



## **Cabinet**

### **2 December 2009**

#### **Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 18 November 2009**

##### **1. Citizens Advice Bureaux in St Edmundsbury: Update**

- 1.1 In November 2008, following changes to the distribution of funding to Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) by Suffolk County Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the impact of those changes on the two bureaux in St Edmundsbury. A further update on how the CABs were balancing the increased demand on their services with changes in County Council funding was requested in one year's time, and that update was considered at this Committee meeting.
- 1.2 The Committee received a presentation from the manager of the Bury St Edmunds bureau which covered such issues as the level of use of their services over the past year, strategies they had for dealing with the reduction in core funding, and new sources of funding being pursued, as well as the potential for closer working amongst bureaux. This was followed by a question and answer session where discussion was held on issues including volunteer numbers, adapting to new funding structures and scope to share premises.

##### **2. Havebury Housing Partnership**

- 2.1 As part of its work programme setting process earlier this year the Committee opted to receive a presentation on the work of the Havebury Housing Partnership, and to this end the Partnership's Chief Executive, Steve Cook, attended the meeting.
- 2.2 A presentation was made covering areas including an overview of the business carried out by the Partnership, how the Partnership was addressing housing need and working in communities, and Havebury's plans for the future.
- 2.3 A discussion followed the presentation covering such issues as the percentage of new housing constructed in rural areas, Havebury's contribution to Housing Needs Surveys, refurbishment of properties, the Partnership's investment in the community, and the use of heat pumps in homes with no access to gas.

##### **3. Councillor Call for Action Submission: Councillor David Nettleton Road Safety in Bell Meadow, Bury St Edmunds**

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the recently adopted Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) Protocol in the Council's Constitution, Councillor Nettleton submitted the above CCfA to the Committee.

- 3.2 The information provided to the Committee by Councillor Nettleton was that this CCfA concerned the potential danger of vehicles parking on a bend in the road in Bell Meadow, Bury St Edmunds, a cul-de-sac off Fornham Road. The area of concern was near the junction with Fornham Road, and most vehicles had to pass this point, which was a blind bend. Councillor Nettleton provided photographs to illustrate his points, as well as copies of correspondence as evidence that other routes had been followed to resolve the issue. Finally, as required by the CCfA Protocol, Councillor Nettleton suggested a solution to the issue, which would be to camber the bend to improve visibility and reduce the danger of vehicle collision. Additionally, there was a small grass verge situated at the bend which could be removed as part of this road safety improvement plan, although a street lamp would need to be re-sited.
- 3.3 The Council's officers also provided information to the Committee, in particular stating that officers had visited Bell Meadow on numerous occasions at all times of day, and on only two of those visits had any vehicle been parked in Bell Meadow other than on a drive. Given the rarity of vehicles being parked in Bell Meadow, officers felt the traffic hazard presented by vehicles was not high. Various options were put forward by officers, with the option of doing nothing being recommended.
- 3.4 The Committee's responsibility at this point was to decide whether it wished to take this matter further, to a CCfA hearing. The main criterion supporting this decision was whether the Committee, in holding a hearing, had the potential to produce recommendations which could realistically be implemented and lead to improvements. Several members of the Committee had visited Bell Meadow over the past few days, and none had seen any problem with regard to parking in this road. Members questioned Councillor Nettleton and the Council's officers on a number of areas, including the design of the posts on the grass verge mentioned in Councillor Nettleton's submission, and the phrasing of the letter which was attached to Councillor Nettleton's submission as evidence.
- 3.5 After considering all the evidence, Members concluded that there was not a serious enough problem in Bell Meadow for there to be a need to investigate highways improvements. The Committee therefore resolved not to take the matter forward to a hearing. Members did, however, ask officers to speak to residents of Bell Meadow to try to negotiate a solution to parking in the road, and in particular on the bend in question.

#### **4. Update on Councillor Call for Action: Stanton Grundle Flooding Remedial Action**

- 4.1 Cabinet will recall the recommendations brought to its 29 July 2009 meeting arising from the above Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) hearing which took place on 8 July 2009. The call-in period for implementation of these recommendations ended on Monday 10 August 2009, and on 9 September 2009 the Committee received an update from officers on progress which had been made in the intervening four weeks. A further update was presented to the Committee's last meeting on 18 November 2009.
- 4.2 Substantial clearance of debris from the lower part of the Grundle had been undertaken in September, and photographs were circulated.

- 4.3 In August the Government had announced additional funding for local authorities to tackle problems of surface water flooding, and details became available in mid September. The bid process for ordinary watercourses such as the Grundle was complex, and would only provide a maximum of 45% of the cost of any scheme. The bid process for 2011/2012 would commence in the New Year, and officers were discussing with Suffolk County Council and the Environment Agency the likelihood of success of such a bid for the Grundle.
- 4.4 At this stage it was anticipated that the necessary studies and works to the Grundle would cost between £70,000 and £80,000. A maximum grant of 45% would therefore still leave funding of over £40,000 to be found by St Edmundsbury and Suffolk County Council.
- 4.5 Members asked whether there had been any progress in designing a solution to the flooding issue, and were advised that this could not be commenced until the scale of the problem was quantified through a catchment assessment, which would cost between £8,000 to £10,000, hence the need for a funding application. The Committee requested a further update at a future meeting, when there was progress to report.

