



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# C411

## **Cabinet** **28 March 2012**

### **Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 29 February 2012**

- 1. Update on the impact of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership**
- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring the work of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP), and on 29 February 2012, it received an update on developments since the annual report was discussed in September 2011.
- 1.2 The LSP Manager advised that since the last report, the western part of Babergh District Council (DC) had ceased to be a part of the LSP, as a new multi-agency strategic partnership was being established to cover the areas of Babergh and Mid Suffolk. A review had been carried out on the future direction of the West Suffolk LSP, and it had been agreed that the existing LSP would be dissolved on 22 February 2012, and that a new partnership would be established, the West Suffolk Partnership.
- 1.3 The new partnership will cover Forest Heath DC and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, and the structure of the new partnership was outlined in the report. The Partnership will explore options for securing funding, and will also have the residual WSLSP funding transferred to it. In December 2011, the WSLSP had awarded £80,000 capital funding to the Suffolk Local Broadband Plan, leaving approximately £9,000 capital and £24,000 revenue to the West Suffolk Partnership.
- 1.4 Finally, the outcomes of projects allocated funding from the Partnership Fund in 2010 and an update on the Action Plan was discussed, and a representative from one of the projects, *Empowering the West Suffolk community to manage the impact of the economic downturn*, led by Bury St Edmunds' Citizens' Advice Bureau, gave an overview of the project.
- 1.5 Members discussed a number of areas of the report, including future funding of the partnership. The Committee could see the rationale behind the change to the West Suffolk Partnership, which emphasised the Council's new journey with Forest Heath District Council.

## **2. Corporate Plan 2012-2016**

- 2.1 The Council has had a Corporate Plan since 2003, and whilst the Plan has been subject to an annual review, the same four corporate priorities have remained in place since that date. Following the Borough Council's elections in May 2011, it was clear that a review of the Corporate Plan and priorities was necessary due to a number of factors, including more limited budgets, increased focus on localism and the ending of the Council's major capital programme.
- 2.2 The Leader of the Council attended the meeting and explained that over the past few months, work had been undertaken to develop a new Corporate Plan. Whilst Vision 2031 focused on public aspirations, this Corporate Plan set out more specifically how, over the next four years, the Council was going to start that 20 year journey. The draft Corporate Plan considered by the Committee was based on budget and other consultations with residents, business, various organisations, Councillors and staff, as well as drawing on the extensive consultation carried out for Vision 2031.
- 2.3 As a result of this work, the Corporate Plan had emerged with three overarching priorities, each with its own commitments and actions. The priorities are:-
- (1) working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities;
  - (2) working together for prosperous and environmentally responsible communities; and
  - (3) working together for an efficient Council.
- 2.4 The Corporate Plan will be subject to an annual review to report on progress made against the priorities, commitments and actions, and to propose any amendments in light of changes in circumstances.
- 2.5 The Committee was asked to examine the draft Corporate Plan 2012-2016 prior to its consideration by the Cabinet, and discussed a number of areas of the Plan, including making best use of community facilities, supporting sustainable transport options, and development of Councillors' skills. Members' observations and suggestions for amendment were taken into account when drafting the version of the Corporate Plan which is contained else where on this Cabinet agenda.

## **3. Tenancy Strategy**

- 3.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires, as part of the social housing tenure reforms, that all local authorities prepare and publish a Tenancy Strategy setting out the matters which the registered providers of social housing for its district are to 'have regard to' in formulating their own tenancy policies.
- 3.2 Officers, working with key registered provider partners, had prepared a draft Tenancy Strategy following consultation on the key issues. A Members' working group was also pivotal in the formation of the draft Strategy.
- 3.3 The Head of Environmental Health and Housing gave a presentation setting out the purpose and focus of the Strategy, in particular the key issues from section seven of the draft Strategy, which specifically provided guidance on tenancy matters, setting out the Council's position.

