



Council 27 September 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;
- Property, Asset, Facility and Estate Management (including West Suffolk House);
- Rural Affairs;
- Shared Services;
- External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships; and
- Vision 2031

1. Shared Services

- 1.1 We are now much closer to having a Joint Leadership Team in place and working consistently across both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath councils. The Directors' appointment process started earlier this month, and the process for appointing our new Heads of Service will also be completed shortly. I look forward to working with the Chief Executive and the new team to develop a strong working relationship with Councillors at both councils.
- 1.2 There is a clue in the title – this team's role is leadership, not simply management. As services join together, staff are working not only across council boundary lines on a map of West Suffolk, but also across internal boundaries. The Joint Leadership Team's role will be to ensure we have staff with the right competencies to deliver our priorities and to encourage cooperation and coordination across all services as well as geographic boundaries.
- 1.3 With fewer staff, but little sign of any decrease in demand for services, we need people (including Councillors!) who are flexible and able to work outside their traditional areas of responsibility. This flexibility will enable us to continue to deliver good quality services across West Suffolk.
- 1.4 Alongside this change in the style of work for our staff is the customer access strategy and this is progressing well. We aim to give our customers easier access to services at times which suit them, usually through better use of technology. Wherever possible, we need to simplify things for our residents and we are looking at common activities such as bookings, applications and payments to see where improvements can be made.

- 1.5 A proposed operating model will be presented to the Shared Services Steering Group in October for discussion. The customer is very much at the heart of this process and I am confident that it will deliver improved customer service even in the context of reduced resources.
- 1.6 The Joint Leadership Team is also a significant element of our savings target of £2.3 million across both councils. While there are inevitably costs associated with change (such as redundancy costs) we must remember that these are one-off costs, whilst the savings are permanent. Any costs will be paid back within two years, and usually within a much shorter time. The gains, in shared expertise as well as savings, will continue to benefit West Suffolk well into the future.
- 1.7 I am confident that we are well on track to deliver the challenging savings we have set ourselves and that this work will put us in a good position to respond to the next round of future government settlements and other funding pressures.

2. Communications

- 2.1 Progress continues in building the West Suffolk Communications Team as its members learn more about each council. While each council has its own individual identities, Councillors, issues and priorities, as more services come together there will be more shared communications.
- 2.2 The team is already issuing a number of joint media releases, for example about the senior management restructure, and these are likely to increase as services join up their policies and devise new ways of working. The communications team will also continue to support services to develop clear, cost-effective communications with their customers.
- 2.3 There is a great deal of focus on internal communications across both councils as we go through the senior management restructure, and subsequent restructure of services. Staff at all levels at both councils will be adopting very different responsibilities, methods of working and service delivery. The communications team is working closely with the Chief Executive, and the HR and Learning and Development Teams to support these changes.
- 2.4 There is one staff change to note – Jill Carter, temporary Publications and Support Officer left in August, with our thanks.
- 2.5 Finally, while the communications update is usually more about what's on the horizon, there are two activities which I believe deserve special praise. The first is the team's response, along with many others across St Edmundsbury, to the devastating Cupola House fire. Sally Easton became involved with communications to the media and public at an early stage and maintained detailed updates for a number of weeks afterwards. The Council's response, and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders, has been welcomed by many in the town. A very good example of teamwork.
- 2.6 The Council now has a new website which has improved navigation, is better structured and generally easier to use. Working closely with ICT colleagues and members of the new web update team, E-Communications Officer Justine Salmon put in a tremendous number of hours, including at weekends, to help get the website up and running. The website will continue to evolve as service delivery changes and the team is still making corrections or additions where necessary. If you spot any problems please email web.updates@stedsbc.gov.uk.

3. Economic Development

3.1 Business Festival

- (a) I had the pleasure of once again opening this year's Business Festival, which ran from 11 to 21 September. It was a resounding success, largely because it offered something for everyone – from young entrepreneurs and those with a new business idea, to growing and well-established businesses – and is a wonderful example of partnership working at its best.
- (b) The aim this year was to expand the geographical location of the events throughout West Suffolk, and we welcomed two new events into the programme which were held in Newmarket, thanks to Suffolk, Haverhill and Cambridge Chambers of Commerce.
- (c) Other events included the Menta Trade Fair; a Suffolk International Trade Group focus on China with the China-Britain Business Council and UK Trade and Investment; Question Time with Bid4Bury; workshops on intellectual property, the online presentation tool, 'Prezi', the art of leadership and more; networking business breakfasts and lunches; and the Bury Free Press Business Awards.
- (d) The 'Fresh Festival', a new event for this year's festival, was popular and inspiring for the 16 to 30 year olds that attended. The event celebrated the imagination, diversity and creativity of young entrepreneurs in the Eastern region and illustrated the sheer depth and breadth of alternative options to full time employment.

