



Cabinet 30 July 2008

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 9 July 2008

(1) Concessionary Fares

- 1.1 At its meeting on 28 November 2007 the Committee identified that it wished to receive further information on the Concessionary Fares Scheme at a future meeting. To this end, the topic was added to this year's work programme, and in fact was scored as the topic with the highest priority. On 9 July 2008, the Committee welcomed Chris Brown from MCL Transport Consultants (MCL) to the meeting. MCL are the consultants who act on the Council's behalf in negotiating with the bus operators. Mr Brown presented an overview of the current national scheme, and also explained the Suffolk scheme, including how bus operators were reimbursed and the outlook for the future.
- 1.2 Members agreed that this overview had helped them to understand the scope, nature and funding of the scheme, and in particular found the explanation of the complicated way the bus companies were reimbursed very useful. The purpose of the discussion was to identify whether there was anything the Council could do to improve the situation whereby the funding of the scheme by Central Government had fallen below the cost of the scheme to the Council since 2007, currently showing a shortfall of approximately £280,000.
- 1.3 The Committee discussed actions which the Council had already taken regarding feeding back to Central Government on the funding gap. The Council had previously contacted the Local Government Association regarding the under-funding of the scheme, and had also lobbied the MP for Bury St Edmunds, who had raised the issue in Parliament. The Committee therefore felt that there would be little value in further lobbying at this stage. Central Government was aware of the funding issues, and until there were changes, the Council should be prepared, by reflecting the under-funding in forward budgets.

(2) Annual Report from Councillor Beckwith, the Council's Representative on the Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Outcomes of the Past Year

- 2.1 As this Council's representative on the above joint scrutiny committee, Councillor Beckwith presented to Members a selection of the decisions and outcomes of the Committee over the previous year. Members discussed some of the decisions which were particularly relevant to the west of the county, and Councillor Beckwith explained the change from the old star rating system to "healthchecks", the benefits to the Suffolk Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust of moving to

Foundation Trust Status, and his appointment as an observer on the West Suffolk Hospital NHS Board, which he found very worthwhile.

2.2 Additionally, the St Edmundsbury Health Profile for 2008 was presented, and the Committee noted that, whilst the health of the people of St Edmundsbury was generally significantly better than the average for England, the profile identified obesity as the main health issue in the Borough. Councillor Thorndyke reminded Members that this profile provided a snapshot of the Borough, and should be considered alongside other more detailed information, such as the OCSI Index of Multiple Deprivation data, which told a less positive story about some of the more deprived wards of the Borough.

2.3 As a key priority of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was "getting people active", and obesity was also an Local Area Agreement issue for this region, Councillor Beckwith suggested that obesity could be a focus for the Committee's next update from the LSP which was due in September.

(3) Presentation from Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Ray, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development

3.1 Further to requests from the Committee that it receive periodic presentations from Portfolio Holders and Directors on forthcoming plans and priorities, Councillor Ray, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development, attended the meeting and presented his Portfolio's current priorities to the Committee.

3.2 Councillor Ray then took the Committee's questions on a number of issues, with the Committee particularly emphasising consultation, the Council's website and Local Government Reorganisation.

3.3 The Committee found Councillor Ray's attendance at the meeting to be most beneficial, allowing a wide range of issues to be discussed, and looked forward to similar presentations from other Portfolio Holders at future meetings.

(4) Cabinet Forward Plan July to October 2008 and Committee's Work Programme

4.1 The Committee examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period July to October 2008, but did not ask for any further information or involvement on this occasion. Turning to its own Work Programme, the Committee noted the current position and carried out a short scoping exercise on the topics expected at the Committee's next meeting on 3 September 2008.

(5) Corporate Asset Management Plan and Capital Management Strategy

5.1 Whilst considering the Annual Cabinet Report at its last meeting, the Committee requested the opportunity to discuss Asset Management. As the Policy Development Committee had recently recommended adoption of an Asset Management Plan and Capital Management Strategy for 2008-2025, that document was presented to the Committee to provide some background for the discussion.

- 5.2 As a piece of scrutiny, the Committee wished to assess the effectiveness of the Council's asset management. A wide ranging discussion ensued, during which the Committee covered a number of issues including the use of non-operational buildings, the running costs of the Council's property portfolio, the disposals programme (moving into private session where exempt issues were discussed), and the impact of Local Government Reorganisation.
- 5.3 The Committee concluded that asset management at St Edmundsbury was given the prominence it required, and was both proactive and effective, with accurate information on all properties, sufficient staff capacity and regular, timely reviews.

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