



## Council 27 September 2012

### CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

#### *Report by Cllr Anne Gower, Housing, Licensing and Environmental Health Portfolio*

**Portfolio includes:**

- Haverhill
- Haverhill Masterplan;
- Haverhill Town Centre Management;  
Haverhill Youth and Community  
Development;
- Environmental Health
- Licensing; and
- Strategic Housing and Homelessness.

#### 1. **Environmental Health and Licensing**

1.1 The 'transitional' staff structure for Environmental Health and Licensing is now in place, with the shared team for St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath organised into three teams. The details are as follows:-

- (a) **Environment** – dealing with Corporate Environmental Management, Air Quality, Contaminated Land, Environmental Permitting, Climate Change, Sustainability, Carbon Reduction, Energy Efficiency, Private Water Supplies and Fuel Poverty. This team is managed by Peter Gudde; the specialist lead is Keith Mumford, who is also the specialist lead for Public Health and Housing.
- (b) **Business Regulation and Licensing** – dealing with Food Safety and Hygiene, Health and Safety, Infectious Disease Control, Licensing Registration Administration, Licensing Enforcement and Licensing Committee. The team is managed by Tom Wright; the specialist lead on Licensing is Hilary Workman; specialist lead on Food Safety and Hygiene, Health and Safety and Infectious Disease Control is Julie Lynch.
- (c) **Public Health and Housing** – dealing with Housing Standards, Housing Policy, Housing Grants, Drainage, Filthy and Verminous Premises, Caravan Site, National Assistance Burials, Public Health Nuisance and Stray Dogs. This team is managed by Andy Newman, with specialist lead Keith Mumford.

1.2 As well as bringing the teams together, this interim structure delivers some immediate savings. Work is continuing to develop the longer-term 'transformational' structure for 2013 which will take into account the new customer access strategy. Members will also start to see evidence at Cabinet, scrutiny committees and Licensing and Regulatory

Committee of a new more coordinated approach to environmental health and licensing policy and procedures between the two councils.

- 1.3 An example of this is the Joint Homes Assistance Policy approved by both Councils (*the Joint Policy was agreed by Cabinet on 25 July 2012 and is to be approved at this Council meeting*). Both Councils have similar priorities in terms of their overall approach to housing, which seeks to ensure safe and suitable accommodation for residents, either through advice, enforcement or assistance. The Joint Housing Assistance Policy sets a framework for the provision of assistance and support to property owners and occupiers who are unable to meet the cost of repair or renewal from their own resources. It recognises that the prime responsibility for maintaining properties rests with the individual property owner, and that many owners have equity available that can be used to fund works to their homes. Equally there is recognition that some owners may be unable to access finance and will need support from public funds. The assistance available in the revised policy is broadly similar to this Council's previous policy.
- 1.4 As reported by Councillor Everitt, for the first two weeks in July, officers from the Commercial and Food Team of Environmental Health supported colleagues from the Neighbourhoods Team in the annual Crucial Crew event at West Suffolk College. The event was aimed at 10-11 year old school pupils, and looks at many aspects of personal safety. The environmental health team focused on food safety, with practical demonstrations of hand washing and hazard spotting in the calamity kitchen. Over the two weeks just under 1200 pupils attended and positive feedback was received from accompanying teachers.

## **2. Fuel Poverty**

- 2.1 The Council has been actively participating in a Department of Health funded initiative to support vulnerable people in the county with their home heating and energy efficiency. The aim of the Department of Health-supported *Warm Homes Healthy People* project is to reduce the risk of cold-related illness or early death in vulnerable Suffolk residents living in cold homes. This is achieved through a range of free local authority interventions including home insulation and assisting with home heating.
- 2.2 Since February 2012, over 1,000 Suffolk households have received advice with around 600 households being referred onwards for cavity wall or loft insulation measures, while over 180 households have received a payment to help with heating their home. In West Suffolk, 299 households received advice from the project team with 147 households being referred onwards for insulation measures, while 48 households have received a fuel payment.

## **3. Community Safety**

- 3.1 West Suffolk Domestic Abuse Forum – following a merger of the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury forums earlier in the year, the group has now elected a new chair and vice chair. This is an issue I feel passionately about so I am delighted that the group chose me to be its Chairman, and Councillor Maureen Byrne as Vice Chairman. We will be leading the group to form an action plan which supports the County and National strategies and raises awareness of domestic abuse locally. My first job as Chair is to make sure we have the right people round the table and to define our focus and identify deliverable outcomes.

#### 4. Community Development

- 4.1 Big Day Out, Haverhill – staff from the Community Development Unit helped wristband over 1200 adults and children on one of the few hot days in August. Run by Haverhill Town Council, Big Day Out contributes to the health and wellbeing agenda as it mixes family fun with access to a wide range of information from volunteering and community education through to access to money advice and the foodbank. It is an annual fixture in the summer calendar of events for Haverhill, and I am pleased that the Council, along with a range of organisations working with families, continues to support the event.
- 4.2 ONE Haverhill Community Budget – as I write this report the draft operational plan for the budget is being put together. Extensive community engagement has been carried out over the summer and is continuing into early autumn with some specific events – such as attendance at the Golden Age Fair in the town and a ‘game’ for young people which helps them look at the competing demands on the money all ONE Haverhill Board organisations spend in the town. Early feedback from the surveys completed over the summer has identified the following priorities:-
- (a) **Young people theme:** support for young people with special needs and a feeling that more needs to be done to help young people with skills and training, apprenticeships and finding jobs;
  - (b) **Physical environment theme:** there were generally high levels of satisfaction with the quality of grass verges, open spaces and recycling but there was less satisfaction with the quality of roads and pavements with potholes being a particular issue and the presence of litter, including glass and some drug paraphernalia, in recreation areas and play grounds; and
  - (c) other issues outside of the two themes which residents also commented on were the closure of the NHS walk-in centre and a perception that the turning off of street lights in some areas of the town at midnight mean that crime was increasing.

