



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# C155

## **Council** **27 September 2011**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT** **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

This report covers the meetings of the Committee held on 6 July and 7 September 2011.

#### **A. 6 July 2011**

##### **1. Appointments to Task and Finish Groups and Suffolk Joint Scrutiny Committees**

1.1 The Committee considered its requirements for 2011/2012 and made appointments to the Cultural Strategy Working Group, Leisure Facilities Asset Management Review (including Playgrounds in St Edmundsbury), and the Diversity Group. The Committee also noted appointments at Annual Council to the Joint Suffolk Emergency Planning Policy Panel and the Joint Scrutiny of Flooding and Flood Risk Working Party for 2011/2012.

1.2 Members were also made aware of Suffolk County Council's reinstatement of its Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This would again be a body which included a representative from each of the County's districts and boroughs. As Councillor Beckwith had been this Council's representative for several years, and was keen to continue, the Committee recommended confirmation by full Council of the appointment of Councillor Beckwith to the Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2011/2012.

##### **2. 2011/2012 Work Programme**

###### **2.1 Adoption of Work Programme**

2.1.1 Prior to the Borough Council elections, and following a consultation exercise, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recommended a work programme for the first six months of 2011/2012, to allow the newly appointed Overview and Scrutiny Committee to get used to the way scrutiny worked, following which it would set the remainder of the work programme itself. This draft work programme was adopted by the Committee.

## **2.2 Planning the second half of the Work Programme**

- 2.2.1 Ordinarily, a second consultation exercise with officers and Members would now commence to set the second half of the work programme. However, a discussion took place on an alternative way of working, whereby the Committee would have a “rolling” work programme, with suggestions for scrutiny being considered at each meeting, for potential addition to the work programme subject to the vote of the Committee, and reporting back to the Committee in 2 to 3 meetings time. It was considered that this way of working would make the work programme more responsive to changing priorities, and Members agreed that this would be the way of working for the rest of the work programme.
- 2.2.2 On the suggestion of the Chairman, and following discussion, Members also agreed that the most effective scrutiny carried out in recent years had been carried out in “Task and Finish” groups, which ensured Member input at each stage of a review, with Members reporting recommendations to the Committee rather than officers. The Committee, therefore, agreed that, where practical, the majority of its reviews would take place in such Task and Finish Groups.

## **2.3 Suggestions for Scrutiny**

- 2.3.1 Following the agreement to have a rolling work programme for the remainder of 2011/2012, five suggestions for scrutiny reviews were discussed by the Committee, and all five were added to the work programme. Discussion took place on the terms of reference for these reviews, some of which the Committee felt would need to change, and the first meeting of each Task and Finish Group would, therefore, need to clarify the Terms of Reference of each review. The five reviews agreed were: Litter collection and litter bin distribution in the Borough; Conservation Area Policy; Universal coverage of Broadband in St Edmundsbury; Commitment to and expectations of the new Health Agenda; and Review of blue badge holder parking.

## **3. Revised Equality Scheme 2011-2014 and Action Plan 2011-2012**

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for overseeing the work of the Diversity Group, which exists to progress the Council’s diversity and equality agenda. The Group had focused recently on the development of the Revised Equality Scheme 2011-2014, and the implementation of the Equality Action Plan, which it had now updated for 2011/12.
- 3.2 The Council first published an Equality Scheme in 2008, and this had now been revised following the introduction of the Equality Act 2010. The Committee discussed the revised Equality Scheme and made three suggestions for minor amendment, recommending the Scheme and Action Plan for approval.

## **4. Leisure Facilities Asset Management Plan**

- 4.1 The Committee received a report which set the scene for a major piece of Asset Management Plan (AMP) work to be carried out over the Summer to advise specifically on the leisure facilities stock, identify revenue and capital requirements and introduce options for consideration including community asset transfer, disposal or retention. The Committee had been asked by Cabinet to scrutinise this report before it came through Cabinet in October 2011.

- 4.2 The report explained the process which would be followed to develop a new AMP for leisure facilities in the Borough, and the Committee was asked to give a steer to the Cabinet and officers at the outset of the review. Part of this review was the review of playgrounds in St Edmundsbury which was being run by the Committee. It was agreed that the final report on the Leisure Facilities AMP would be scrutinised by that Task and Finish Group before being brought to the Committee's October meeting.

