



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Z229

Cabinet

17 September 2008

Report from the Policy Development Committee: 10 September 2008

At this meeting the Committee also considered the following issues:

- (a) National Fraud Initiative (NFI) Strategy 2008;
- (b) Discretionary Rate Relief for Charitable and Non-Profit Making Organisations;
- (c) Delivering a Sustainable Budget 2009/10;
- (d) The Service Plan and Budget Development Process; and
- (e) Service Delivery Review Panel – Review of Terms of Reference.

Separate reports for these items appear on this Cabinet agenda.

(1) Housing Strategy

- 1.1 As the Council's existing Housing Strategy requires updating, the Committee considered a draft Housing Strategy for St Edmundsbury for 2008-2013. The Committee discussed the main challenges for the 5 years of the Strategy, which would be a live document continually updated to meet changing needs, including affordable housing, meeting the needs of vulnerable people and providing good quality, secure and healthy housing.
- 1.2 Members questioned officers on a number of areas of the draft Strategy, including the standard of private rented accommodation, the style of affordable housing on new developments, promoting housing issues and the success of Choice Based Lettings. The draft Strategy is currently out for consultation with a wide range of stakeholders until 1 October 2008, and the final Strategy will be considered by the Committee on 15 October 2008 prior to recommendation to Cabinet for adoption.

(2) Homelessness Strategy

- 2.1 Alongside the Housing Strategy, the Council's Homelessness Strategy also requires updating, and a draft Strategy for 2008-2013 was considered by the Committee. The aim of the Strategy is to ensure that there is adequate provision within the area, and must be led by housing need. A full review of homelessness within St Edmundsbury had taken place, and the new Strategy is currently out for consultation until 1 October 2008.

- 2.2 A range of statistics was presented to Members, such as the number of applicants housed, homelessness prevention and reasons for homelessness, and these sparked a wide ranging debate. Members asked officers for more detail on the supported lodging scheme, involvement of the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the difference in targets between the Borough and those shown in the Sub Regional Housing Strategy. The final Strategy, amended following consultation, will be presented to the Committee on 15 October, alongside the Housing Strategy and Sub Regional Housing Strategy, for recommendation to Cabinet for adoption.

(3) Cabinet Forward Plan/Work Programme

- 3.1 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, although comment was made that the format of the Plan did not make best use of space and meant the Plan often ran to well over 10 pages.
- 3.2 Turning to its own Work Programme, the Committee noted the current position and the topics expected at its next meeting on 15 October 2008.

(4) Local Government Review and the Scrutiny Work Programmes

- 4.1 The Committee carried out the same exercise as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which is detailed in Report Z227 on this Cabinet agenda, in that, due to the major effect on the workloads of officers needing to respond to the Local Government Review proposals, the Committee had been asked to consider whether any of its planned work programme for 2008/2009 could potentially be deferred for consideration under the next work programme.
- 4.2 The Committee analysed its work programme and, as had been the case with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, saw continuing value in the majority of the work planned for 2008/2009. However, the Committee agreed that four reviews could be deferred for consideration under the next work programme, "Recycling elements of the Climate Change Bill", "Update on Environmental Enforcement", "Planning Enforcement Policies" and "Parish Council Support Fund". As for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this will not result in fewer meetings, as both Committees still retained the bulk of their work programmes, but this slight reduction will assist officers to pay the necessary attention to Local Government Review over the next few months.

(5) Cemeteries Service Review: Update

- 5.1 Finally on this agenda, the Committee received an update on the Cemeteries Service Review, which was currently being run with the involvement of a sub-group of members from the Committee. A consultation network had been established, and liaison meetings held. The staffing structure of the service had been reviewed, new staff appointed, and administrative arrangements had also been reviewed to ensure the service was operated as efficiently as possible.

- 5.2 The next job of the councillor group would be to assist in the development of a Cemeteries Strategy to assist in shaping the future direction of the service and address key operational and service issues. It is intended to bring this Strategy to the Policy Development Committee on 14 January 2009, subject to consultation, which is key to this work, being completed, for recommendation on to Cabinet.

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