



Council 19 June 2012

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Report by the Leader of the Council and Corporate and Rural Affairs Portfolio Cllr John Griffiths

Portfolio includes:

- Communications;
- Economic Development;
- External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships;
- Property, Asset, Facility and Estates Management (including West Suffolk House);
- Rural Affairs;
- Shared Services; and
- Vision 2031

1. Corporate Plan

- 1.1 Full Council will consider the Council's new Corporate Plan. This is an important document because it sets out what we are going to do over the next few years, and will enable us to deliver what is important to our residents, businesses and visitors to the area. This draft of the Corporate Plan has been built on the consultation and views expressed during the development of the Vision 2031 documents and other public consultation, such as our budget survey. The key message in the Plan is that we cannot deliver every service or give all the support people need on our own. Our key message is 'working together'. That is all of us: councillors, staff, partners and those who live and work in our various communities.

2. Shared Services

- 2.1 Progress on shared services with Forest Heath District council (FHDC) is good. We now have a shared Chief Executive for both authorities, Ian Gallin, and he has made some immediate changes to bring the two councils into closer alignment at management level. Ian has extensive experience of transforming the way councils work from his time in Wiltshire and Plymouth and his current priority is to restructure the senior management so we have one team managing services at the Borough Council and FHDC. This is due for completion at the end of September. Meanwhile a number of services are continuing the process of joining together with business cases for Planning, Housing and Environmental Health approved by the Borough Council's Cabinet and the new Cabinet at FHDC. The teams have already started the process and expect to be fully joined up by the end of the year.

- 2.2 With all these changes going on we must never forget that we have people to serve both efficiently and cost-effectively. The customer is at the heart of our redesigns and we are working on a new Customer Access Strategy to support the frontline teams. There is also a tremendous amount of work going on to underpin service redesigns, joining up our two staffs and simply making both Councils more efficient. We have a growing number of shared policies and teams, for example, a shared Internal Audit process, a shared communications team and so on. These do not make headlines, but are producing real savings in financial and staffing resources. The default position at both Councils is 'can we do this together instead of individually?'. There will still be occasions when the answer is 'no', because we are two separate Councils, with our own Councillors and political leadership.
- 2.3 The establishment of a Cabinet system at FHDC, with portfolios closely aligned to the Borough Council's Cabinet, I have no doubt that our Councillors, like our staff, will also be working much closer together in the future. In addition to the Joint Committees we have now merged to form a West Suffolk Joint Emergency Panel and a West Suffolk Joint Health and Safety Panel, and will shortly merge our Joint Staff Consultative Working with the equivalent at FHDC.

3. Vision 2031

- 3.1 A comprehensive consultation exercise about the three Vision 2031 documents was carried out during March and April 2012. High-profile launches were held in Haverhill Arts Centre, The Apex and Horringer Community Centre. Well-attended drop-in sessions were held in community venues across the Borough. Focus groups were organised on the key themes of Vision 2031 for both stakeholders and the general public. In addition, an email and written consultation was conducted of statutory agencies, amenity and community groups, parish councils and everybody who has expressed an interest or responded to a consultation in the past.
- 3.2 This consultation exercise resulted in a flood of responses, which are now being analysed. Reports about the results of the consultation will be presented to Members, and the documents will be revised as appropriate. There will then be another consultation on the redrafted documents before they are submitted for examination in public before an independent Planning Inspector.
- 3.3 The Vision 2031 documents are not just planning documents. They are also corporate documents, and we are already using the results of the consultation to determine our corporate policies. We believe we are blazing a trail in seeking to produce documents that combine corporate planning with land planning, and what we do is being watched keenly by many other authorities.

4. Communications

- 4.1 The communications teams at the Borough Council and FHDC are now one team: West Suffolk Communications. Team members are busy learning about the issues, priorities and strategies affecting both Councils to enable them to work seamlessly across West Suffolk. They are also developing their skills, often through sharing their specialist knowledge with their colleagues and learning from other Councils going through a similar shared services process. Over the coming months the communications team will be working with service areas to help them deliver cost-effective, two-way communications with their customers. This will involve, for example, engaging with the evolving Customer Access Strategy, looking at appropriate replacements for costly print, and developing greater skills and awareness of social media among services.

4.2 The team is also working with our new Chief Executive, Ian Gallin, to improve internal communications across both Councils. Staff and Councillors alike are facing major changes, and it is essential that we all understand what this means to us and how we can take advantage of shared services opportunities.

