



Council 29 June 2010

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Written report by the Leader of the Council, Cllr John Griffiths

1. New Government

- 1.1 The new Coalition Government is getting its feet under the table fast and they have made tackling the current national debt their (and our) major priority.
- 1.2 We have already seen the withdrawal of the Planning Delivery Grant (PDG), the curtailment of Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) funding for next year and there is still some discussion over the future of reward grant payments to Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and the Community Strategic Partnership (CSP).
- 1.3 There have also been policy announcements made over planning, and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in particular. More detail will be forthcoming as the policies are translated into firm details.
- 1.4 The budget on the 22nd of this month will contain other measures and the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) scheduled for the Autumn will set the overall direction of grant policy for the next 5 years.
- 1.5 I have no doubt that we are in extremely challenging times. We will need to play our part in this while using every endeavour to protect the public services which we deliver for our residents and businesses.

2. West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP)

- 2.1 The WSLSP is in the process of reviewing its Community Strategy. While the initial consultation has suggested that the current themes, focusing on keeping communities safe and strong, young people, healthy communities and developing a prosperous economy were all still relevant the Board agreed that the environment should become a theme in its own right (it had previously been referred to under wording about sustainable communities). For the purposes of allocating the £721,000 of performance reward grant which the LSP has received, the Board agreed a series of priorities under each of those five themes.
- 2.2 These priorities now provide the criteria against which groups can bid for WSLSP funding. As in previous rounds the WSLSP is making available Community Chest funding available to voluntary and community groups, including Parish Councils. £60,000 has been allocated

and the maximum bid raised from £1,500 to £2,000. There will also be partnership funding available for major projects which help deliver the priorities of the WSLSP with £60,000 the maximum bid. Community Chest bids must be submitted by 9 August 2010, while those seeking partnership funding have until 8 July to submit an initial expression of interest. Full details of both types of funding were included in the Members' Bulletin and are available on the WSLSP website at <http://www.onesuffolk.co.uk/WSLSP/WSLSP+Funding+Application+Forms.htm> Please make groups in your wards aware of this funding, it is the last funding the WSLSP is likely to receive and the Board is keen to see a good cross section of applications.

- 2.3 The Board has also recently received an update on the Apprenticeship Scheme which the WSLSP has been piloting. It is very encouraging that a total of 29 apprentices have been placed, 24 of which have received a subsidy funded by the WSLSP. Of these all but two were 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEETs), a much higher proportion than on most schemes reflecting the value of the brokering role being played by the co-ordinator of the scheme who matches suitable apprentices with employers. A business case for a second stage to the scheme is being developed and will be applying for partnership funding.

3. Rural Issues

- 3.1 The Rural Area Working Party met on 17 June 2010, and items discussed included the Ixworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, plans for the Parish Conference in November 2010, and the Council's future approach to the cleansing of rural areas.
- 3.2 The Suffolk Village of the Year Competition, organised by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, is currently underway. Five St Edmundsbury villages entered the district round: Barrow, Clare, Hundon, Pakenham and Troston. These entries are soon to be judged by three Borough Councillors, in order to decide the village which will be put forward for the County round. The villages that make the final round will be judged by Mark Murphy and Lesley Dolphin from BBC Radio Suffolk on Saturday 14 August 2010.
- 3.3 Two '*Sustaining your Village Hall into the 21st Century*' conferences will take place at the end of June for people who are involved in the running of village halls and community buildings in St Edmundsbury. The conferences are free to attend and are being held at Great Barton and Hundon Village Halls. The events are run by Suffolk ACRE on behalf of the Council, and topics being covered include a case study of Great Barton Village Hall, green energy solutions, trustees' roles and responsibilities, best practices in managing the money and current funding opportunities.
- 3.4 Pakenham Parish Council has successfully applied for £1,000 from the Rural Areas Community Initiatives Fund towards the resurfacing of the village hall car park.
- 3.5 St Edmundsbury has received eight visits from the Rural Coffee Caravan Information Project so far this season and they have gone well. The caravan has been particularly well visited by residents of all ages in Ousden, which was a new location for 2010 and the caravan visits monthly.
- 3.6 As part of the Rural Action Plan, a tree and hedge planting grant scheme has been developed, which is available to community groups in rural St Edmundsbury. Any groups that would like to add some tree/hedge planting to an area in their village can apply, provided advice over the suitability of the planting has been sought from the Community Wildlife Advisor at Suffolk Wildlife Trust. The deadline for applications is this Christmas, and the actual grant allocated will depend upon the number of applications received and the beneficial effects of the planned planting to biodiversity. In addition to this, officers commissioned Suffolk Wildlife Trust to organise and deliver a '*Wildlife Question Time*' event

at the recent Nowton Park Country Fair. The aim of the event was to help inform people about how we can all do our bit to help promote biodiversity in our local areas.

- 3.7 Following the relatively recent first Parish Meeting for Ampton, Little Livermere and Timworth, Ampton Social Club held its first Coffee Morning on 12 June; it was a great success and hopefully more community-run events will follow.
- 3.8 Hundon is the first village to benefit from the Community Cafe support that is available through the Rural Action Plan. The volunteers received advice from officers regarding how to set up a community cafe and made good use of the Community Cafe leaflet that officers produced. Furthermore, Hundon Community Cafe received a small grant towards set-up costs. Their first session was on 13 May and the cafe is open from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm every Thursday. Hundon also successfully applied to the *'Connected Villages'* scheme, which has allowed them to give people the opportunity to use the free laptop with wireless internet access when attending the cafe.

4. Shared Services

- 4.1 The Shared Services agenda is a major thrust of our policy aimed to drive out savings. There will inevitably be some difficulties along the road but the Cabinet from the Borough Council and the Core Leaders from Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) are of one mind that this is the best way forward for both Councils.
- 4.2 Being specific:-
- (a) the first Programme Board meeting was held at FHDC on 14 June 2010. This involved both Corporate Management Teams and Officers from Communications, Finance and Human Resources;
 - (b) Louise Hammond, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, is the new Project Leader;
 - (c) there is a decision making matrix designed which will be used on 22 June to re-visit the prioritisation of services; and
 - (d) a timetable has been agreed for Programme Board meetings then through to Shared Services Group and Cabinet/Core Leaders.

5. Superfast Broadband

- 5.1 Superfast Broadband will assist Bury St Edmunds to have a competitive edge. The progress made so far is:-
- (a) a meeting was held with BT on 4 June 2010; and
 - (b) a series of inspections are being undertaken by Conservation Officers with BT staff to 'inspect' the areas which will be sensitive to new boxes being added.
- 5.2 As the programme develops, local Ward Members will be involved.