



## **Cabinet** **1 February 2012**

### **Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 11 January 2012**

#### **1. Cabinet Forward Plan: January to April 2012**

- 1.1 The Committee considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period January to April 2012, which was introduced by the Committee Services Manager who outlined changes to the Plan since its publication. The Committee did not request any further information or involvement in any of the expected decisions on this occasion, but made some suggestions for changes to the wording on the Plan.

#### **2. 2011/2012 Work Programme: Update**

- 2.1 The Committee reviewed the current position of its work programme for 2011/2012 and noted the items which were expected at the next meeting of the Committee on 29 February 2012. Members also noted that the Tenancy Strategy would now be brought to the Committee's next meeting, prior to its consideration by Cabinet, and that the 2011/2012 Cabinet Annual Report would be brought to the Committee's June 2012 meeting.

- 2.2 The current position of the Task and Finish Groups running and in the pipeline were as follows:-

##### **(a) Currently running or due to commence shortly**

1. Litter collection and litter/dog bin distribution.
2. Conservation Area Policy.
3. Licensing, planning and enforcement of street signage.
4. Universal coverage of Broadband in St Edmundsbury.
5. Review of the continuing success of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre.
6. The variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre.

##### **(b) Reviews not yet timetabled**

7. Commitment to and expectations of the new Health Agenda.

##### **(c) Reviews suggested at meeting**

8. Anglia Revenues Partnership.

2.3 A Task and Finish Group was suggested by the Chief Finance Officer to investigate the impact on customers and stakeholders of the Council joining the Anglia Revenues Partnership. This review was accepted by the Committee, and Councillors Buckle, Houlder, Nettleton, Springett and Mrs P Warby were appointed to the Task and Finish Group. Members also requested that a Member of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee be invited to join the Task and Finish Group.

### **3. Review of the first six months of Overview and Scrutiny: July 2011 to December 2011**

3.1 May 2011 saw big changes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: a new Chairman, several new Members (some new to the Council), and taking on responsibility for policy development and review from the former Policy Development Committee.

3.2 Due to the increased workload the Committee agreed that it would aim to carry out most scrutiny and policy reviews in Task and Finish Groups. This was also good practice, and as well as easing pressure on the main Committee. It ensured a Member lead on all scrutiny issues, enabled a wider number of Members to engage in scrutiny, and allowed for in-depth scrutiny to be carried out over a longer period of time.

3.3 The Committee reviewed the success of this method of working, and the results seen so far from the Task and Finish Groups which had been appointed to since July 2011. At the time of the report, 9 reviews had been approved by the Committee, of which 2 were completed, 5 were currently running, and 2 had yet to be commenced.

3.4 The success of the new way of working will be judged from the outcomes of the Task and Finish Groups, and details of the outcomes of the two Groups which had finished their work and reported their recommendations were discussed. Members concluded that, although it was still early days for this way of working, the Task and Finish Groups had proven successful in allowing more in-depth scrutiny and a stronger Member lead on often controversial issues.

3.5 Two issues of concern had been identified during the first six months of operation of the Groups, one being a concern that having so many Groups running could put pressure on Members and officers' time, and the Committee therefore resolved that no more than four reviews put forward by Members should be running at any one time. Reviews 'in the pipeline' would be prioritised, and as one review came to an end, the next review on the prioritised list would commence.

3.6 Additionally, two questions were added to the 'suggestion for scrutiny' form, to ensure that when issues arose which were the responsibility of a partner organisation, they would be discussed with that organisation before the issue was put into the public domain on the Committee's agenda.

3.7 Finally, an issue was raised under this item as to whether the Committee's planned review of the quality of paving in the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre could be extended to paving outside the immediate town centre. Members acknowledged that, as this was a County Council responsibility, the Committee had no authority to require the co-operation of the County Council, and any assistance would be

based on goodwill. The County Council had agreed to assist with the focused Town Centre review, but if a wider review was required, it may be more appropriate for those Committee Members who were also County Councillors to raise this through the County's scrutiny process. However, a report was requested for the next meeting outlining how this issue might be taken forward.

#### **4. Update from Task and Finish Group: Article 4 Directions**

- 4.1 Following an initial update report at its November 2011 meeting, the Committee was advised that the Task and Finish Group had worked with officers to undertake a review of the boundaries of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre and Victoria Street conservation areas. The draft amendments to the boundaries had been agreed by the Task and Finish Group, but would need to be subject to consultation before they could be formally agreed.
- 4.2 Although the changes to the conservation area boundaries had been identified through the Task and Finish Group, it was normal practice for such changes to be considered by the relevant area working party. The Committee therefore agreed that the proposed changes should be submitted to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party on 24 January 2012, which would consider the proposed changes and then make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet, which would approve the public consultation document.
- 4.3 The Committee requested, however, that a further update report be brought to its next meeting providing further detail of the proposed changes to the conservation area boundaries, including maps and photographs.

#### **5. Affordable Housing: Annual Update**

- 5.1 It has been the practice of the Committee for the past three years to discuss an update report on the present situation with regard to affordable housing in the Borough, and the current position was considered by the Committee, as well as an update on the housing reforms and progress of delivering the priorities identified in the Local Investment Plan.
- 5.2 The implications of the housing reforms on the Borough Council were discussed, which included review of the allocations policy, a new Tenancy Strategy (which would be the subject of a report to the next meeting of the Committee), as well as changes to lengths of tenancy granted and greater use of private rented homes. Tenants Panels would be introduced, which Members would be involved in.
- 5.3 The report also updated Members on the current position of the Housing Register, and outlined changes to the way new affordable housing would now be funded. Finally, delivery against the Local Investment Plan was discussed.
- 5.4 Members asked questions on a number of areas of the report, including the impact of affordable rents, delivery of planned affordable housing developments, right to buy, working with Forest Heath District Council and controlling tenancy fraud. The Committee also praised the Head of Housing and Environmental Services and her team, whose professionalism and commitment ensured that St Edmundsbury was in a good position to implement the housing reforms.

- 5.5 As mentioned above, the new Tenancy Strategy will be considered at the next meeting of the Committee, and once the new Strategy is in place, the Committee will carry out a six month review of its impact.

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