



Council

27 September 2012

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

This report covers the meetings of the Committee held on 11 July and 5 September 2012.

A. 11 JULY 2012 MEETING

- 1. Work Programme Update and Presentation from Forest Heath District Council – Educational Attainment**
 - 1.1 Two suggestions for scrutiny were considered at this meeting. Firstly, during 2011/12 Forest Heath DC had undertaken a review of educational attainment in the District, and it had been suggested that St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to carry out a similar review for the Borough. To this end a presentation was given by the Chairman of Forest Heath DC's Task and Finish Group, and other Members who had been involved in the review.
 - 1.2 Following a question and answer session and a debate on the issue, further information on the review was requested, pending a final decision being made at the September meeting of the Committee as to whether the expected outcomes and value of running such a review would be balanced by the resources required to run it.
 - 1.3 The second suggestion for scrutiny had come from Councillor Thorndyke, who wished to look into the condition of the Olding Road skatepark and the future provision for skate boarding in Bury St Edmunds.
 - 1.4 Officers advised that regular safety inspections were made to ensure the equipment was safe to use. Any equipment deemed unable to be safely repaired was removed. The equipment was, however, nearing the end of its life, and plans were in place to remove the current skatepark in the Autumn with a view to a new concrete park being provided from 2013 onwards.
 - 1.5 A lengthy debate on the issue was held, with some Members making the point that by the time a Task and Finish Group was up and running, the skatepark would have been closed.

The Committee resolved not to set up a Task and Finish Group to look into the issue, as it felt it was being adequately managed by officers.

2. Interim Report of the Task and Finish Group – Review of car parking charges throughout the Borough

- 2.1 I presented an update to the Committee on the work of the Task and Finish Group, which had met three times since the Committee set up the Group in April 2012. A scoping meeting had taken place in May 2012, which set the Terms of Reference for the Review, followed by the first information gathering meeting in June 2012. This had been followed by a second information gathering meeting on 2 July 2012, at which the Group had commenced reviewing the evidence gathered to date.
- 2.2 The Group aims to bring draft recommendations to the September meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, final recommendations to its October meeting, and if agreed, the final recommendations of the Committee will be brought through Cabinet in November 2012.

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

- 3.1 The Committee considered the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, which had been formulated at a meeting and site visit held on 21 February 2012. The report had been further updated following the request of the Committee to put together a list of areas of poor areas of paving across the Borough.
- 3.2 The report set out the background to the review, and the lines of enquiry followed by Members during their site visit and meeting with the County Council's Area Highway Manager (West) in February 2012. Taking all the information gathered into account, the Task and Finish Group had accepted that unless the paving in the areas concerned deteriorated to an extent whereby it was more economic to repair the entire stretch of paving than to continue with running repairs, wholesale replacement of the slabs was unlikely. The County Council budget covered the whole of the County, and 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 Committee agreed to send the Task and Finish Group's recommendations to the County Council and the Cabinet. Recommendations to the County Council concerned the quality of paving and prioritisation of the development of historic town centres, as well as a list of areas of poor paving across the Borough which it requested be taken into consideration when prioritising areas of paving for repair.
- 3.4 Recommendations to the Cabinet were that contributions towards maintaining and developing Bury St Edmunds Town Centre be added to the list of desirable contributions through Community Infrastructure Levy for new developments; and that the Town Centre Masterplan element of the Council's Vision 2031 document include an aspiration to invest in a high quality, low maintenance public realm, and these were approved.

4. 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)

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group had looked at this issue in detail, and had tried to strike a balance between the concerns of residents that the proliferation of A Boards was detracting from the amenity of the area, with the needs of business to advertise their goods in this difficult economic climate.