## **5. Playgrounds in St Edmundsbury**

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a Task and Finish Group in March 2011 to investigate the provision of childrens' play facilities in the Borough. This review will form part of the wider asset management plan review of Council-owned leisure facilities. The Committee received an update on the work of the Group to date, which included consideration of the location, ownership and funding of play facilities in the Borough; current maintenance and inspection regimes; classifications of play areas; and the current condition of each play area.
- 5.2 Having considered the current position, and in the knowledge that a planned schedule of significant capital funding would be required to renew/refurbish play areas, the Group had agreed a set of principles which they would like the Council to consider when determining the future management of play facilities. The Committee agreed with the majority of the principles, except for the suggestion that any transfer of responsibilities for facilities on the Moreton Hall estate should not be progressed until such time as a decision was made on the "parishing" of the estate. Members felt that decisions on play facilities on the Moreton Hall estate should not be held up pending a decision on "parishing", which could take a very long time to complete.
- 5.3 The Committee recommended adoption of the principles with the exception of that concerning the Moreton Hall estate as set out above, the commencing of negotiations with Town Councils and other relevant community organisations on the potential to transfer the responsibility for playgrounds in non-strategic parks/green spaces, and that the findings of the Asset Management Plan review of existing playgrounds be fed into both the current work to revise planning requirements for play spaces in new developments, and the Council's broader Vision 2031 policies for children's play.

## **6. Quarter 1 Directed Surveillance Authorised Applications**

- 6.1 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 requires that Members should scrutinise the authority's use of its surveillance powers on a quarterly basis. In June 2010 it was agreed that this requirement should be fulfilled by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.2 The Monitoring Officer advised that no authorisations for Directed Surveillance were given in Quarter 1 of 2011/2012. One authorisation for access to communications data (mobile phone account) was granted via the National Anti-Fraud Network.

## **B. 7 September 2011**

### **1. Update on the Impact of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership and Sustainable Community Strategy**

- 1.1 The Committee is responsible for monitoring the Sustainable Community Strategy and the development of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP). The LSP Manager, Lurna Compton, updated the Committee on developments since the last report considered by Members. A verbal update was also given following the LSP Board meeting which had taken place that morning and where the future of the LSP had been discussed.
- 1.2 Two of the Council's partners on the LSP attended the meeting to make presentations to Members on two projects which had been running, funded through the Partnership. Linda Dennison from West Suffolk College spoke about the "Upskilling the West Suffolk Workforce" project, and the Council's Environmental Management Officer, Peter Gudde, spoke about the "Greener Business Grant", which aimed to help small businesses to cut energy and carbon, and to save money by providing support funding to invest in simple energy and resource cutting measures.
- 1.3 The LSP Manager concluded the presentation by reporting back on that morning's Board meeting, at which it had been agreed that the WSLSP should continue to meet, but that its membership should be refreshed, it should potentially look at becoming smaller and it should change its name to the West Suffolk Strategic Partnership. For the next Board meeting, Lurna had been asked to identify each partner's priorities, which would be used to advise the Board of the areas on which it should be focused.

### **2. Cabinet Forward Plan/Work Programme**

- 2.1 The Committee considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period September to December 2011.

#### **2.2 Community Centres**

- 2.2.1 The Committee expressed concern that, in the rural areas, village halls appeared to be successfully run by the communities themselves, whereas community centres in the towns were operated on subsidies from the Borough Council. The Committee asked how the process of transferring the running of other community centres in Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds to community groups could be speeded up and requested that a brief report be brought to its meeting scheduled for 12 October 2011 setting out the cost to the Council of subsidising each of these community centres, and maintaining them, and what measures had been taken so far to have them run on the same principles as rural community centres.

#### **2.3 Licensing, Planning and County Council Enforcement of Pavement Signage**

- 2.3.1 Members also expressed concern with regard to licensing and advertisement consent for 'A' boards and similar pavement signs in Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds, and the enforcement of decisions on these. They felt there was a disparity between the granting of advertisement consent for these signs, and the granting of licences, plus the enforcement of any refusals by the County Council, which was currently carrying out its own review.

- 2.3.2 Members were concerned that the Licensing and Planning Teams worked with different legislation with regard to granting consents for these signs, and asked that a review be carried out, involving the County Council where necessary, to see whether a consistent policy on granting consents and enforcing on these could be achieved, and to clarify who had the final decision on these applications, and who had responsibility for enforcement.
- 2.4 The Committee also reviewed the current position of its work programme for 2011/2012 and the Task and Finish/Working Groups currently constituted, and agreed that the Cultural Strategy Working Group should be disbanded, as the work of this group had been superseded by Vision 2031.

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