



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

B226

Council 28 September 2010

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

*Written report by Cllr David Lockwood
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

This report covers the meetings of the Committee held on 7 July and 8 September 2010.

(A) 7 July 2010 meeting

1. Review of the Disabled Facilities Grants Process

1.1 An item on this year's work programme put forward by a Councillor is a review of the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) process, which was added to the programme due to the time which sometimes elapses between identification of the need for a grant, and the actual payment of such grant and provision of adaptations.

1.2 The Committee's request came at an opportune time, as the County Council, in partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council, have been working on a review of the system. A report considered by the Committee was intended to give Members some background both to the review, and also to the DFG system, including the agencies involved at each stage of the process, and the Borough Council's part in the process. A further report will be considered in March 2011 setting out the full findings of the review and pilot to date, and actions proposed to achieve the target of the reduction of the average 223 days to 55 days from initial referral to forwarding the single recommendation form to the housing authority.

2. Regulatory Enforcement Update: Review of Enforcement Policy; Directed Surveillance; Enforcement of Planning Conditions

2.1 The Committee received a report which was in three parts. Firstly, it reviewed and updated the Council's Enforcement Policy, which the Committee recommended for approval. Secondly, the report introduced the new Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance and Property Interference, which recommended that elected Members review the authority's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 on a quarterly basis. The five authorised applications for Directed Surveillance that were approved in 2009/2010 were detailed for this purpose. Thirdly, Members had requested information about the planning enforcement service, and this was provided via the

annual report to the Development Control Committee, which outlined the work undertaken, and was the means by which the outcomes of this service area were monitored.

- 2.2 The Committee considered the information provided and discussed a number of areas of the report, in particular planning enforcement. Members were disappointed that, although officers were as pro-active as they could be, resources did not exist to monitor the implementation of every planning condition made on every application, and that officers sometimes had to rely on information from parish councils or members of the public to find out about breaches. However, there had been a number of enforcement 'success' stories, and presentations to Parish Council meetings raised the profile of the issue.

3. Review of Car Parking and Potential for Park and Ride in Bury St Edmunds

- 3.1 The Committee had requested a review of the impact on car parking demand following the arc having been open for a year, and also an investigation into the potential for park and ride provision in Bury St Edmunds. The review focused on the effectiveness of the changes to parking policy and management in the town adopted in advance of the development opening, and also included an assessment of the potential for park and ride based upon a study undertaken in 2007/2008.
- 3.2 The report, and the Committee, concluded that the impact on parking of the opening of the arc had been as anticipated, and the measures put in place had enabled the additional demand to be managed effectively.
- 3.3 A viability assessment for park and ride was carried out in 2007, and the most favourable option would have needed ongoing revenue support estimated at £500K per annum, with a capital construction cost of between £1 to £2 million. Members concurred with the study's conclusion that there was no current justification for the provision of a permanent park and ride service in Bury St Edmunds.

4. Update on Section 106 matters in St Edmundsbury

- 4.1 An update on the Council's Section 106 approach was considered, including what funding had been received and used to support transport schemes within the Borough. The Committee was also updated on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy system.
- 4.2 Since the last update to the Committee, the planning service had implemented a formal s.106 monitoring system. A table was presented to Members indicating the s.106 funds that had been secured over the past three years, and the purposes to which those funds had been put or were committed towards. Members requested a further report to the next meeting of the Committee with a more in-depth breakdown of contributions on a scheme by scheme basis.

5. Civil Parking Enforcement

- 5.1 At the last meeting of the Committee, Members requested an update on the position with the introduction of civil parking enforcement (CPE) in Bury St Edmunds. This was also known as decriminalised parking enforcement, and meant that the enforcement of most parking offences was carried out by a local authority rather than the police.

- 5.2 The decision to implement such schemes rests with Suffolk County Council, which in September 2009 had decided that no further action should be taken until the position with Local Government Review (LGR) was clearer, but that in principle CPE should be the direction that Suffolk authorities should aim for. The costs associated with introducing such a scheme across Suffolk were around £750,000; many authorities had had problems with making CPE self financing.
- 5.3 As the uncertainty around LGR has now been resolved, the County Council will be reporting further to its Members in the near future, and is aware of the concerns of this Council about on street parking enforcement. Officers will report further on this matter when the County Council has decided on a way forward

(B) 8 September 2010 meeting

1. Annual Report of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy

- 1.1 The Committee receives an annual report on the work of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership and its Community Strategy in September each year, followed by a six month update at its March meeting. The Committee is responsible for monitoring the Community Strategy and the development of the Partnership, and this annual report gave an update on the projects being run by the Partnership, and developments since the last report, including the recruitment of a new LSP Manager, and initial work to update the Community Strategy being accepted by the LSP Board.
- 1.2 Members were pleased to welcome to the meeting representatives from AFC Sudbury and Young People Afloat, who made presentations to the Committee on the development of these projects. The Committee was very impressed with the number of projects being undertaken, and the difference which the LSP funding made to them.

2. Review of response of Borough Council to severe winter weather 2009/2010

- 2.1 This report set out the response of the authority to the severe weather experienced during the 2009/2010 winter. It detailed the impact on the delivery of services in the Borough and the steps taken to maintain these services and the assistance provided to Suffolk County Council in delivery of their highway responsibilities.
- 2.2 Members received details of the County Council's winter maintenance plan (the County Council has responsibility for winter maintenance of highways), and in particular the criteria used to decide which roads were gritted.
- 2.3 Matthew Riches, the County Council's West Area Highway Manager, explained to the Committee that prioritisation of roads for gritting was difficult due to limited resources, and that a system of priority road grading was used, which was outlined to the Committee. Members had been concerned that minor roads in villages had not been cleared and that some people had been marooned in their houses, unable to get to towns. Mr Riches advised that this was a resource issue, and the severity of the snow meant that the safety of the County's Priority 1 routes had to take priority.
- 2.4 The Committee concluded that the conditions experienced in December 2009 and January 2010 had been unusual, and acknowledged that the resources available to cope with severe weather were based on more average conditions. Any additional resources would have to be balanced against the likelihood that they would be needed.

3. Update on Section106 matters in St Edmundsbury

- 3.1 Following a request from Members at the previous meeting, this report provided a list of the s.106 obligations that were currently being monitored, which related to planning permissions which had been implemented, so had become 'live' obligations. The various schemes which initiated the original s.106 requirement were also listed, as well as the variety of financial contributions that they had resulted in.
- 3.2 Questions were raised on a number of the schemes in the report, and a discussion took place on rural bus services. The Committee wished to know how the County Council had spent s.106 monies linked to public transport improvements, and suggested that this information be added to a report which the Policy Development Committee was expecting regarding bus services to Clare, and copied to this Committee.

4. Work Programme

- 4.1 When reviewing the current position of the Committee's work programme, a discussion took place with regard to the Council's policy on carrying out works to trees. Members asked whether the procedures for planning and budgeting landscaping works should be investigated, and requested a review to be added to their work programme for this year.