



Council

13 December 2011

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

This report covers the meetings of the Committee held on 12 October and 16 November 2011.

A. 12 October 2011

1. Framework for the Development of the New Corporate Plan and Priorities

1.1 A review of the corporate plan and priorities is necessary due to a number of factors, including increased focus on localism and the ending of the Council's major capital programme, as well as budget limitations.

1.2 Members considered a report which set out a framework for developing the new corporate priorities, and planned consultation with local people, Ward Councillors, staff and senior managers, and were asked to make suggestions as necessary for how the corporate plan and priorities could be developed.

1.3 The Committee agreed that the consultation process and timescale as set out in the report were appropriate, and did not recommend any revisions to these plans.

2. Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy 2011-2016

2.1 The Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy was last adopted in 2009, and sets out how the Council engages with its communities; ensures that local people can have their say through consultations; makes the right information available to help people influence decisions; and ensures that peoples' views are reflected in its priorities and service delivery.

2.2 Through the updated Strategy, the Council aims to effectively engage with all individuals, groups and organisations. The Committee recommended the Strategy for adoption.

3. Interim report from Task and Finish Group – Review of Free Parking for Blue Badge Holders

- 3.1 The Task and Finish Group working on the review of free parking for blue badge holders was due to present its recommendations to the November 2011 meeting of the Committee. However, Members had requested a progress update to be brought to the October 2011 meeting.
- 3.2 The Task and Finish Group had met to develop options for consultation, which had been sent to over 30 local disability groups seeking their comments. A question was also included on the Council's budget consultation, and focus groups had been held with 12 groups of residents and parish councils.
- 3.3 All consultation responses were being analysed, and would be reflected in the recommendations expected at the next meeting of the Committee. Members of the Task and Finish Group were also due to visit Waveney District Council, which had recently introduced charges, in order to learn the rationale behind their decision and the lessons learnt from implementation.

4. Leisure Facilities Asset Management

- 4.1 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 formed part of the wider asset management plan review of Council-owned leisure facilities.

Funding and ownership of fixed play facilities in the Borough

- 4.2 The Task and Finish Group had identified 10 sites as being suitable for community transfer. Also, five areas were recommended for the removal of play equipment when it came to the end of its useful life.
- 4.3 The Committee supported the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group that a revenue growth bid of up to £39,000 be made as part of budget setting to enable the Council to maintain all of the play areas in the Borough; that, if the growth bid is approved, a central maintenance contract be let for a "term playground repairs maintenance contractor", and parishes be invited to opt into that contract; that the rationalisation of the play areas in Clover Fields, Lavender Fields, Raine Avenue, Argyll Court and Puddlebrook in Haverhill be approved; and that the Borough Council continues to welcome approaches from town councils and other community groups for the voluntary transfer of ownership of play equipment and open spaces.

The Leisure Asset Management Plan 2011

- 4.4 Appendix 1 to Report C172 presented a schedule of leisure facilities refurbishment, replacement or investment for 2011/12 to 2017/18, based on a rolling programme of works required to maintain each leisure facility.
- 4.5 The Committee supported the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group that the initial schedule of leisure facilities refurbishment, replacement or investment be used to assist the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan and budget setting processes from 2012/13 onwards; and that the proposals for investment in 2012/13 be included as capital growth bids in the normal budget setting process for that year.

5. Community Centres

- 5.1 The Committee requested that a report be brought to its October 2011 meeting setting out levels of subsidy and maintenance; the timetable for transfer of those centres still managed by the Borough Council; and an analysis of Trustees and the legal obligations in this respect.
- 5.2 The report included a draft timetable for the transfer of Weston, Leiston and Newbury Community Centres. The Committee discussed the information provided and questioned why there was such a long run-in planned to the transfer of further community centres. Whilst Members accepted that time was needed to engage sensitively with community associations, and that significant officer resource was required to achieve any transfers, they felt that at least one of the community centres concerned was in a good position to be transferred, and recommended that two community centres be prioritised for transfer to community ownership with a target completion date of 2013, with the remaining two transfers being subject to a completion date of 2014.

