



Cabinet 3 December 2008

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2008

At this meeting the Committee also considered a report on the Bury St Edmunds Festival, and a separate report appears on this Cabinet agenda as Report Z383. At the meeting, a number of recommendations to Cabinet (and also to the Grant Panel prior to their consideration by the Cabinet) arose from some of the other reports considered, and these are set out in this report.

(1) Update on Activities for Young People

- 1.1 The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the various activities, events and projects which had been delivered for young people over the past twelve months. It also provided an evaluation of the rural youth work project, *'Wos Up'*, which was a new project that had begun this year in place of the mobile skate park sessions held previously.
- 1.2 Three young people from the Council's Youth Forum addressed the Committee, in conjunction with a presentation from the Council's Youth and Community Development Officer. A very useful discussion followed between the young people and the Committee, whereby the young people asked why Suffolk County Council's Information and Support Centre for Young People, *'No. 46'* located in Bury St Edmunds had such restricted opening hours, and was usually closing just when they wanted to use the facility. Also, after hearing the feedback on the *'Wos Up'* project, the Committee discussed the feasibility of extending similar activities in the urban areas. It suggested that pilot projects could be developed in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill.
- 1.3 The Committee **RECOMMENDS that:-**
 - (1) **subject to the identification of funding, consideration be given to piloting activities similar to the rural youth project *'Wos Up'* to areas in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill; and**
 - (2) **Suffolk County Council be asked to consider the feasibility of extending or amending the opening hours of its Information and Support Centre for Young People, *'No. 46'* to better meet the needs of the young people using this facility.**

(2) Review of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux in St Edmundsbury

- 2.1 When setting its Work Programme for the current year, the Committee requested a presentation from the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CABs) in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill, with particular focus on their activities, funding issues and the future of the service. To this end, the managers of the two Bureaux attended the meeting and made a presentation to Members. A user of the service also addressed the Committee, providing a case study example of the kind of work carried out by the CABs.
- 2.2 The discussion primarily concentrated on the planned redistribution of Suffolk County Council's grant to CABs across Suffolk, which would see a phased reduction over four years to the St Edmundsbury Bureaux, amounting to a 43% reduction overall. The managers explained measures they were planning to take in order to be able to cope with the reduction, including joint working, shared services and specialisation. However, they advised that due to the current financial situation the call on the service had increased, for example, the number of new clients seen by the Haverhill Bureau in the first six months of the present year had increased by 35%. The reduction in grant was therefore, going to be very difficult to manage.
- 2.3 The Committee has made the following recommendations in connection with the levels of grant funding provided by the Borough Council to the Citizens' Advice Bureaux for consideration at the next meeting of the Grant Panel on 16 December 2008. That:-
- (1) at the very least, the current grant levels provided by the Borough Council to the Citizens' Advice Bureaux be maintained, or even revised to take into account the increased workloads caused by the current difficult economic situation; and
 - (2) the Council be requested to consider the overall level of grant, bearing in mind the potential cost of providing the essential services currently provided by the Bureaux.

Following consideration by the Grant Panel, recommendations arising from the Panel will be considered by the Cabinet on 21 January 2009. The Committee also makes the following recommendations directly to Cabinet.

- 2.4 The Committee **RECOMMENDS that:-**
- (1) the Borough Council explores potential areas for closer working between the Borough Council and the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, including potential areas for scrutiny which may arise out of their workloads;**
 - (2) the Borough Council works closely with the Bureaux to provide information to the Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards Officer for inclusion in his planned report to the County Public Protection Scrutiny Committee, outlining the interim effects of the funding changes on the St Edmundsbury Bureaux; and**

(3) **it be suggested to Suffolk County Council that it may also wish to consider the overall levels of grant provided to Citizens' Advice Bureaux, bearing in mind the potential cost of providing the essential services currently provided by the Bureaux.**

(3) **Review of the Transfer of Leisure Management to Abbeycroft Leisure Trust**

3.1 Cabinet will recall the wide-ranging recommendations which arose from the Committee's post-implementation scrutiny review of the transfer of the Council's leisure management to Abbeycroft Leisure Trust (Abbeycroft), which were presented to Cabinet in March 2007. At its last meeting the Committee welcomed Warren Smyth, the Chief Executive of Abbeycroft to the meeting, and received a presentation on a range of improvement measures carried out by the Trust since the review.

