



Council 19 June 2012

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 29 February, 18 April and 6 June 2012.

A: 29 FEBRUARY 2012 MEETING

- 1. Update on the impact of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership**
 - 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring the work of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP), and in February 2012 received an update from the LSP Manager.
 - 1.2 Since the last report, West Babergh had ceased to be a part of the LSP, as a new multi-agency strategic partnership was being established to cover the areas of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. It had been agreed that the existing West Suffolk LSP would be dissolved on 22 February 2012, and that a new partnership would be established, the West Suffolk Partnership, covering Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.
 - 1.3 The outcomes of projects allocated funding from the Partnership Fund in 2010 and an update on the Action Plan were discussed, and a representative from one of the projects, *Empowering the West Suffolk community to manage the impact of the economic downturn*, led by Bury St Edmunds Citizens Advice Bureau, gave an overview of the project.
 - 1.4 The Committee could see the rationale behind the change to the West Suffolk Partnership, which emphasised the Council's joint working with Forest Heath District Council.
- 2. Corporate Plan 2012-2016**
 - 2.1 The Council has had a Corporate Plan since 2003, and whilst the plan has been subject to an annual review, the same four corporate priorities have remained in place since that date. Following the Borough Council elections in May 2011, it was clear that a review of the corporate plan and priorities was necessary due to a number of factors, including more

limited budgets, increased focus on localism and the ending of the Council's major capital programme.

- 2.2 The Leader of the Council attended the Committee's February 2012 meeting and explained that over the past few months, work had been undertaken to develop a new corporate plan. Whilst Vision 2031 focused on public aspirations, this corporate plan set out more specifically how, over the next four years, the Council was going to start that 20 year journey.
- 2.3 As a result of this work, the corporate plan had emerged with three overarching priorities, each with its own commitments and actions. The priorities are:-
1. Working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities;
 2. Working together for prosperous and environmentally responsible communities;
 3. Working together for an efficient council.
- 2.4 The final post-consultation corporate plan appears on this Council agenda, and will be subject to an annual review to report on progress made against the priorities, commitments and actions, and to propose any amendments in light of changes in circumstances.

3. Tenancy Strategy

- 3.1 The Localism Act requires, as part of the social housing tenure reforms, that all local authorities prepare and publish a tenancy strategy setting out the matters which the registered providers of social housing for its district are to "have regard to" in formulating their own tenancy policies.
- 3.2 Officers, working with key registered provider partners, have prepared a draft Tenancy Strategy following consultation on the key issues. A Members working group was also pivotal in the formation of the draft Strategy.
- 3.3 The Committee discussed the purpose and focus of the Strategy, in particular the key issues from section seven, which specifically provided guidance on tenancy matters, setting out the Council's position.
- 3.4 The Committee's comments and suggestions were taken into account when drafting the final version of the Tenancy Strategy which appears on this Council agenda for approval.

4. Article 4 Direction Task and Finish Group: Progress Report

- 4.1 The Article 4 Direction Task and Finish Group was set up in July 2011, and has since met several times, tasked with improving the effectiveness and management of Article 4 Directions within Bury St Edmunds.
- 4.2 As part of this work, officers had identified several parts of the Conservation Area boundaries in need of updating, and the Committee had previously agreed to refer this issue to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party for consideration. The Working Party had subsequently referred the proposed boundary amendments to Cabinet for approval for consultation.
- 4.3 Work was also continuing on a full assessment of the implications of the current permitted development rights which allow the installation of solar panels and photovoltaic cells on front roof slopes within Conservation Areas, and the implications of the blanket and selective approaches to making Article 4 Directions. The next meeting of the Task and Finish Group was to take place following the close of the consultation period.

5. Footways in St Edmundsbury

- 5.1 A Task and Finish Group was looking at "the variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre", and the Committee had asked whether the remit of this review could be widened to include the 'outskirts' of the town.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed the responsibility for the inspection and maintenance of footways to adopted streets in St Edmundsbury, which was the responsibility of the County Council. Intervention criteria determined the level of "defect" before remedial measures were undertaken, and regular inspections were made of all areas of footway.
- 5.3 Members were advised that any specific issues concerning footways to individual estates should be passed to the County Council Highways Western Area Office, but that if Members still wished to pursue the issue, or the intervention criteria or inspection regime, through scrutiny, it would be more appropriate to do this through the County Council's scrutiny processes. The Borough Council had no powers to "require" County Council involvement in its reviews, whereas the County's scrutiny process did have this power.
- 5.4 Members raised two issues which they felt may affect the County Council's intervention criteria, and asked that these be passed on to the Western Area Highways Office with a request that these issues be taken into account when the County Council next reviews its intervention criteria.