B. 16 November 2011

1. 2011/2012 Work Programme - Update

- 1.1 The Committee reviewed the current position of its work programme for 2011/12 and noted the items which were expected at the next meeting of the Committee on 11 January 2012. One Task and Finish Group had brought its recommendations to this meeting of the Committee. Further Groups were ongoing, and others in the pipeline, and were discussed.
- 1.2 In addition, Councillor Mrs Levack had submitted two "suggestion for scrutiny" forms to the Committee, and two new reviews were added to the work programme: "Review of the continuing success of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre", and "The variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre".

2. Interim Report from Task and Finish Group - Litter Collection and Litter/Dog Bin Distribution in the Borough

- 2.1 The above Task and Finish Group has met twice. Its Members have been given an overview of cleansing in St Edmundsbury, as well as the scope and progress of the Joint Cleansing Review with Forest Heath DC. The next task will be to address litter and dog bin issues. The Task and Finish Group wishes to concentrate on this area of work, in line with the suggested scope of its investigation.
- 2.2 A number of issues regarding dog and litter bins have been discussed by the Group, together with a number of possible solutions to address these issues. Some of these solutions were operational in nature and would be implemented forthwith. Others may require policy revisions, which would need to be approved by the West Suffolk Waste and Street Scene Services Joint Committee. The Task and Finish Group will meet again early in 2012 to progress operational changes and review any emerging policy changes.

3. Interim Report from Task and Finish Group – Article 4 Directions

- 3.1 This Task and Finish Group is resurveying/updating the existing Article 4 Directions within the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre and Victoria Street conservation areas, and introducing ways of promoting them to owners and residents to raise their awareness of the Article 4 Directions.
- 3.2 Members are considering whether to continue with the selective method of making Directions, or to change to a blanket approach covering a whole conservation area. A

survey of all properties within the two conservation areas not currently covered by an Article 4 Direction has been undertaken. Letters and information leaflets have been sent to owners/occupiers, window companies have been reminded of the requirements of Article 4 Directions, and local estate agents, lettings agents and solicitors reminded to make owners, prospective purchasers and tenants aware of Article 4 Directions.

- 3.3 The next steps for the Task and Finish Group will be to arrange drop-in sessions for owners/occupiers of the conservation areas, assessment of the implications of microgeneration permitted development rights within conservation areas, and review of the boundaries of the Town Centre and Victoria Street conservation areas.

4. Recommendations from Task and Finish Group – Review of Free Parking for Blue Badge Holders

- 4.1 Following the Committee's decision to review the Council's policy of providing free car parking for blue badge holders, the Task and Finish Group's report back to the Committee was considered, and included results of consultation and experiences learnt from other Councils.
- 4.2 Consultation had taken place with 37 disability groups, one national organisation, and the St Edmundsbury Tourist Information Manager. Additionally a question on this issue was included as part of the Council's budget consultation, and the same question asked at 12 focus groups of residents, parish councils and residents associations. Members had also made comparisons with nearby publicly-owned car parking authorities, and private car parks, and a site visit had been made to Waveney District Council where charging had recently been introduced, in order to benefit from the lessons learnt from implementation there.
- 4.3 From the general consultation, the majority (70%) supported charging, and those who were blue badge holders demonstrated some support (36%). The concerns raised by consultees were discussed, together with actions which could be taken to mitigate these.
- 4.4 The Committee recommended that charging for blue badge holders to park in the Council's off-street car parks be introduced throughout the Borough, with effect from Monday 2 April 2012, on the basis of one free hour for every hour purchased. Alterations would be made to positioning and heights of ticket machines, and alternative methods of payment would be examined and introduced if appropriate. Finally, a communications plan would be developed to ensure clear publicity and signage to those people who are affected.