3.2 Because of the commercially sensitive nature of some of the issues discussed, the discussion was taken in private session. Mr Smyth covered each of the recommendations from the original review in turn, advising Members where improvements had been made. Following the presentation, Members questioned Mr Smyth on plans for the future, and also the potential impact of local government reorganisation on the Trust. During the discussion, it transpired that the issue of perception of 'council'-run leisure centres was a problem, and a barrier to take-up of services. It was acknowledged that this was not helped by the uninviting external appearance of the Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre.

3.3 The Committee therefore, **RECOMMENDS that the Borough Council explores with Abbeycroft Leisure the possibility of making the external appearance of Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre more attractive, by low cost means such as improved signage, in order to enhance the public perception of the Centre.**

3.4 The Committee concluded that the transfer had been a great success, and in particular had 'released' the leisure centres to be able to be more active within the Community. Members acknowledged the excellent work carried out by the Trust since the original review, and felt that all the original recommendations had been addressed.

(4) **Follow-up Report on the Ongoing Review of Section 106 Matters in St Edmundsbury**

4.1 Following a request from the Committee for an update on the internal review of Section 106 procedures, the Committee was advised that good progress had been made in moving forward the policies of the Council in relation to Section 106 and infrastructure needs. Importantly, a new post had been agreed, anticipated to be in place in the new year, which would provide additional capacity for this important work area.

(5) Street Engineering in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill, and Presentation from Portfolio Holder

- 5.1 When setting its Work Programme for 2008/2009 the Committee requested a presentation on works which had been carried out over the previous 12 months. In addition, further to the request of the Committee that it receive periodic presentations from Portfolio Holders, Members were pleased to welcome Councillor Terry Clements, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, to the meeting.
- 5.2 Councillors Clements and the Council's Engineer took Members through both recently completed and upcoming schemes in the areas of highways maintenance, traffic management and capital works. The status of current major developments was also discussed. The Committee found the presentation very interesting, and requested that a further update be brought to the Committee in a year's time.

(6) Cabinet Forward Plan: December 2008 to March 2009/Work Programme

- 6.1 The Committee examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period December 2008 to March 2009, however, no further information or involvement was required on this occasion.
- 6.2 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 19 January 2009. In addition, following Suffolk County Council's scrutiny of the Suffolk Flood Policy Review, its Scrutiny Management Board had agreed that scrutiny of flood risk and flooding was a priority, and felt that this was scrutiny which was best undertaken jointly with districts and boroughs, since it was of interest to most local authorities in Suffolk. To this end, the Board was seeking to establish a joint scrutiny working party, and two Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were requested to sit on the working party. The Committee appointed Councillor Mrs Levack, but considered that the second representative should be a Member from Haverhill, and the Haverhill Members of the Committee would be contacted in this regard.
- 6.3 Under the Work Programme, and in accordance with the terms of the Constitution, the Committee also considered a request from the Chairman for an addition to the Work Programme. This concerned the aspirations of West Suffolk Hospital to create a carbon neutral 'eco friendly' hospital for the Borough. The Chairman wished to discuss with the Hospital Trust, together with the NHS Sustainable Development Unit, how this would lead to improved services.
- 6.4 Whilst having regard to the fact that health scrutiny was usually undertaken by Suffolk County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Committee considered that this issue could make positive contributions to the wellbeing of local residents, and asked that a member/officer sub-group should be appointed to investigate the issue with partners and report back to the full Committee. Councillors Ereira-Guyer and Chappell were appointed to the sub-group, and the Scrutiny Manager was authorised to explore with the wider Committee the appointment of further Members.

Contacts:-

Mark Ereira-Guyer, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Telephone: (01284-703526)
Stefan Oliver, Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Telephone: (01284-706172)
Adriana Stapleton, Scrutiny Manager
Telephone: (01284-757613), or email: adriana.stapleton@stedsbc.gov.uk

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