B: 18 APRIL 2012 MEETING

1. Work Programme: Update

- 1.1 Two reviews were completed at this meeting, "Universal Coverage of Broadband in St Edmundsbury" and "Review of the Continuing Success of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre".
- 1.2 A review of car parking charges throughout the Borough was added at the meeting, and will aim to secure a clear way forward for future years' car parking charges in the context of the Council's budget.
- 1.3 Finally, the "Commitment to and expectations of the new Health Agenda" Task and Finish Group was disbanded, as the new legislation had not made any changes to the responsibilities of districts. This meant that a total of six Task and Finish Groups were currently being run by the Committee.

2. Final report of the Task and Finish Group: Universal Coverage of Broadband in St Edmundsbury

- 2.1 Following the successful bid for £22m funding to provide Broadband to those areas of Suffolk without it, and to provide minimum download speeds in others, the scope of this review had been amended to be "an investigation into general Broadband coverage and infrastructure availability across the Borough, to include identifying areas currently receiving poor Broadband service and determining minimum standards considered acceptable regarding Broadband coverage and speed."
- 2.2 The Task and Finish Group met on two occasions, and discussed the scope of the Suffolk Better Broadband Review, and how they could influence the project. It was acknowledged that this programme was designed to do exactly what Members commenced their own review to do, ie to reduce Broadband inequalities. The scope of the review had, therefore, been achieved following the success of the £22m bid.

2.3 The Committee resolved that the Task and Finish Group would only meet again should it become necessary to review the progress of the Better Broadband for Suffolk project.

3. Report of the Task and Finish Group: The Variable Quality of Paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre

3.1 This Task and Finish Group met in February 2012 to explore the rationale/criteria behind the County Council's maintenance standards, and how the specification of the paving for the town centre was arrived at. Steve Boor, the County Council's Area Highway Manager (West), was in attendance at the meeting, which also included a site visit.

3.2 The Group explored a number of lines of enquiry, and accepted that, due to County Council policies and health and safety requirements, wholesale replacement of the slabs was unlikely, and that as the County Council budget covered the whole of the County, the area of paving of concern in the centre of Bury St Edmunds was not necessarily a high priority compared to other areas of footway.

3.3 The Group's work resulted in a number of aspirational recommendations to both the Borough and County Council which were brought to the April 2012 meeting of the Committee. However, following a wide ranging discussion, the Committee asked that the Task and Finish Group put together a list of areas of particularly poor paving across the Borough, which could be forwarded to the County Council Highways Office alongside any other recommendations of the Task and Finish Group which may be brought back to the Committee at a later date. Councillor Ms Byrne was added to the Membership of the Task and Finish Group, in order to cover the Haverhill end of the Borough.

4. Review of the Continuing Success of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre

4.1 A Task and Finish Group was set up by the Committee at its November 2011 meeting to observe the 2011 Christmas Fayre, and then to work with officers on the future direction of the Fayre. The aim of the review was to ensure that the Fayre continued to benefit the town and visitors.

4.2 During its meetings the Task and Finish Group collected details of all elements of the Fayre, including stallholder information, Fayre expenditure and organisation. The Group's report to Committee included facts around the 2011 Fayre, and set out the various areas of the review.

4.3 Extensive consultation was carried out, and the consultation results and data collected, together with the Group Members' own observations of the Fayre, led to a number of recommendations being put forward, which were endorsed by the Committee and approved by Cabinet on 23 May 2012. The recommendations included the investigation of additional and/or alternative sites for Park and Ride, a system of segmentation of areas, a new Vision Statement for the Fayre, provision of a map to advertise other routes and quieter times around the town, investigation of the utilisation of other parts of the town, investigation of the legal position of holding the Market during the three days of the Fayre, and development of an online questionnaire to receive customer feedback and additional information on Fayre users.

5. Interim Report of the Task and Finish Group: Litter Collection and Litter/Dog Bin Distribution in the Borough

5.1 Following two meetings, the Task and Finish Group brought an update on its work to date to the Committee. This provided background to contextualise the cleansing service in relation to the Council's statutory responsibilities, reviewed the initial scope of the Task and Finish Group and operational changes made to date in furthering these issues, and

reviewed the Joint Waste Committee approved framework for future provision, maintenance and servicing arrangements for dog and litter bins.