5. ***Economic Development***

5.1 **Business Festival 2012**

(a) Here are some important dates for your diary: the 2012 Bury St Edmunds Business Festival will run from Tuesday 11 to Friday 21 September 2012. It opens with the very popular Menta Trade Fair on 11 September. This attracted 400 people last year and the stands have almost sold out already. It closes with the first ever Bury Free Press Business Awards on 21 September. Other events include an International Trade Event with the China-Britain Business Council; a workshop on intellectual property; workshops with West Suffolk College on subjects such as the online presentation tool 'Prezzi' and mobile phones in business; workshops with the Theatre Royal on the art of being heard and the art of leadership; a question time event with Bid4Bury at The Apex; a health and wellbeing event with the Bury St Edmunds Chamber of Commerce, an engineering conference at The Apex and the Bury Free Press Business Show, which will include a procurement workshop with the United States Air Force in Europe (USAFE) and a speed networking event. For further details, look at: www.businessfestival.org; www.facebook.com/BusinessFestival ; Twitter - @businessfestbse or #BizFestBSE

5.2 **Develop Your Business**

(a) I had the great pleasure of being one of the panel members at the *'Develop your Business'* interactive conference held at The Apex on 14 May 2012. It was organised by *'Start-up-Suffolk'* which aims to improve the chances of success and the profitability of new-start businesses by advising and helping their owners. The keynote speech was made by the Right Honourable Lord Tebbit, and there were sessions on start-up essentials, funding growth, affordable marketing, local support for small business and social networking.

5.3 ***'Better Broadband for Suffolk'* (BB4S)**

(a) Suffolk County Council and district Council partners, including the Borough Council, have secured about £22M towards a broadband upgrade in the County. It is intended that this funding will be doubled when the broadband provider is announced. The total amount will be used to provide superfast broadband (20 megabytes per second or more) to most premises (85% to 90%) by 2015, with the remaining 10% to 15% also getting a significant improvement in broadband speeds (2 to 10 megabytes per second or more). Ultimately, it is hoped that all premises will have superfast broadband by 2020.

(b) The *'Better Broadband for Suffolk'* conference was held at The Apex on 9 March 2012. The conference heard from business leaders and local MPs about the importance of the campaign to people across the county. The event was hailed as a great success and marked the launch of the public consultation phase of the campaign. Over 12,000 survey responses have been received, showing the huge support for improved broadband across the county.

5.4 Robust Bury St Edmunds

- (a) *'Battlefield Britain'*, a report published by international retail consultants Javelin group in April described Bury St Edmunds as one of the top ten 'most robust' mid-sized regional town centres. It looked at 600 town centres, and puts Bury St Edmunds in the same group as York, Cambridge and Milton Keynes.

6. External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships

6.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

- (a) ***Growing Places Fund***

The Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough (GCGP) LEP and the New Anglia LEP, covering Norfolk and Suffolk, have both been allocated funding from the Governments *'Growing Places Fund'*. This initiative aims to unlock stalled projects and developments that could help support the creation of new jobs and economic growth. Both LEPs have shortlisted Haverhill Research Park to receive funding, and are examining the project more closely with a view to making final decisions shortly.

- (b) **New Anglia LEP**

The New Anglia LEP, is holding a listening exercise, a series of events for businesses across the region to understand the issues that are important for businesses. One of these listening events was held at Denny Brothers in Bury St Edmunds on 24 May 2012, and I was privileged to welcome everyone to the meeting and to hear the views of local businesses.

6.2 West Suffolk Partnership (WSP)

- (a) ***'Ask and Offer'***

The Strategic Group of the partnership is looking at how the WSP can add value and not duplicate what is being done in other forums. It is developing its *'ask and offer'* of partners and other agencies: the *'ask'* being those key things that need to happen to improve life chances for people in West Suffolk that are not currently being addressed elsewhere, and the *'offer'* being what the partnership can collectively bring to the table. As a foundation for understanding those key issues, the group is pulling together a profile of the partnership area which can be used to identify gaps in provision.

- (b) **WSP Network**

The Strategic Group has also agreed arrangements for the launch of the WSP Network. The Network is an opportunity for individuals and organisations, whether voluntary and community groups, public services or businesses, to engage with the partnership, provide feedback about the issues they face and inform the Strategic Group's understanding of the issues facing West Suffolk. The launch will take place from 10am to 12 noon on 12 July at Great Whelnetham Community Centre. All Councillors have been invited to attend.

7. Property, Asset, Facility and Estates Management

7.1 West Suffolk Property Services

- (a) The shared West Suffolk Property Services was formally approved by FHDC and the Borough Council in March 2012, and is now being implemented under the leadership of Ivan Sams. Borough Council officers are now involved in managing properties at FHDC, and are enjoying getting to know new colleagues in Mildenhall, whilst FHDC officers are involved in projects here.

7.2 Asset Management

- (a) **Hamlet Croft**

Bloor Homes is working on the planning obligations, and a decision on the planning application is likely to be made in early summer. It is hoped that building works will start later this year.