- 4.2 In investigating this issue, the Group had gathered a lot of information, and considered a number of options on a way forward on this issue, which in brief were: the status quo; do nothing and leave regulation to the highway authority; ban all A Boards; introduce a revised permitting scheme; and introduce voluntary guidelines.
- 4.3 Having taken all its research and evidence into account, including the legal and financial implications of each option, the Task and Finish Group had concluded that its aim of balancing the needs of residents with the needs of businesses could only be achieved by the introduction of a revised permitting scheme that was equitable to all businesses.
- 4.4 The Task and Finish Group's recommendation that consultation take place on the preferred option was agreed by the Committee, however Members wished to make it clear that it was implicit in the recommendation that the consultation would explain the rationale behind the preferred option, including brief details of the options which were considered and rejected (and why), in order that consultees could comment on all options.
- 5. Interim Report of the Task and Finish Group – Article 4 Directions/Conservation Areas**
- 5.1 This Task and Finish Group had worked with officers to undertake a review of those places where the boundaries of the conservation areas were in need of updating. The Committee had referred the conservation area boundary proposals to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party (BAWP), which had undertaken consultation on proposed amendments to the two Bury St Edmunds conservation areas.
- 5.2 The Committee received a report which updated on the responses received to the consultation undertaken by BAWP, including the final boundaries of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre and Victoria Street Conservation Areas which Members were informed had been recommended by BAWP for formal adoption.
- 5.3 The Committee also noted the continuing work of the Task and Finish Group in reviewing the Article 4 Directions in Bury St Edmunds. The purpose of this area of work is to consider how the Article 4 Directions in the two Bury St Edmunds conservation areas could be more effectively managed, including the coverage of the Directions and also the impact of microgeneration on the conservation areas and whether this should be brought within the scope of Article 4 Directions.

B. 5 SEPTEMBER 2012 MEETING

- 1. Work Programme Update and Suggestion for Scrutiny – Educational Attainment**
- 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 October 2012. Under this update I circulated a consultation timetable for the "A Boards" review, proposing that the consultation approved at the last meeting would commence in Mid September, to run concurrently with the consultation on the wider Street Vending Policy, for a period of 10 weeks, with recommendations arising being brought to Cabinet on 13 February 2013, and full Council on 25 February 2013.
- 1.2 Also under this item, following a presentation at the last meeting from Members of Forest Heath District Council concerning their review of Educational Attainment, a "Suggestion for Scrutiny" form had been produced setting out the expected outcomes and value of carrying out a similar review in St Edmundsbury. Members felt that St Edmundsbury would probably not need to carry out as extensive a review as Forest Heath, as this would leave little time for other scrutiny reviews, but appointed four Members to a Task and Finish

Group to consider an update of the Forest Heath review's findings, revised to provide figures applicable to St Edmundsbury, and to make any necessary recommendations arising from consideration of the updated report. The review will commence when there is a gap in the review schedule (Members having made the decision that no more than 4 Member-suggested reviews should be running at any one time).

2. Cabinet Forward Plan – September to December 2012

- 2.1 The Committee considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period September to December 2012, and a discussion took place on the Two Year Review of the Apex, timetabled for consideration by Cabinet on 21 November 2012. Members wished to have the opportunity to comment on the proposals in the report, by way of a full scrutiny discussion. Officers were asked to find a solution whereby Overview and Scrutiny Members had the opportunity to scrutinise the report prior to Cabinet consideration. This may involve putting back the 24 October meeting of the Committee, holding a special meeting of the Committee in November, or another solution on which I was asked to liaise with officers.

3. Interim Report of the Task and Finish Group – Review of car parking charges throughout the Borough

- 3.1 I presented an update on the work of the above Task and Finish Group, which had met five times since the Committee set up the Group in April 2012. The Group aims to bring recommendations to the October 2012 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and if agreed, to bring the recommendations of the Committee through Cabinet in November 2012.
- 3.2 The consultation process for the review was discussed, and I advised that the first focus group was held with the Chamber of Commerce, Bury Society and Bid4Bury on 3 September 2012, at which a very helpful discussion had taken place and ideas put forward as to how to move forward for the next three years. The next focus group will be with the businesses themselves.
- 3.3 Additionally, following on from the Cabinet's consultation on car park charges prior to preparing the budget for 2012-13, the Task and Finish Group recommended that the Markets and Car Parks Team undertake further market research in the Borough's car parks to obtain the public's view on car parks across the Borough, and in particular to get a view on usage, the current tariffs and on how the Council should set future years' charges, and this recommendation was agreed by Cabinet.