



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# B411

## **Cabinet**

### **19 January 2011**

#### **Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 5 January 2011**

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

- 1.1 The Committee examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period January to April 2011, but did not request any involvement at this time.
- 1.2 Turning to its own work programme, the Committee considered the current position of the 2010/2011 work programme, including an early indication of the topics expected at the Committee's next meeting on 2 March 2011, which were discussed by Members in a short scoping exercise.

##### **2. Provision of Fixed Play Facilities in the Borough**

- 2.1 When setting its work programme for 2010/2011 the Committee requested that an investigation be made into the alleged inequality between the Council's funding of urban and rural fixed play facilities. A report was considered by the Committee which examined the way in which the Council funded fixed play areas in both sites it owned, and those provided on land owned by some parish councils.
- 2.2 The Council currently maintained 49 Borough-owned play areas, and also inspected and provided advice to parish councils on a further 38 parish-owned play areas. A breakdown of expenditure on all these activities was provided. It was estimated that if the Borough were to take on the maintenance of the parish-owned play areas, the estimated budget needed to enable this would require a growth bid of an additional £38,453 per annum.
- 2.3 There was no statutory requirement on either the Borough or parish councils to provide play facilities, and the distribution of these across the Borough was largely a historical situation. The Borough had, through its Play Strategy, been prioritising its spend on new play facilities in areas identified as having a high population of children and a deficiency in provision.
- 2.4 The Council was planning to carry out a major asset management review of leisure facilities during 2011, to include play areas, and officers recommended that it may be appropriate to incorporate any recommendations about the funding or ownership of play facilities from the Committee into that process.

- 2.5 A wide ranging discussion took place on a number of issues including developer contributions towards play equipment, and the Committee decided that the best way forward was through a Member/officer task and finish group, and Councillors Beckwith, Marks, Mrs Rushbrook and Thorndyke were appointed to work with officers to investigate the issue and make recommendations back to the Committee.

### **3. Tree and Woodland Strategy Update**

- 3.1 The Council adopted a Tree and Woodland Strategy in December 2009. On 8 September 2010 the Committee asked for the procedures for planning and budgeting landscaping works to be reported to Members. A report was, therefore, considered at this meeting which provided an update on the implementation of the Strategy, and clarity on how tree work was prioritised by the Council's Tree Officers.
- 3.2 Members were advised that the management of the Council's tree stock was performed in a clear and transparent manner, with programmed inspections and maintenance; inspection and maintenance in response to requests for service; and a planting and aftercare regime.
- 3.3 The inspection and maintenance programme was outlined to Members, under which all Council maintained trees were inspected, and maintained as necessary, at least once every four years. Work was generally only undertaken outside this cycle in order to deal with issues brought to the Council's attention which required prompt remedial work, or if work to young trees would be best undertaken sooner.
- 3.4 This year's budget spend on tree work was around 50% proactive management and 50% reactive. In the long term it was hoped to achieve a level of 70% planned management, as the benefits of pro-active management should result in the volume of enquiries diminishing.
- 3.5 Discussion took place on a number of areas, including the responsibilities of landowners for tree maintenance, inappropriate tree planting in past years, and the digital mapping of tree ownership. Members were pleased to note the reduction in enquiries to the service, which had been achieved through the new proactive management and programmed maintenance regime.

### **4. Affordable Housing Update**

- 4.1 Following previous updates, the Committee had requested a further update on affordable housing issues in the Borough. This update also provided an overview of the housing implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).
- 4.2 There were 14 areas in the CSR that were likely to impact on affordable housing in the Borough, and these were outlined to Members, together with the likely impact on St Edmundsbury. The key changes were discussed with Members, including the total investment in new affordable housing (which may impact on the quantity and tenure mix/type of affordable housing and increase demand), the New Homes Bonus Scheme (under which the Government was proposing to match fund the Council Tax for each home built), the new "affordable rent" tenure for social housing (which was intended to make social housing more responsive and flexible so a greater number of people could access it, but could also result in increased

rents and therefore potentially arrears accruing more quickly), and reform of social housing regulation (which would implement a set of clear, outcome focussed standards for social landlords to work to, making the Council's strategic housing role even more important).

- 4.3 An update on affordable housing delivery in the Borough was also discussed with Members, who were advised that in the latest bid round St Edmundsbury achieved £617,000 funding for the delivery of 20 new homes in the Borough. Numbers of homes completed in the Borough, and affordable housing completions, were given in the form of a chart, including projected numbers for 2010/2011. Issues and trends affecting the demand for affordable housing in the Borough were also discussed, as well as progress on the priorities set by the Committee in July 2009, including the focus of the Council's Local Investment Plan.
- 4.4 Affordable housing updates would continue to be brought to the Committee annually, with the next update to be brought when the implications of CSR were more advanced, and focusing on St Edmundsbury's Local Investment Plan, which Members noted had contributed to the 100% success rate in achieving funding for all schemes submitted in the latest bid round.

## **5. Quarter 3 Directed Surveillance Authorised Applications**

- 5.1 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 requires that Members should scrutinise the authority's use of its surveillance powers on a quarterly basis. In June 2010 it was agreed that this requirement should be fulfilled by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.2 The Monitoring Officer had advised that there had been two directed surveillance authorisations in the third quarter of 2010/2011. Both cases of directed surveillance were to establish whether a benefit claimant was co-habiting, and they were ongoing. The intention was for staff within the Revenues and Benefits Section to obtain enough information to justify interviewing the claimant under caution.

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