- (b) **Site E2, Suffolk Park**

The sale of 6.5 acres of business park land in Bury St Edmunds to Jack Sealey Limited was completed in March 2012, and a planning application for a phased warehouse development and enlarged service area was submitted soon after. The sale will help this successful local firm to continue to expand its business. Without this opportunity, the company would have had to consider other options of splitting its business or relocating.

- (c) **Vinefields Farm, Bury St Edmunds**

The grant of access rights across a strip of land at East Close was completed on 17 May 2012. This will enable Hopkins Homes to develop Vinefields Farm housing site.

- (d) **Millfields Way, Haverhill: Affordable Housing**

Subject to planning permission, Orbit Homes will build 11 units of affordable housing, including two special needs bungalows. The whole development will be built to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The project has been subsidised using national growth area funds and the Council will receive its land payment when the units are completed, anticipated in 2013.

- (e) **Corn Exchange, Bury St Edmunds**

The extensive refurbishment of the first floor of the Corn Exchange has been completed, and the building was handed over to the new management at the end of May 2012. It was officially opened on 5 June and the general reaction has been very positive, with most people saying that the building has been well restored and looks very attractive. This important Victorian building re-opening to the public has been a major achievement.

7.3 Haverhill Council Offices

- (a) Phases one and two of the refurbishment and renewal works have been completed. Staff from the Borough Council and Anglia Revenues Partnership have settled down in their new accommodation, and four voluntary organisations are now operating from their modernised ground floor offices. They have adopted more flexible work

styles, and now use less floorspace than before. Suffolk County Council staff are moving in at the end of June from their Camps Road building into the more open plan offices on the first floor.

7.4 Industrial portfolio improvements

- (a) The four year programme of improvements to the industrial portfolio in Haverhill is nearly complete. The service yard and car park beside the Menta business centre have recently been resurfaced, and the tenants are pleased with it.

7.5 Environmental Efficiency

- (a) The last item on this Council agenda is to approve a loan for Abbeycroft Leisure to implement environmental improvements to the Borough Council's two leisure centres. I support this initiative as considerable annual savings can be achieved. I have asked that an audit is undertaken on other Council buildings, recognising that new and newly refurbished buildings will already have efficiency measures incorporated.

8. Rural Affairs

8.1 Rural Area Working Party (RAWP)

- (a) On 14 March 2012 the RAWP received a progress report on the first year of the 2011 to 2014 Rural Action Plan. Members also discussed the Rural Profiling Project, which involves carrying out a pilot project to develop a different approach to local housing needs surveys.

8.2 Spring Parish Conference

- (a) On 23 April 2012 the Spring Parish Conference was held and well attended, with just under 60 parish Councillors and Clerks, as well as representatives from partner organisations, Borough Councillors and officers. Items discussed included the '*Better Broadband for Suffolk*' campaign, the future of Suffolk libraries and Rural Vision 2031. The workshops enabled attendees to gain a greater understanding about the non-planning aspects of the Localism Act, and a case study from Clare Parish Council showed how to manage a village proactively.

8.3 Rural Initiatives Grants

- (a) A rural initiatives grant of £1,100 has been awarded to the Friends of Lidgate Churchyard towards rebuilding the entrance gate to Lidgate Village war memorial in the churchyard of the parish church. A grant of £1,100 has also been awarded to the Great Saxham Parochial Church Council, towards the purchase of a comprehensive sound system and hearing loop in the church, which is the only community facility in the village.

8.4 Golden Age Fair

- (a) On 11 May 2012, officers attended a very successful Golden Age Fair in Stanton. The event, organised by the Rural Coffee Caravan, was one of a series held across the county designed to raise awareness of services available to older people in the community. About 200 people attended, and Borough Council officers provided a '*slipper exchange*', distributing 50 new pairs in exchange for poorly-fitting, old

slippers, which can cause older people to fall. Officers also gave information about grants, forthcoming events and other Borough Council services.

8.5 *'Is There a Business in You?'*

- (a) On 21 May 2012 I had the pleasure of giving the welcome speech at an *'Is there a business in you?'* event at Great Barton Village Hall. The event was fully booked, and the very positive feedback showed that it was extremely successful. The day was organised and partly funded as part of the Rural Action Plan, and was sponsored by Knights Lowe, local chartered accountants and business advisers.
- (b) Successful businesses gave inspiring and thought-provoking presentations and workshops to attendees, all of whom were thinking about starting up their own business, whether a private or a social enterprise. One of the presenters, Yum Yum Tree Fudge, who supply their gourmet fudge to Harrods and other outlets, very kindly distributed packets of fudge to all the attendees. It was, however, the only thing that was fudged in a day full of clear advice for aspirant businesses!

9. Thank You

This will be my last report compiled with the assistance of Steven Lincoln, Committee Services Manager. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his help and support, not only on behalf of myself, but also for the other members of the Cabinet and, indeed, all Councillors. I would like to wish him every success for the future.