

Council

28 February 2012

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

This report covers the meeting of the Committee held on 11 January 2012.

1. The Committee's Work Programme

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the current position of its work programme at each meeting, and monitors the number of Task and Finish Groups running, their reporting targets, and further reviews in the pipeline.
- 1.2 Since the Committee started this new way of working, two Task and Finish Groups have completed their work and brought recommendations to the Committee. Six further Groups are currently running, or due to commence shortly, as follows:-
 - (a) Litter collection and litter/dog bin distribution;
 - (b) Conservation Area Policy/Article 4 Directions;
 - (c) Licensing, planning and enforcement of street signage;
 - (d) Universal coverage of Broadband in St Edmundsbury;
 - (e) Review of the continuing success of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre; and
 - (f) The variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre.
- 1.3 A seventh review, "Commitment to and expectations of the new Health Agenda", has not yet commenced, and an eighth, "Anglia Revenues Partnership", was added by the Committee at this meeting, to commence after May 2012.

2. Review of the first six months of Overview and Scrutiny: July 2011 to December 2011

- 2.1 May 2011 saw big changes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: a new Chairman, several new Members (some new to the Council), and taking on responsibility for policy development and review from the former Policy Development Committee.

- 2.2 Due to the increased workload, the Committee agreed that it would aim to carry out most scrutiny and policy reviews in "Task and Finish" Groups. This is considered good practice, and as well as easing pressure on the main Committee it ensures a Member lead on all scrutiny issues, enables a wider number of Members to engage in scrutiny, and allows for in-depth scrutiny to be carried out over a longer period of time.
- 2.3 The Committee reviewed the success of this way of working, and the results seen so far from the Task and Finish Groups which had been appointed since July 2011. Members concluded that, although it was still early days for this way of working, the Task and Finish Groups had proven successful in allowing more in-depth scrutiny and a stronger Member lead on often controversial issues.
- 2.4 To further improve the new way of working, the Committee resolved that no more than four reviews put forward by Members should be running at any one time. Reviews "in the pipeline" will be prioritised, and as a review comes to an end, the next review on the prioritised list will commence.
- 2.5 Additionally, two questions were added to the "suggestion for scrutiny" form, to ensure that when issues arise which were the responsibility of a partner organisation, they will be discussed with that organisation before the issue is put into the public domain on the Committee's agenda.

3. Update from Task and Finish Group: Article 4 Directions

- 3.1 This Task and Finish Group has worked with officers to undertake a review of the boundaries of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre and Victoria Street conservation areas. Although the changes to the conservation area boundaries were identified through the Task and Finish Group, it is normal practice for such changes to be considered by the relevant area working party. The Committee, therefore, agreed that the proposed changes would be submitted to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party on 24 January 2012, which would consider the proposed changes and, if supportive of these, recommend to Cabinet that they be approved for public consultation.

4. Affordable Housing: Annual Update

- 4.1 The current position with regard to affordable housing in the Borough was considered by the Committee, as well as an update on the housing reforms and progress of delivering the priorities identified in the Local Investment Plan.
- 4.2 The implications of the housing reforms on the Borough Council were discussed, as well as changes to lengths of tenancy granted and greater use of private rented homes. The report also updated Members on the current position of the Housing Register, and outlined changes to the way new affordable housing would now be funded.
- 4.3 The new Tenancy Strategy will be considered at the next meeting of the Committee, on 29 February 2012, and once the new Strategy is in place, the Committee will carry out a six month review of its impact.