6. Interim Report of the Task and Finish Group: The Co-ordination of Licensing, Planning and Enforcement Functions Relating to Street Vending (the "A Boards" Review)

- 6.1 The Committee was updated on the work carried out to date by this Task and Finish Group, and that planned for the next phase of the review. The Group had met twice, at the first meeting examining the issues involved, and at the second looking at best practice from elsewhere and at some proposals to address the issues raised.
- 6.2 The Group had concluded that the issue was far more complex than it first appeared, and also that the issue was divisive. The Group had agreed that the best way to address the issues would be to draw up a policy on A Boards, to consult on it, to publicise it and to implement it. The next step was therefore for the Group to consider a policy and to look at the complex legal and financial implications of implementing it. This is intended to be brought to the July 2012 meeting of the Committee.

C: 6 JUNE 2012 MEETING

1. Work Programme Update, Suggestions for Scrutiny, and Re-appointment to Task and Finish Groups and other Groups

- 1.1 Members reviewed the current position of the work programme, and noted the items which were expected at the next meeting of the Committee in July 2012. Additionally, Councillors Houlder, Oliver and Mrs P Warby were nominated to attend a hearing which will review the progress of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership following an invitation being received from Cambridgeshire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Once the date has been determined, two of the three Members nominated will attend.
- 1.2 In a separate report, the Committee re-appointed to the six Task and Finish Groups currently running, as follows:-
1. The variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre;
 2. The co-ordination of licensing, planning and enforcement functions relating to street vending (the "A Boards" Review);
 3. Litter collection and dog/litter bin distribution in the Borough;
 4. Conservation Area Policy/Article 4 Directions;
 5. The impact on customers and stakeholders of the Council joining the Anglia Revenues Partnership; and
 6. Review of car parking charges throughout the Borough.
- 1.3 Finally, the Committee re-appointed three Members to the Diversity Group for 2012/2013 (with the proviso that Membership may need to be re-visited should a joint Diversity Group with Forest Heath District Council be formed), and nominated Councillor Beckwith as the Council's representative on the Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2012/2013.

2. Review of car parking charges throughout the Borough

- 2.1 As a Member of the Task and Finish Group looking into the above topic, I took the opportunity to give the Committee a brief update on the first meeting of the Group, which had taken place on 30 May 2012. A further meeting of the Group has been set for 12 June 2012, where officers will assist with gathering the information the Group needs to inform the review.
- 2.2 The Committee will receive a further short update at its 11 July meeting, and on 5 September will receive the draft report of the Task and Finish Group, setting out any recommendations. That will be the commencement of wide consultation. At the 24 October meeting the final recommendations of the Group will be presented to the Committee, and subject to the Committee's approval, these will be presented to Cabinet on 18 November 2012.
- 2.3 I would invite any Members with urgent issues related to car parking charges which cannot wait until the consultation element of the review commences, to email me direct, and I will ensure your comments feed into the review.

3. Cabinet Annual Report 2011/2012

- 3.1 The Constitution requires that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive reports from the Leader of the Council or representative(s) of Cabinet, either prior to the commencement of each financial year or at its first meeting after each Annual Council meeting on "the state of the Borough", the Cabinet's priorities and its performance in the previous year.
- 3.2 The Leader of the Council attended this meeting of the Committee, and presented the Cabinet's Annual Report for 2011/2012. The Committee examined the document in detail, questioning the Leader on the report's contents, including extensive discussions on a number of areas of the report.
- 3.3 Issues discussed included the continuing consultation on Vision 2031, actions taken to bring empty homes back into use, actions taken to ensure empty business premises were let, and the timetable for the transfer of community centres to be run by their local communities, following the success of the transfer of Southgate Community Centre.
- 3.4 Finally, a discussion was held on the closure of the Crown Health Centre in Haverhill, with Haverhill Members advising the Committee of actions being taken both to lobby against the closure, including raising the issue with the Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and also to ensure that healthcare funding in Haverhill did not reduce following the closure.

4. Monitoring the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

- 4.1 The Committee received its annual update on the progress of the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. It is the duty of the Committee, as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee designated under the Police and Justice Act 2006, to scrutinise the work of the Partnership.
- 4.2 The Council's Head of Neighbourhood Development, Cathy Manning, introduced the report, and updated Members on the work of the CSP during 2011/2012 (including projects being run both by the West Suffolk Partnership and the Safer Suffolk Partnership), and the election of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and formation of Police and Crime Panels (PCPs). PCPs will hold PCCs to account, and will have a significant effect on the Partnership, including on its funding.

- 4.3 Details of end-of-year police crime statistics were provided as an appendix to the report, together with statistics provided by the St Edmundsbury Anti-Social Behaviour Co-located Team. Discussions were held on a number of elements of the report, including on whether incidents of crime had increased since the street lights in many residential areas were now switched off between midnight and 5am. Several Members advised the Committee that their requests to turn back on certain lights where they could make a case for this, for example where a light was outside sheltered housing or there were traffic issues, had been agreed by the County Council. However, this was not possible in every case.