3.2 Haverhill Research Park

- (a) Haverhill Research Park, a £100 million project on a 30 acre site, is to be the new home for technology companies on the Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire border. There will be up to 450,000 sq ft of office/laboratory/technology and supporting accommodation for a wide spectrum of companies from start-ups to international companies. Proposals being worked up include an innovation centre, grow-on space and bespoke buildings, a hotel, family pub/restaurant, crèche and housing.
- (b) The developer, Carisbrooke Investments, has recently sold 9.17 acres of residential land to Taylor Wimpey East Anglia, who are now progressing their proposals for a residential scheme comprising 150 new homes, from starter units through to executive homes (the scheme will include a number of affordable homes).
- (c) New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP) were allocated Growing Places funding by Government to unlock projects and initiatives that could help support the creation of new jobs and economic growth. Both LEPs received numerous project proposals, each of which were reviewed against a series of criteria including job creation, deliverability of the project, value for money and consistency with the LEP priorities. Subject to contract and conditions, Haverhill Research Park was one of the few that was awarded a loan (£2 million from NALEP and £2 million from GCGP).

4. Property, Asset, Facility And Estate Management

4.1 Property and Estate Management

The joint FHDC and SEBC team is now firmly established and working effectively across the two districts.

4.2 Asset Management

(a) Hamlet Croft

I am pleased to report that Bloor Homes completed the purchase of the Hamlet Croft residential site at the end of August. A small population of slow worms that were found in two areas of the site have been successfully relocated offsite. It is anticipated that building works will start later this year.

(b) Vinefields Farm, Bury St Edmunds

The grant of access rights across a strip of land at East Close was completed in May 2012. This will enable Hopkins Homes to develop Vinefields Farm housing site. The Council received its share of the capital value of the residential development site in early August.

4.3 Facilities Management

The Haverhill House office refurbishment project has now been completed and Building Induction Briefings have been carried out for Suffolk County Council staff as they commenced the use of the first floor of the building at the beginning of July. The Induction Briefings were well received by all and feedback from staff remains positive as they continue to enjoy their new working environment. The official opening of the building takes place on 30 October 2012.

5. Rural Affairs

5.1 A rural initiatives grant of £8,000 has been awarded to Fornham All Saints Parish Council towards a skatepark. A grant of £5,000 has been awarded to Kedington Community Association towards the upgrade of their current heating and hot water system at Kedington Community Centre. A grant of £2,500 has been awarded to the Combined Halls of Clare towards the refurbishment of their kitchen and bar area. A grant of £1,500 has been awarded to Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council towards a new village sign for Ixworth Thorpe. A grant of £2,712 has been awarded to Stanton Parish Council towards the urgent replacement of the underground sewage pipe from the village hall and recreation ground. A grant of £320 has been awarded to Brockley Carpet Bowls Club towards a new carpet bowls carpet.

5.2 The date for the next Parish Conference has been arranged for Thursday 22 November 2012, 6pm, at Great Whelnetham Community Centre. David Ruffley MP is due to attend.

5.3 The Rural Area Working Party met on 3 September 2012. Items discussed included the planning of the Parish Conference, the Rural Vision 2031 consultation responses and gypsy and traveller sites.

6. Vision 2031

- 6.1 As stated in my report to the June meeting of full Council, reports summarising the main points raised during the draft Vision 2031 documents consultation exercise have now been reported to various Working Parties. All of the responses received are now being assessed and the documents are currently being revised where necessary to take account of what has been said before bringing them before Members for consideration.
- 6.2 These planning documents, as with the Core Strategy, will require sufficient and robust background evidence to support their content and policies. These will need to be in place before the Vision documents are placed before a Planning Inspector for examination. In particular, other organisations such as the Highways Agency and Suffolk County Council will need to be satisfied that the proposals will not have a detrimental impact on the highway network which cannot be overcome through improvements. Developers of major sites also recognise this need in order to support their planning applications. Developers in Bury St Edmunds have previously commissioned and funded the collection of traffic data in order to support the assessment of potential impact and specification of required mitigation works. This data collection was carried out in June 2011 in accordance with guidelines agreed by the County Council and Highways Agency, and is required to provide a basis for modelling impact. However, in analysing the data, the County Council and Highways Agency consultants have found some limitations that require further surveys to be carried out. The developers, who continue to fund this work, were not able to commission the surveys prior to the start of the Summer school holidays. The list of highways projects is being prepared for Bury St Edmunds and, as a consequence, the Borough Council will not proceed with consultation on the final draft Bury St Edmunds Vision 2031 document until the mitigation projects have been agreed by both highways authorities. This also takes into account the concerns raised regarding the traffic movements across the town.
- 6.3 Given the above, it is now likely that the draft documents will be considered by Members in February 2013 at the earliest, when they will be asked to approve the amended documents for consultation. These delays are unfortunate, but the Council remains insistent that the final consultation documents should be as complete and robust as possible.

7. West Suffolk Partnership (WSP)

- 7.1 The WSP has had a slightly slow start, but we do now have support arrangements in place which will help the partnership get established. You may know that when the secondment arrangement for the previous manager came to an end it was decided to invite expressions of interest in providing support from members of the partnership and the third sector. Newmarket and District Chamber of Commerce were successful in getting a contract to supply that resource.
- 7.2 Since being appointed they have spent time working on the website for the partnership and are now focussing on arranging a meeting of the Strategic Group in October and finding a suitable date for the launch of the WSP Network. This is an important part of the partnership as it will be a place for groups and individuals to engage with the partnership and help shape the areas it focuses on. Details of the launch event will be put in the Members' Bulletin when they have been finalised.