

Forest Heath District Council

Notes of informal discussions held on Tuesday 16 September 2014 at 5.30 pm in the Council Chamber, District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall

PRESENT: Forest Heath District Council (FHDC)

Councillor J E Waters (Leader of the Council) (in the Chair for the informal discussions)

Councillors Mrs Burt, Edwards, Hirst, Millar and Roman

St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC)

Councillors Clements, Mrs Gower, Griffiths (Leader of the Council), Mrs Mildmay-White, Pugh, Ray, Mrs Stamp and Stevens

IN ATTENDANCE: FHDC Councillor Simmons (Chairman of FHDC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Prior to the formal meeting, informal discussions took place on the following two substantive items:

- (1) West Suffolk Housing Strategy; and
- (2) West Suffolk Joint Tree Management Policy.

All Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Cabinet had been invited to attend Forest Heath District Council's offices to enable joint informal discussions on the reports to take place between the two authorities prior to seeking formal approval at their respective separate Cabinet meetings immediately following the informal discussions.

The Leader of Forest Heath District Council welcomed all those present to the District Offices and the Legal Services Manager advised on the format of the proceedings for the informal discussions and subsequent separate meetings of each authority.

SEBC's Cabinet noted that under its Constitution, FHDC permitted public participation during its Cabinet meetings. Therefore, for the purpose of facilitating this Constitutional requirement, it was proposed that public speaking should be permitted prior to the start of the informal discussions to enable any questions/statements to be considered by both Cabinets as the outcome may inform the decisions taken during the separate formal meetings. On this occasion however, no members of the public were in attendance.

Each report was then considered in the order listed on the agenda.

**1. WEST SUFFOLK HOUSING STRATEGY (Decisions Plan Reference: APR14/01)
*Cabinet Members: Cllrs Anne Gower and Rona Burt***

The Cabinets considered Report No CAB14/163 (previously circulated) which presented the West Suffolk Housing Strategy.

It was no longer a legal requirement for local authorities to have a Housing Strategy in place. However, it was recognised that a strategic overview was necessary to assess how both Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) delivered a range of housing and related assets to the community.

The West Suffolk Housing Strategy, attached as Appendix A to Report No CAB14/163, had been subject to extensive consultation across both authorities, which included scrutiny of the Strategy by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees at an informal joint meeting held on 23 July 2014. The document was subsequently amended, where appropriate, having taken comments received during the consultation into account.

Councillors Mrs Burt and Mrs Gower, Portfolio Holders with the responsibility for Housing, drew relevant issues to the attention of both Cabinets. Both Cabinets commended the document and supported the recommendation for the Strategy to be adopted by both full Councils on 23 September and 8 October 2014 respectively.

A detailed discussion was then held on the second recommendation contained in Section 2.1 of the report, which related to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' discussion on 23 July 2014 of the New Homes Bonus (NHB). During consideration of the draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy, the Committees had discussed proposed options in which to allocate the NHB. Members had felt that a proportion of the monies received from each new house built should go back into the community where the houses had been built. This discussion resulted in the Committees recommending to both Cabinets that they consider part of the NHB being allocated to community facilities and a report on the options for the use of the NHB being referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consideration.

Councillor Ray, SEBC Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance duly responded to the recommendation. He explained that the NHB received was not included in the revenue budget and had currently been placed in earmarked reserves, including the current year 2014/2015 allocation. In line with the budget report presented to both full Councils in February 2014, the NHB's use was being considered as part of delivering a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the delivery of the new Strategic Plan. Options and various strands of work were currently being considered that would, in turn, help to determine the future allocation of NHB reserve. This work was in progress and would feed into the 2015/2016 budget setting process with the final decision(s) being taken by both full Councils by February 2015. It was, therefore, not considered appropriate to make any new decisions in isolation on the NHB reserve. This view was not only supported by Councillor Edwards, FHDC Portfolio Holder for Resources, Governance and Performance but also all other Cabinet Members present.

A proposed response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' recommendation contained in 2.1 (2) from the Cabinets was tabled; however, it was considered that the Portfolio Holders for Resources [Governance] and Performance should reply directly in writing to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees with an appropriate response based on the discussion held above and to reiterate that no new decision was required.

2. WEST SUFFOLK JOINT TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY (Decisions Plan Reference: SEP14/02)

Cabinet Members: *Cllrs Sarah Stamp and Warwick Hirst*

The Cabinets considered Report No CAB14/164 (previously circulated) which presented the West Suffolk Tree Management Policy.

