



Cabinet

17 September 2008

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 3 September 2008

At this meeting the Committee also considered the Key Action Areas which had been developed following the 2007 Staff Survey, and a separate report appears on this agenda as Cabinet Report Z228.

1. Presentation from NHS Suffolk

- 1.1 When setting its work programme for this year the Committee decided to invite representatives of NHS Suffolk to attend a meeting and discuss the provision of services in the west of Suffolk. At the same time, an offer of such a visit had actually been received from the Chairman of the Trust, and this took place at this meeting of the Committee, with the attendance of the Trust's Chairman and Deputy Chief Executive.
- 1.2 The session commenced with a presentation from Julian Herbert, the Trust's Deputy Chief Executive, who outlined the key responsibilities of the Trust, how its accountability worked, current developments, and topical local and national issues. Mr Herbert was pleased to report that the financial deficit of 2 to 3 years ago had now been repaid, enabling the Trust to focus on delivery of services. He outlined how the Trust's resources were allocated, and then invited questions from the Committee.
- 1.3 The Committee's questions focused mainly on local issues, but also on the independence, funding and resources of the Trust, how it ensured it was getting value for money, and how it was scrutinised. Local healthcare questions centred on the provision of dental services, mental healthcare and the GP-led health clinic in Haverhill.
- 1.4 The Committee found this update from the Trust very useful, and greater detail on the discussion which took place will be set out in the Committee's minutes.

2. Annual Report on the Impact of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy

- 2.1 Each September the Committee receives an Annual Report on the work of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP), followed by a six month update at its March meeting. At its July 2008 meeting, following a suggestion from the Committee's representative on the Joint Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Committee had requested that the next Annual Report should focus on health issues. To this end, the report focused on projects being run across the LSP's area to tackle those problems.

- 2.2 As well as an illustrated appendix to the report (Report Z188) detailing several of the projects being run by the Partnership, four partners attended the meeting and verbally updated members on four of the projects shown. The speakers focused on *"Think Smart, Drink Smart"*, the *"Alcohol Misuse Screening and Referral Service"*, *"the Good Neighbour Schemes"*, and *"Getting West Suffolk Active"*.
- 2.3 The Committee was very impressed, not just with the number of projects running under the WSLSP, but in particular the very real outcomes from the projects which were outlined, and which without the partnership would either not have been run, or may not have achieved the same level of benefits. Members looked forward to their March update, when the results of bids to the Partnership Fund would be presented to the Committee, together with details of new projects.

3. Supporting People

- 3.1 The Committee was pleased to welcome Clare Smith, Head of Supporting People for Suffolk County Council, to the meeting. Ms Smith outlined to the Committee the role of the Supporting People Programme in Suffolk, and in St Edmundsbury, in helping vulnerable people to live independently in the community.
- 3.2 Supporting People is a key service in delivering one of the key priorities of the Borough, *"to improve the safety and well-being of the community"*, and is delivered in partnership with some of the Council's key partners. Ms Smith provided Members with information about the Supporting People Programme, and its outcomes for the residents of St Edmundsbury, in particular outlining three very moving case studies.
- 3.3 The Partnership covers a wide range of client groups, and the Committee asked how the Partnership managed to engage and consult with them all. It also asked about the Partnership's funding, which voluntary groups it was in touch with, and its support for people with learning difficulties. A more detailed account of the debate will be set out in the Committee's minutes. As the first district level council which had chosen to scrutinise the Supporting People Programme, the Committee hoped that Ms Smith had found its comments and suggestions useful.

4. Cabinet Forward Plan: September to December 2008 and Committee's Work Programme

- 4.1 The Committee examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period September to December 2008, but did not ask for any further information or involvement on this occasion.
- 4.2 Turning to its own Work Programme, the Committee noted the current position and carried out a short scoping exercise on the topics expected at its next meeting on 26 November 2008.

5. Local Government Review (LGR) and the Scrutiny Work Programmes

- 5.1 Early in 2008 the annual process for setting the forward scrutiny work programmes had led to the Policy Development and Overview and Scrutiny Committees setting their usual extensive work programmes to cover the 2008/2009 civic year. Subsequently, the Boundary Commission had published draft proposals for unitary local government in Suffolk, and a number of officers from across the authority were now working on a response to the proposals, which needed to be prioritised. This was having a major effect on workloads, and the Committee considered a report which set out options for alleviating this.
- 5.2 One option was to increase capacity, and officers would seek external and internal assistance with workloads during the LGR period. A second option was to reduce the current workload by rescheduling work, and the Committee was asked to consider whether any of its planned work programme for 2008/2009 could potentially be deferred for consideration under the next work programme.
- 5.3 The Committee was clear that there were elements of workload which could not be deferred, because the Council needed to carry on providing excellent services for its residents alongside preparations for LGR. However, some of the "optional" value-added work could potentially be re-scheduled. Also, given that St Edmundsbury Borough Council may not exist as an authority in less than two years' time, it may be inappropriate to spend time reviewing policies or issues which would become functions of a new authority.
- 5.4 The Committee analysed its work programme and decided that the bulk of the work was still required, or ideally should remain because of its value to the community. The Committee did, however, agree that three reviews could be deferred for consideration under the next work programme: *"Levels of Sporting Activity"*, *"Evening Economy Review Phase Two"* and *"Town Centre Management"*. Two further reviews would be re-focussed. The Arts, Festivals and Entertainment review would now focus only on the Bury Festival, with the remainder of the review being deferred. The Citizens Advice Bureaux Review would remain, but with the majority of the information coming from the Bureaux themselves, alongside a report giving the Council's point of view.

Contacts:

Mark Ereira-Guyer, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, (01284-703526)

Stefan Oliver, Vice Chairman of the Committee (Chairman at this meeting),
(01284- 706172)

Adriana Stapleton, Scrutiny Manager, (01284-757613)