer, and Evelyn Crossland responded to Members' questions.

The officers were asked to supply the relevant figures for the numbers of properties (Council / RSL and private) which appeared to be under-occupied in terms of the Welfare Reform Act together with statistics for the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's). Members also asked for additional witness(es) who could give a view on the needs of the disabled in relation to an additional bedroom.

Evelyn Crossland was asked to update the table of properties previously reported in December 2013, which set out how many Council properties were in each category of number(s) of bedrooms, and was relevant to downsizing. She confirmed that this would be done, although it would not form part of the proposed review but would link to wider consideration of voids. Reference was also made to the Committee's work on fuel poverty and its relevance to the impact of welfare reforms.

RESOLVED

(1) That the Review Scoping Document attached as Appendix A to [Paper JSC/20/14](#) be approved with the following additions:-

- **Further statistics to be supplied, as requested by the Committee and referred to above**
- **Witnesses to include representation from Disability Advice groups**

(2) That the Review be undertaken on the basis set out in (1) above.

9 SCOPING OF A JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW OF OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE JOINT HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY OUTCOMES

Jonathan Seed, Corporate Manager – Healthy Communities introduced a report from the Head of Communities ([Paper JSC/21/14](#)) asking Members to agree the proposed scoping document attached as Appendix A to the report.

RESOLVED

That the Review Scoping Document attached as Appendix A to [Paper JSC/21/14](#) be approved and that the Review be undertaken on that basis.

10 FUEL POVERTY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Members were advised of the current position, which was that the Group had held an initial discussion but that as yet no single lead officer had been allocated to the role of co-ordinating the Councils' approach to addressing fuel poverty.

Members expressed the view that a lead officer role was key to addressing the cross-cutting nature of the issues raised by fuel poverty. After further discussion, it was agreed that the Task and Finish Group would meet to produce a set of recommendations for the Joint Committee to take forward to Executive and Strategy Committees, including the identification of a lead officer.

RESOLVED

That the current position be noted

11 WORK PLAN FOR 2014/15

The Head of Corporate Organisation submitted [Paper JSC/22/14](#) setting out items identified for consideration by the Committee.

Members were aware that as identified earlier in the meeting, the following items would be included on the agenda for the January meeting:-

- Oral update from David Benham on business rates growth
- Recommendations on Fuel Poverty from the Task and Finish Group

RESOLVED

That the content of [Paper JSC/22/14](#), together with the updates reported at the meeting, be noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.20 p.m.

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Chairman