



Cabinet

29 April 2009

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 22 April 2009

1. **Presentation from Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White, Portfolio Holder for Community**
- 1.1 When setting the Scrutiny Improvement Plan for 2008/2010 the Committee requested periodic presentations from Portfolio Holders. At the last meeting Members were pleased to welcome Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White to the meeting, to give the fourth of these presentations, on her Community Portfolio.
- 1.2 Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White, supported by the Corporate Director for Community and Head of Environmental Health and Housing, took Members through a presentation which touched on many of the areas of her Portfolio, but went into greater detail on four specific areas which Members of the Committee had requested information on, as follows:-
 - (a) an overview of the current issues affecting the Licensing Service was discussed, in particular the deregulation of Hackney Carriages and variations to the Licensing Act 2003;
 - (b) Members questioned Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White in detail on the current issues and legislation affecting Gypsies and Travellers, and in particular the decision to extend the site at Depden;
 - (c) the work of the Environmental Health and Housing Section was covered, with particular emphasis on the Homes Assistance Policy, Decent Homes and fuel poverty. Both the Domestic and Pollution and the Commercial and Food areas of the Service were covered, and Members were shown some photographs illustrating some successful prosecutions, including a Health and Safety matter, a market trader and a fish shop, together with some domestic premises officially described as *'filthy and verminous'*; and
 - (d) the final area to be covered was the work of the Community Development Unit, and Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White outlined a number of initiatives being worked on by this team, including schemes to reduce anti-social behaviour and substance misuse; the team's work in the community to develop health and wellbeing; issues around diversity and community cohesion; and the extensive youth development programme.
- 1.3 Members questioned Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White throughout the presentation on all the areas covered, and made suggestions on a number of areas. The

Committee reiterated how helpful it found these presentations from Portfolio Holders, and looked forward to the remaining Cabinet Members presenting their portfolios to the Committee under its 2009/2010 Work Programme.

2. Cabinet Forward Plan: April to July 2009 and Work Programme

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan of key decisions for the period April to July 2009 but did not ask for any additional information on this occasion.
- 2.2 Turning to its own work programme, the Committee noted that this meeting marked the completion of the Committee's 2008/2009 work programme. The process of setting the Committee's work programme for 2009/2010 was nearing completion, and a draft work programme had been produced following analysis of potential new work suggested by both Members and officers, which will be adopted at the Committee's first meeting in the new civic year in June 2009.

3. Rural Action Plan Monitoring Report

- 3.1 St Edmundsbury's three-year Rural Action Plan, which covers the period from March 2008 to February 2011, was approved through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 March 2008. In addition to regular monitoring by officers throughout the year, it was agreed that the development of the Plan would be monitored on an annual basis by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to this end the first annual monitoring report was considered at the last meeting of the Committee.
- 3.2 The Assistant Economic Development Officer provided an update on all the actions in the Action Plan, and also provided a presentation illustrating in more detail a number of the 35 projects in the Plan, which were intended to create quieter and safer village roads; improve community accessibility; maintain and enhance the quality of the environment; or promote stronger and sustainable rural communities.
- 3.3 Members discussed a number of the actions in the Plan and related issues, including bus routes and cycle routes, and concluded that good progress had been made. Members approved a number of minor amendments to the Plan, and will receive the second annual update in April 2010.

4. Update on the Scrutiny Improvement Plan

- 4.1 Since the introduction of scrutiny in 2002, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has carried out regular analysis of the scrutiny function of the Council via a questionnaire to all Members and senior officers. At the request of the Committee, this analysis is now undertaken every two years.
- 4.2 In Spring 2008, the Committee used the Centre for Public Scrutiny's self evaluation framework to investigate the effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny function, and to identify areas and means for improvement. This exercise resulted in a 12 action Scrutiny Improvement Plan for implementation between 2008 and 2010, and at its last meeting the Committee received a mid term update on progress with those actions.

- 4.3 Good progress had been made on some items, for example the very successful presentations from Portfolio Holders, a training event held in November 2008 tailored around scrutiny Members' needs, and the number of external speakers attending meetings. Work was still required to progress other actions, for example holding meetings in venues other than the Council's offices (where appropriate), and, given the number of officer/Member working groups being set up by the Committees, the potential for Chairmen of these review working groups to report back to the main Committees in place of officers.
- 4.4 The end-term update will be provided to the Committee in January 2010, and in Spring 2010 a further full consultation exercise will take place to refresh the Action Plan for 2010/2012.

5. Councillor Call for Action

- 5.1 Members will be aware that the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) introduced under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 came into force from 1 April 2009, and that the necessary amendments to the Constitution and protocol for use of CCfA were adopted by full Council on 31 March 2009.
- 5.2 Information on CCfA has already been circulated to all Members, and all Members were also invited to attend a presentation at the meeting of the Committee held on 22 April 2009 where Councillors were taken through how the protocol will work in practice, and what it will mean for Members.
- 5.3 The presentation covered the purpose of CCfA, and explained that it was not intended as a cure-all for all problems, but rather another way for the Council to resolve issues when all other methods of resolution have been exhausted. The limitations of CCfA were covered, as well as the detail of the process to be followed by Members before submission of a CCfA, and what would happen during consideration of the issue at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.4 The protocol for CCfA, which explains the whole process in detail and includes guidance notes, a helpful flowchart and a form for Members to use to submit an issue for consideration, will be put on the Council's website and is also available from the Scrutiny Manager, who can also be contacted with any queries.

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