I will keep you informed of the final outcome of the community engagement work and the development of joined-up solutions to the issues which come out of it in future reports.

- 4.3 Haverhill Street JAM – the event, organised by St Edmundsbury officers and funded by Haverhill Town Council, was held on 18 August on the Market Square in Haverhill. The day featured Graffiti workshops, Live DJ's, Football Cage, Skate Park, Beat Boxers, Break Dancing and Street Dance Crew to name just a few of the activities on offer during the day. The day was attended by over 300 young people.
- 4.4 Haverhill Graffiti Project – A two day Graffiti project, organised and funded by St Edmundsbury Borough Council, was completed at Haverhill Skate Park and was attended by over 30 young people. It has greatly improved the appearance of the park and has created greater ownership of the facility by young people.
- 4.5 Golden Age Fair – Yesterday, members of Haverhill's Older People's Forum held a Golden Age Network event at the Art Centre. The free-to-attend event will have provided an opportunity for older people to find out more about the services available to them and was attended by a range of organisations offering advice and information. I support this Forum by chairing their meetings and am confident it will have been a very well-received event.
- 4.6 As mentioned in Councillor Mildmay-White's report, the Torch Relay on 7 July was a wonderful occasion in Haverhill, and got everyone in the mood for a brilliant Olympics and Paralympics. As in Bury, several Borough Councillors were part of a large stewarding team put together for the day, and I think I can speak for all of them in congratulating the many

organisations involved in organising and supervising the event. The large crowds were enthusiastic and welcoming, and did the town proud. As well as being great for local residents, it also attracted many visitors. Those visitors that I spoke to while stewarding gave really positive feedback about their visit.

## 5. Housing and Homelessness

### 5.1 Homelink Stats

The demand on Home-Link (housing register) continues to rise, with a gradual but significant increase of applicants in high housing need (Bands A and B). The Housing Options Team work pro-actively on initiatives to advise and support applicants towards a variety of housing solutions.

<b>Home-Link Stats (SEBC)</b>						
<b>Date</b>	01-Apr-12	01-May-12	01-Jun-12	01-Jul-12	Aug-12	01-Sep-12
<b>Band A</b>	104	112	115	110	119	124
<b>Band B</b>	179	156	162	169	186	188
<b>Band C</b>	1132	1023	1071	1086	1095	1134
<b>Band D</b>	716	601	616	620	626	642
<b>Total</b>	<b>2131</b>	<b>1892</b>	<b>1964</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2088</b>
<b>Homeseeker</b>	1661	1478	1538	1545	1578	1619
<b>Transfer</b>	470	414	426	440	448	469
<b>1 Bedroom</b>	1154	1004	1049	1048	1065	1111
<b>2 Bedroom</b>	687	636	653	668	690	703
<b>3 Bedroom</b>	223	193	198	196	204	206
<b>4 Bedroom</b>	61	52	55	58	58	59
<b>5 Bedroom</b>	6	7	8	8	8	8
<b>Single</b>	949	824	855	850	868	907
<b>Couple</b>	311	274	282	292	290	294
<b>Family with children</b>	819	745	775	792	813	833
<b>Other household types</b>	52	49	52	51	56	54
<b>Statutory Homeless</b>	43	55	59	64	67	75
<b>Homeless Prevention</b>	72	62	63	67	75	70
<b>Homeless Other</b>	225	205	213	213	214	227
<b>Over 65s</b>	211	188	193	194	196	212

- 5.2 Our new service, called the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership (WSLP), for private landlords and letting agents is now up and running, with the official launch due to take place in October at our first ever Landlord's Conference. Our new service offers something different to private landlords and letting agents, including deposit bonds for the duration of tenancies, free inventory inspections as well as tenancy advice and support. The WSLP is led by our Landlord Liaison Officer, Darryl Durno, who acts as West Suffolk's Private Letting Co-ordinator. Darryl is working across St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Housing Options Teams to ensure there is one approach to the private sector and one dedicated officer for landlords to speak to. Many landlords are making contact, and we already have 6 private landlords working with us under our new name.
- 5.3 A fantastic new affordable housing scheme was opened by Councillor John Griffiths in the village of Bardwell in July. It was developed following a local housing needs study by Hastoe Housing and 8 homes were built for people with a local connection to Bardwell. Six of the homes were for rent, and 2 for shared ownership, and all the homes have been successfully occupied.
- 5.4 A project group within the Home-Link Partnership are currently developing a new on-line pre-assessment and application form which will enable applicants to receive tailored housing options advice from the website.

- 5.5 This week the Home-Link mutual exchange service has been re-launched, allowing applicants to access more accurate and up-to-date information. The service has been linked to other mutual exchange providers to give access to exchange opportunities across other areas and other housing providers country-wide.
- 5.6 The Strategic Housing Team is now into its third month of Shared Services under the transitional staffing structure. They are currently looking at how processes can be tweaked to make working across West Suffolk more efficient, sharing best practice and trialling new ways of working within the team. Monthly team meetings have been established and feedback from staff so far is that communication is key, especially now we have a larger team spread across two locations.
- 5.7 As Members will be aware, there are significant changes to the Welfare system which will impact on housing being introduced. Information briefings have already been included in Members' Bulletin, and it is planned to include several more briefings on the main issues as further guidance is available. It is also planned to hold a Members awareness session regarding the impact on housing in the near future.

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