- 3.4 Tenants and other community based organisations were not specifically targeted during the consultation, as the purpose of the policy was to provide guidance to Registered Providers, who will have regard to it during the preparation of their own Tenancy Policies, and as part of this, Registered Providers will consult widely with their tenants and other organisations.
- 3.5 The Committee discussed the draft Strategy, with particular emphasis on Section 7, discussing areas including under-occupation of homes, lettings plans, the increased use of private landlords and Right to Buy. Members asked that Section 2.5 be re-worded, if possible, following discussion with Registered Providers to give more clarity over likely minimum tenures. The Committee's comments and suggestions were taken into account when drafting the version of the draft Tenancy Strategy, which is contained elsewhere on this Cabinet agenda.

#### **4. Article 4 Direction Task and Finish Group: progress report**

- 4.1 The Committee considered a report which provided details of the progress of the Article 4 Direction Task and Finish Group to date. The Group was set up in July 2011, and has since met several times, tasked with improving the effectiveness and management of Article 4 Directions within Bury St Edmunds.
- 4.2 As part of this work, officers had identified several parts of the Conservation Area boundaries in need of updating, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had previously agreed to refer this issue to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party for consideration, but requested that maps and photographs of the areas proposed for change be provided to the Committee for information. A report was presented to the Working Party in January 2012, and the information discussed was included in Report C367 to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information.
- 4.3 The Working Party had subsequently referred the proposed boundary amendments to Cabinet for approval for consultation. The consultation will last for eight weeks, and details were provided to Members. Work is also continuing on a full assessment of the implications of the current permitted development rights which allow the installation of solar panels and photovoltaic cells on front roof slopes within consultation areas, and the implications of the blanket and selective approaches to making Article 4 Directions.
- 4.4 The next meeting of the Task and Finish Group will take place following the close of the consultation period.

#### **5. Footways in St Edmundsbury**

- 5.1 A Task and Finish Group is currently running and looking at 'the variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre'. At the last meeting of the Committee a question was asked as to whether the remit of this review could be widened to include the 'outskirts' of the town.
- 5.2 A narrative had been produced outlining the responsibility for the inspection and maintenance of footways to adopted streets in St Edmundsbury, which was the responsibility of the County Council. Intervention criteria determined the level of 'defect' before remedial measures were undertaken, and regular inspections were made of all areas of footway. The policies on footway maintenance and allocation of resources were set by Members of Suffolk County Council.

- 5.3 Members were advised that any specific issues concerning footways to individual estates should be passed to the County Council Highways Western Area Office, but that if Members still wished to pursue the issue, or the intervention criteria or inspection regime, through scrutiny, it would be more appropriate to do this through the County Council's scrutiny processes. The Borough Council had no powers to 'require' County Council involvement in its reviews, whereas the County's scrutiny process did have this power.
- 5.4 Members raised two issues which they felt may affect the County Council's intervention criteria, firstly the fact that street lights were now switched off at midnight across much of the county, which could increase the risk of trips on pavement defects which might not be so dangerous in well lit areas, and secondly the problem of tree roots causing trip hazards on several streets. The Committee asked for a letter to be sent to the Western Area Highways Office asking that these two issues be taken into account when the County Council next reviews its intervention criteria, and also that all communications from Members to the Western Area Office be responded to.

## **6. Cabinet Forward Plan: March to June 2012**

- 6.1 The Committee considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period March to June 2012, but did not request any further information or involvement in any of the expected decisions on this occasion.

## **7. Work Programme: Update**

- 7.1 The Committee has a rolling Work Programme, whereby suggestions for scrutiny reviews are brought to each meeting, and if accepted, are timetabled to report to a future meeting. The Work Programme also provides a contingency for Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action. Members reviewed the current position of the Work Programme, and noted the items which were expected at the next meeting of the Committee on 18 April 2012, where end-of-year updates from all current Task and Finish Groups had been requested.
- 7.2 The current position of the Task and Finish Groups in operation and in the pipeline are as follows:-

### **(a) Reviews currently running**

- (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; and
- (6) the variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre.

### **(b) Reviews timetabled**

- (7) Anglia Revenues Partnership (to commence in May/June 2012).

**(c) Reviews not yet timetabled**

- (8) Commitment to and expectations of the new Health Agenda.

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