



Cabinet **21 November 2012**

Review of Cabinet Working Parties **(Nov12/03)**

1. Background and principles

1.1 The Cabinet currently operates the following Working Parties (excluding those now run jointly with Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) relating to shared services, staff matters, safety and emergency planning):

- (a) Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party;
- (b) Haverhill Area Working Party;
- (c) Rural Area Working Party;
- (d) Sustainable Development Working Party; and
- (e) Grant Working Party.

1.2 On 25 May 2012, the Cabinet agreed to review these Working Parties in the autumn of 2012.

1.3 This review has now been carried out and the following changes to the current arrangements are suggested.

2. Area Working Parties (x3)

2.1 These Working Parties are considered to be fulfilling an important role, but it was noted that, for a variety of reasons, their workload has diminished slightly. It is therefore suggested that this is reflected in the planning of the 2013/2014 meetings calendar.

3. West Suffolk Growth Steering Group (provisional name)

3.1 While local planning policy groups will still be needed, Members of both Cabinets believe there is merit in setting up a joint Steering Group which will look at the wider issues of growth across West Suffolk, whether these be in relation to planning policy, infrastructure, housing, economic development or environment. Its draft Terms of Reference would be to advise the Cabinets of FHDC and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) on:

- (a) creating the conditions to encourage and support sustainable growth across the whole of the West Suffolk area; and
- (b) common planning policy affecting both districts.

- 3.2 However, the Steering Group would be asked to refine its Terms of Reference at its first meeting.
- 3.3 It is suggested that the Steering Group comprises 12 Members, six from each Council. The Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship would rotate annually between the two Councils. Membership of the Steering Group would be politically balanced, and each Council must ensure that its Development Control Committee and planning policy bodies (the Local Development Framework Working Group in the case of FHDC and the Sustainable Development Working Party in the case of SEBC) are represented, alongside Members of the two Cabinets. Meetings will be governed by normal Access to Information rules in both Councils.
- 3.4 Frequency of meetings would initially be quarterly, but this can be reviewed in the light of workload.

4. Sustainable Development Working Party

- 4.1 The joint Steering Group for Growth outlined above will not remove the need for each Council to maintain a planning policy group to advise on matters affecting its own district, including the area-specific elements of their Local Development Frameworks. Therefore, there is no proposal to remove the Sustainable Development Working Party.
- 4.2 However, given that common planning policy issues will be considered by the new joint group it is suggested that its Terms of Reference are clarified to read: *'advise the Cabinet and Council on the formulation of the Local Development Framework for St Edmundsbury and associated planning policies **specific to the district.**'* This will avoid duplication and allow a continuation of the recent success of joint work by the two Councils on common planning policies.
- 4.3 Similarly, in view of this, it is suggested that the frequency of the Working Party's meetings is adjusted when planning the 2013/2014 calendar.

5. Grant Working Party

- 5.1 The Cabinet would like this Working Party to look at ways of further streamlining the current process of handling applications for rural grants, perhaps making more use of the electronic system, and reviewing delegations. The Working Party will be asked to report back to the Cabinet with suggestions to implement in 2013/2014.

6. Diversity Working Party

- 6.1 The existing Diversity Group is a Councillor/Officer group, chaired by an officer but with three Members appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Portfolio Holder attends by invite. Since nearly all of its work is common or of relevance to both Councils (particularly after shared services) it is suggested that a Joint Diversity Working Party is established.

6.2 It is proposed that this becomes a Cabinet appointed Working Party with effect from 2013/2014, with two Councillors representing each Council, one of whom may be a Cabinet Member. In the interim period, it will be suggested that invites are issued to relevant Forest Heath Councillors to attend the remaining scheduled meetings of the existing group, on an informal basis.

7. Recommendations

7.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that subject to the agreement of Forest Heath District Council's Cabinet regarding joint arrangements that:

- (1) the changes be implemented in respect of Working Parties and Steering Groups, as detailed in Sections 2 to 6 of Report D199, as part of planning for 2013/2014;
- (2) the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to appoint Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council to the provisionally named West Suffolk Growth Steering Group on the nominations of Group Leaders, in accordance with the requirements detailed in Section 3.3 of Report D199; and
- (3) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to disband its Diversity Group with effect from May 2013, to allow Cabinet to form a new Joint Diversity Working Party as part of its next annual review of working parties.

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