Councillor Hirst, FHDC Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Cabinets, including that the West Suffolk Tree Management Policy for both Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council would:

- (a) provide a clear standardised approach to the way in which both FHDC and SEBCs' trees and woodlands were managed in the future and the way in which the authorities communicated their plans to the local communities;
- (b) outline how current service specific issues/problems would be addressed; and
- (c) provide clarity around the Councils' responsibilities in maintaining its tree stock in a safe and appropriate manner.

Councillor Hirst commended the comprehensive detail of the document, a view not only supported Mrs Stamp, SEBC Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage, but also those of other Cabinet Members present.

On the conclusion of the informal joint discussions and following the vacating of SEBC's Cabinet to the Training Centre to convene its formal Extraordinary Cabinet meeting, the Leader formally opened the meeting of Forest Heath District Council's Cabinet at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber.

Forest Heath District Council

MINUTES of the **CABINET** held at the District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall on Tuesday 16 September 2014 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

J E Waters (Leader)	S J Edwards
N A Roman (Deputy Leader)	W Hirst
Mrs R E Burt	R J Millar

Councillors C Noble and T Simmons were also in attendance.

Also in attendance:

P Heard, Legal Services Manager
R Mann, Head of Resources and Performance
D Parker, Leisure, Culture and Communities Operations Manager
A Wilson, Director
S Turner, FHDC Cabinet Officer/Committee Administrator

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D W Bowman.

125. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Public participation had been included within the previous informal discussions and there had been no questions/statements from members of the public.

126. **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 July 2014 were unanimously accepted as an accurate record and signed by the Leader.

127. **MINUTES OF JOINT COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS AND OTHER GROUPS**

The minutes of the following Joint Committee and Steering Group were received:

West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group	23 June 2014
Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee	30 June 2014

There were no items the subject of formal report or proposition.

128. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

It was moved, duly seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the respective Joint Committee and Steering Group, be approved and that authority is hereby given for such action to be taken as necessary to give effect thereto.

129. **WEST SUFFOLK HOUSING STRATEGY (REPORT CAB14/163)** (Decisions Plan Reference: APR14/01)

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting with St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Cabinet (including the discussions on the separate New Homes Bonus issue), the Cabinet formally considered Report No CAB14/163.

Councillor R J Millar explained that there had been some confusion regarding the nature and purpose of this document. This Strategy was not a planning document and its aim was to enhance the supply and range of housing for residents.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RECOMMENDED:

That:-

1. The West Suffolk Housing Strategy, be adopted, as contained in Appendix A to Report No CAB14/163.

and it was

RESOLVED:

That:-

2. Having noted and discussed the recommendation of the FHDC and SEBC Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Portfolio Holders for Resources, Governance and Performance (FHDC) and for Resources and Performance (SEBC) are asked to jointly respond in writing to both of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, to confirm the position of both Cabinets concerning the allocation of the New Homes Bonus.

130. **WEST SUFFOLK JOINT TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY (REPORT NO CAB14/164)** (Decisions Plan Reference: SEP14/02)

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting with St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Cabinet, the Cabinet formally considered Report No CAB14/164.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the West Suffolk Tree Management Policy (as attached to Report No CAB14/164) be adopted.

131. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014 (REPORT NO CAB14/165)** (Decisions Plan Reference: SEP14/05)

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Governance and Performance presented this report which provided Members with an overview of the Treasury Management activities for the 2013/2014 financial year.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

132. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT (REPORT NO CAB14/166)** (Decisions Plan Reference: SEP14/06)

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Transport presented this report which explained that a resident had taken a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), where the complaint had been upheld under the category of maladministration and injustice and was recommending that the Council paid the Complainant £1,000 in compensation. The LGO's decision was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. The Council had accepted the findings and had awarded the £1,000 compensation.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Local Government Ombudsman's decision of maladministration and the level of compensated recommended, be noted.

133. **REVIEW OF THE DECISIONS PLAN (REPORT NO CAB14/167)**

The Cabinet was asked to review the Decisions Plan for the period September 2014 to May 2015.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Decisions Plan for the period September 2014 to May 2015, attached as an Appendix to Report No CAB14/167, be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.12 pm.

(Following the conclusion of the meeting, Councillor R J Millar referred to the recent death of former Councillor Mrs Maureen Hills and wished to record the appreciation of the work which she had undertaken whilst she had served on the Council.)