



Council 1 March 2011

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

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

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As this is the last annual budget setting full Council meeting of this administration, I wanted to thank my fellow Councillors, officers and staff at St Edmundsbury for all their hard work and contributions over the last few years.
- 1.2 Thanks to this and our long term forward thinking approval – and despite tough economic conditions and the very significant Government grant reductions – we are again able to propose freezing Council Tax while maintaining our frontline services for the people of St Edmundsbury.
- 1.3 This is no small achievement and I would like to both register my appreciation and thanks – and pay tribute – to all concerned.

2. £120,000 funding for innovative projects in St Edmundsbury

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 I was pleased to be on the Panel of the Transforming Suffolk Community Fund when it awarded a total of £120,000 to three innovative projects in St Edmundsbury.
- 2.1.2 These projects are excellent examples of the Borough Council and partners working together to respond to challenges we all face and are as follows:-

2.2 West Suffolk Apprenticeship Business Incentive Scheme

- 2.2.1 The West Suffolk Apprenticeship Business Incentive Scheme receives £43,890 to help create forty apprenticeships in local businesses. Delivered by Suffolk Apprentices Ltd working with public and private sector partners in the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership, the project will run until April 2012. It identifies and recruits small and medium size organisations willing to offer apprenticeships for Suffolk school leavers and young people not in education, employment or training, and 90 per cent of the funding goes directly to help with apprentices' wages.

2.3 Local Energy Generation

- 2.3.1 £28,000 has been awarded to look into options for local energy generation in Bury St Edmunds to provide heat and power to around 4,500 new homes and 80 hectares of employment land planned for Bury St Edmunds over the next 20 years.
- 2.3.2 Part of the study will look at district heating. Little used in the UK, but well established in many other western countries, this concept centralises the heating and hot water supply, removing the need for individual boilers in each new house. This would reduce overall emissions for the area, increase energy affordability and reduce fuel poverty. The study, also led by the Borough Council and partners, ends in July 2011.

2.4 Money Advice Co-ordinator

- 2.4.1 The third project, led by the Bury St Edmunds Citizens Advice Bureaux, is to recruit a Money Advice Co-ordinator who in turn will recruit and train five voluntary advisers (one based at each of the West Suffolk Bureaux), in the use of the CASHflow software designed to help clients to learn and use budget management skills and take control of their own finances.

3. Shared Services and Partnership Working

- 3.1 You will see from the report of the Performance and Organisational Development Portfolio Holder that the Shared Services project with Forest Heath District Council is continuing to move forward. May I take this opportunity to urge you to attend the briefing on Wednesday 2 March 2011 at 4.00 pm in West Suffolk House. A presentation will be made by the Chief Executive and the Project Lead on the progress to date of the Shared Services Initiative and the programme for Phase 2 of the project.
- 3.2 We also need to consider the Borough Council's response to Suffolk County Council's New Strategic Direction (NSD). In some ways, the timing is opportune since we are, as a Council, embarking upon a masterplanning exercise for the next stage of the Local Development Framework as well as pursuing the Shared Services agenda in West Suffolk with Forest Heath District Council. However, we also need to look closely at the NSD proposals/suggestions on a service by service, case by case basis and to formulate the best way forward.
- 3.3 Before doing this, there are some principles which were outlined at the most recent seminar held by Suffolk County Council at The Apex on 31 January 2011 which are, most probably, worth repeating, these are:-
 - (a) divesting to existing Suffolk businesses;
 - (b) fostering new businesses to employ local people;
 - (c) supporting staff in management buyouts or other similar arrangements; and
 - (d) exploring joint ventures with social equity investors.
- 3.4 In all of the 'offers' under consideration it will be necessary to prepare and develop a full business case. This must be done within the next six months and discussions need to be held with the County Council to look at the current framework model for each service, facility or collection of facilities.

4. West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP)

- 4.1 On 15 December 2010 the WSLSP Board discussed its possible future role given the rapidly changing landscape. While it is too early to know quite how some of the big national policy changes will work at a local level, and therefore too early to take a firm view about any continuing role for the partnership, the consensus at present is that there remains benefit from meeting, not least because it is an efficient way for Board partners to look at issues of common interest. As new policies are rolled out at a local level it will become apparent if there is added value or a niche role for the WSLSP to play, for example in the localism agenda or in relation to the new county-level health and well-being boards. The Board will continue to keep the role of the partnership under review.
- 4.2 The remainder of the meeting was focussed on funding issues. The Board agreed the process for a final round of bidding for up to £209,000 of capital funding. That process is underway and, at the time of writing final decisions are still to be made but it is encouraging to see a range of legacy projects coming forward covering a variety of WSLSP priorities such as green issues, support for the voluntary sector and the economy.
- 4.3 The Board also agreed to fund a second round of the West Suffolk and Babergh East LSP apprenticeship scheme. This award was subject to the match funding being found which has now been secured (paragraph 2.2.1 above provides the detail). This is an example of WSLSP showing leadership and a proactive approach to tackling the high numbers of those not in education, employment or training (NEET). It will help 40 people to become economically productive and is an investment in them, their families and the local economy.
- 4.4 Since my last report the WSLSP has also awarded the final round of Community Chest funding for local voluntary and community groups, including town and parish councils. The local schemes which received funding range from the start-up of an after school club run by the Thurlow and Bradley Pre-School group to an aerial runway at Troston, a contribution to a new trailer for the Bury Bombers Wheelchair Basketball team to the Running Club in Haverhill developing new running trails. What all these schemes have in common is that they were initiated by their local communities, the need for the project was well evidenced and the views of those who were going to use the service/facility had been taken account of in developing the scheme. It is a credit to our local communities that there were so many more good projects coming forward. The challenge for the future will be to identify how such projects can be encouraged in an era where funding is tight.

5. Rural Issues

- 5.1 The Rural Area Working Party met on 13 January 2011, and Members were given the opportunity to pose questions about 'Wos Up' and other issues to youth outreach workers from Supporting Contemporary Adolescence (SCA). Members also discussed the development brief for land at The Green, Barrow; the Rural Area Masterplan, or Rural Vision 2031 as it is now referred to; Parish Conference planning; the Waste and Street Scene Services Cleansing Review; and the development of the 2011-2014 Rural Action Plan.
- 5.2 As the current 2008-2011 Rural Action Plan draws to a close, the new Rural Action Plan for April 2011 to March 2014 is being finalised. The second phase of consultation commenced on 14 January and, while scheduled to end on 28 February 2011, responses are already being analysed in readiness for the final document to be approved by April 2011.

- 5.3 Plans are also underway for the next Parish Conference, which is taking place on Thursday 12 May 2011 from 6pm, at Stanton Village Hall. All Parish Councils, rural Village Hall Committees, and other rural community groups are most welcome to attend, though booking is essential. As only the minority of Parish Councils have contested elections most will know who their new councillors are in early April 2011.
- 5.4 Since the last report, Stanton Football Club has been awarded £675 to purchase a good quality second-hand compact tractor flail mower and front loader for use on their pitches. Mouse Lane Playing Field Committee and Rougham Parish Council were jointly awarded £3,255 towards the replacement of some old play equipment and the purchase of some new items to the Mouse Lane Play Area.
- 5.5 Cavendish Community Shop has been awarded a grant of £5,000 from the Suffolk Rural Economy Scheme. This will enable routine and much-needed decoration, as well as completely rewiring and refitting the shop with new equipment, a new till and stock control system, and additional security measures for the doors and windows.