## **5. Cabinet Forward Plan/Work Programme**

- 5.1 The Committee examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period November 2009 to February 2010, and asked questions on two items, but did not request any further involvement on this occasion.
- 5.2 Turning to its own Work Programme, the Committee carried out a short scoping exercise of the items expected at its next meeting 18 January 2010.
- 5.3 Two other issues were considered under this item. Firstly, an invitation had been received from Suffolk County Council's Children, Schools and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a representative from this Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take part in a joint investigation on education attainment. As the meeting was now unlikely to be held until April 2010, Members asked that consideration of this invitation be deferred to the January 2010 meeting of the Committee.
- 5.4 Finally, the Committee discussed a proposal from the County Council on a way forward across Suffolk for the scrutiny of crime and disorder issues, which was aimed at preventing duplication, and concluded that this proposal did not conflict in any way with the Committee's own resolutions with regard to scrutiny of crime and disorder issues which had been agreed at its September meeting.

## **6. Environmental Enforcement**

- 6.1 In November 2007, following a wider review of the Council's Enforcement Policy in March 2007, the Policy Development Committee recommended opportunities to help the Council enforce against low level environmental crimes such as littering and dog fouling. At its last meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the progress made since these new actions to enforce against environmental crimes had been taken, and considered the activities which had been conducted in order to raise awareness of these issues.

- 6.2 In particular, in May 2007 training was organised for 60 staff to provide knowledge of new legislation, and to give them the confidence to approach the public to question when an environmental crime had been committed. In most cases it had been found that offenders did what was required to remove the offence, thus avoiding the need for enforcement action to be taken.
- 6.3 A number of actions and campaigns had been undertaken to raise awareness of the impact of low level environmental crime, including the "No Excuses" litter campaign and the purchase of CCTV cameras to provide covert surveillance of an area where environmental crimes were common.
- 6.4 The Committee held a wide ranging discussion on the issues covered in the report, including enforcement activity, use of CCTV, the new "Playing Your Part" reporting process, and identification of fly tipping hotspots, and concluded that the Council had carried out a range of activities, and that these had had a positive impact on the amount of low level environmental crime being committed.

## **7. West Suffolk Waste and Street Scene Joint Committee**

- 7.1 St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council have worked in partnership for many years, delivering a number of joint projects, and on 19 March 2008 a formal Joint Committee was established to oversee the delivery of waste and street scene services in West Suffolk.
- 7.2 The Committee considered a report which provided information on the development of the Partnership, and the progress of the various activities and initiatives that had been undertaken.
- 7.3 Members questioned officers on a number of areas, including the value for money of the Service Level Agreement for vehicle maintenance, the new joint management structure, site upgrades and the sweeping up of leaves.
- 7.4 The Committee concluded that the Partnership was working effectively. An update on the work of the Partnership and current priorities will be circulated on an annual basis to the Committee.

## **8. Economic Assessment**

- 8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development Committee are working together this year on a combined economic assessment and action plan, which will together guide the Council's economic activities for the next few years. The Committee considered an economic assessment which looked at the current economic state of St Edmundsbury.
- 8.2 The Committee was asked to endorse the assessment as a basis for drawing up an economic action plan. This would be the responsibility of the Policy Development Committee, and would put forward proposals for what the Council should be doing to promote the economic prosperity of St Edmundsbury.
- 8.3 Members discussed the main findings of the assessment, and a wide ranging discussion was held on several aspects of the assessment, including population statistics, affordable housing and land availability, deprivation, and the distribution

of the labour market, with particular emphasis on the use of contracted labour in agricultural work. The Committee endorsed the economic assessment as a basis for the Policy Development Committee's work in drawing up an economic action plan. This plan will be brought to the Policy Development Committee at its meeting on 13 January 2010, and following a consultation period the final plan will be presented for approval at the Policy Development Committee's 10 March 2010 meeting, and to Cabinet on 17 March 2010.

## **9. Street Engineering in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill**

- 9.1 In November 2008 the Committee received a presentation which informed Members of both recently completed and upcoming schemes in the areas of highways maintenance, traffic management and capital works, and the status of current major developments. Following that presentation the Committee requested that a further update be brought to the Committee in a year's time, and that update was presented at the Committee's last meeting.
- 9.2 The Council's Engineer and the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning initially reminded Members of the Council's duties and responsibilities which were undertaken on behalf of the County Council. They then took Members through recently completed and ongoing works in the areas of highways maintenance, traffic management, new developments and capital works, plus car parking and environmental enhancement works.

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