



## **Cabinet** **27 March 2013**

### **Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 March 2013**

#### **1. Update on the Impact of the West Suffolk Partnership**

- 1.1 On 6 March 2013 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the work of the West Suffolk Partnership which had been established on 22 February 2012 following the dissolution of the former West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership on the same day.
- 1.2 The Secretariat for the West Suffolk Partnership (WSP) attended the meeting and advised that the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce had won the contract in June 2012 to provide the Secretariat for the WSP for a period of 12 months. Residual assets from the former West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership of approximately £35,000 had been transferred to the WSP.
- 1.3 The new partnership covered Forest Heath DC and St Edmundsbury BC, and the structure of the WSP was in two tiers. The West Suffolk Strategic Group (WSSG) acted as the senior group responsible for setting the roles and targets of the WSP, providing overall leadership. The second tier was the West Suffolk Partnership Operational Group which was the support group for the WSP with the emphasis of executing the aims and priorities set by the WSSG.
- 1.4 The aim of the WSP was to allow a wide range of organisations, from the public, private, voluntary, charitable and not-for-profit sectors to work together to ensure that West Suffolk took full advantage of changes in national policy and market conditions.
- 1.5 Members discussed a number of areas of the report, including priorities identified by the WSSG to establish a West Suffolk Network, a West Suffolk Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Prevention Task Group and future work around exploring how the partnership could become financially sustainable.

#### **2. Loans to Organisations made by the Borough Council**

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report which contained details of loans made by the Borough Council to private firms, including loan amount, security aspects and interest charges.

- 2.2 The Chief Accountant/Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that the purpose of the loans made to private firms was to promote economic development or sports development in the borough. The Council did not have a written policy on assessing loan applications, but each application received was considered on its own merit. The Council did not advertise that it made loans and the current practice in place for assessing loan applications was sufficient, but officers would benefit from having a policy with clear objectives and set criteria. It was stressed that loans to private firms did not form part of the Council's Treasury Management arrangements.
- 2.3 The Committee considered each of the loans which had been made by the Borough Council and responses were provided by the Chief Accountant/Deputy Finance Officer.
- 2.4 A Task and Finish Group was set up, to which Councillors Chung, Mrs Levack, Nettleton, Mrs Rushbrook, Mrs Stamp and Mrs P Warby were appointed, to formulate a policy to be used for assessing future loans requests from outside organisations. A report of the Group's work would be brought to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 April 2013.

### **3. Conservation Area Policy / Article 4 Directions Task and Finish Group**

- 3.1 The Chairman gave a progress report on the work of the above Task and Finish Group. The Group had concentrated on reviewing the use of Article 4 Directions within the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre and Victoria Street Conservation Areas. As part of that work, it became apparent that the boundaries of the conservation areas needed updating. This had now been completed.
- 3.2 Following the completion of the amendments to the two Bury St Edmunds conservation areas, the Group had resumed the task of reviewing the application of the Article 4 Directions in the conservation areas. This had included an assessment of the most effective way to apply the Directions (either selective or whole area coverage) and the implications of withdrawing the permitted development rights relating to micro-generation, in particular, solar panels and photovoltaic cells.
- 3.3 At the meeting of the Group on 28 February 2013, it was decided to explore whole area coverage of the new Article 4 Directions and the withdrawal of the permitted development rights relating to micro-generation. The introduction of a new grant scheme, in conjunction with the building students at West Suffolk College, was also discussed in some detail and would be investigated further.
- 3.4 The Group would meet again in early April 2013 and a full report of the Group's work would be brought to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 April 2013.

### **4. Work Programme Update**

- 4.1 The Committee now 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 leaves space 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 meetings of the Committee.
- 4.2 The Committee considered a 'Suggestion for Scrutiny' form which asked Members to agree to a review to look at the unacceptable length of time taken by housing developers to bring highways, footpaths, landscaping and open space up to adoption standards on new developments.
- 4.3 As the success of the proposed review would significantly rest on being able to establish a two-way communication with developers, it was suggested that a more informal setting of a Task and Finish Group might be the most appropriate forum to discuss the issue.
- 4.4 Members were advised that the Committee had no authority to summon developers to meetings, who could only be politely requested to attend. Officers would speak with the Planning Department and Suffolk County Council's Highways Section to establish which developers should be invited.
- 4.5 The Committee agreed to the suggested review, and an informal Task and Finish Group was set up, to which Councillors Beckwith, Buckle, Ms Byrne, Houlder, Marks, Thorndyke and F J Warby were appointed.
- 4.6 The Committee also considered a request from Councillor Mrs Rushen who had expressed an interest in joining the Educational Attainment Review Group. The Rural Area Working Group (RAWP) had previously raised the issue of under-achievement in rural schools and it was suggested that, rather than duplicating efforts, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might wish to make room for two rural Members to sit on its review group.
- 4.7 As Councillor Mrs Rushen was a Member for a rural Ward, the Committee agreed to invite the RAWP to nominate a second rural Member to the Task and Finish Group at its meeting on 13 March 2013. The Task and Finish Group would then meet in early April once the final membership had been confirmed.

## **5. Decisions Plan: March to September 2013**

- 5.1 Members considered the latest Decisions Plan, covering the period March to September 2013.

- 5.2 Clarification was sought on two items on the Plan, including what support the "Guildhall, Bury St Edmunds" was seeking and the latest position on Vision 2031. Some Members had been approached by parishes and residents wanting an update on progress. It was felt a simple message ahead of the next round of consultation would be useful. Members also raised concerns about the potential for developers starting works / submitting planning applications ahead of the Vision 2031 being approved.
- 5.3 Members formally asked for a short update to be provided in the Members' Bulletin, explaining where the Council was with Vision 2031, the next steps and what would happen if developers submitted applications ahead of Vision 2031 being approved. Members could then share this information with parishes, residents' associations and correspondents.
- 5.4 The Committee did not request any further information or involvement in any of the current planned decisions.

**Contacts:**

David Nettleton, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, (01284-702212)  
Ian Houlder, Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, (01284-810074)  
Adriana Stapleton, Scrutiny Manager, (01284-757613)  
Christine Brain, Overview and Scrutiny Manager, (01638-719729)

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