



Council 18 December 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

Public Health and Housing

- 1.1 The Public Health and Housing Team, established on 1 August 2012 as part of the shared service, has continued the process of integration and delivery across both councils.
- 1.2 Richard Whitehead, the Principal Environmental Health Officer has left the council and I am pleased to confirm that Andy Newman is now managing the service. More recently, Keith Mumford, the Specialist Officer working across the shared service, has left. These changes will inevitably impact on the service and require different approaches in how we tackle the work. But, it provides an opportunity for us to take a fresh look at the systems and practices we want to adopt in light of the new customer access strategy.
- 1.3 The team are now focussing on a new joint enforcement policy to ensure a consistent approach to regulation across West Suffolk, with specific reference to areas such as private sector housing and the various enforcement options available to ensure compliance. They are also currently considering a joint approach to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), and have begun discussions with the Strategic Housing Team on including this as part of a wider Private Sector Housing Strategy. There are a number of HMOs within the Borough and it makes sense that we have a consistent approach in terms of identifying these, and enforcement of the standards.

- 1.4 The Public Health and Housing Team contributed to the Landlord's Conference held in Bury St Edmunds on Friday 2 November 2012. The officers involved were: Emma Grace, Carole Balding, Ann Ashby, Karen Cattle and Andy Newman. The Conference was designed to promote interest in the West Suffolk Landlord's Partnership (WSLP). The team did a question and answer session, where there was a debate around the importance of maintaining housing standards and safe lettings. The two housing teams will continue to work together to try and ensure that properties being let through the WSLP meet minimum standards and private Landlords are given appropriate advice prior to occupation of their properties. With demand for private rented sector increasing, there are clearly going to be challenges in terms of ensuring suitable housing.
- 1.5 The joint Housing Assistance Policy is now being implemented, with the new grants being offered to vulnerable home owners unable to carry out essential improvements and adaptations to their properties. The grants cover a range of different works, and the Suffolk Home Improvement Agency, Orbit East, help the Council to deliver this policy. There is a new empty home grant, for owners wishing to bring their property up to the decent home standard and who are prepared to rent it out to families on our housing register.

Commercial and Food

- 1.6 The food and safety team have just successfully bid for some external funding from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to implement changes to the way they capture and report information relating to their food sampling activities. The £1,300 will be used to update database software and train staff in the new system. Once installed the new system will ensure that all food sampling results are shared nationally and will allow the team access to other authorities' results. This will enable the team to better target resources and identify foods which should be included in the sampling programme.
- 1.7 Food is sampled and submitted for microbiological analysis; last year work was carried out looking at the effectiveness of cleaning in food businesses where raw and ready to eat food is prepared. This year work has been carried out on soda water dispensers in pubs and restaurants; this has highlighted problems with cleaning and the results will be used to develop some national standards for cleaning of soda machines.

Environmental Management

Fuel Poverty

- 1.8 Following the successful Department of Health-supported *Warm Homes Healthy People* project in the winter of 2011-12, the Council co-led and wrote a Suffolk-wide bid to continue and enhance the programme to reduce the risk of cold-related illness or early death in vulnerable Suffolk residents living in cold homes over winter 2012-13. The proposal incorporates a range of free interventions including home insulation and assistance with home heating.
- 1.9 The Department of Health announced on 9 November 2012 that the bid has been successful and the partners have been awarded in the region of £300,000 to undertake fuel poverty alleviation work across the County. The Environment Team will co-lead local authority involvement in the project, which will include working with Public Health, the GP Commissioning Groups, voluntary groups

and charities. Detailed project design is underway and the work will target vulnerable communities using road shows, home energy visits, and contact through GP practices along with more traditional communication routes including broadcast media.

Local Air Quality Management

- 1.10 Local authorities are required to review and assess local air quality to determine whether the Government's air quality objectives are likely to be achieved. Measurements of nitrogen dioxide taken in the vicinity of The Street, Great Barton, have shown that the annual mean level of nitrogen dioxide exceeds the objective level. Accordingly, an Air Quality Management Order was designated in 2010 on the understanding that it was sufficient for residential occupiers alone to be 'exposed'. In developing an action plan to try and mitigate the exceedence, further consideration of the requirements of the Act and accompanying Regulations has led your officers to question the legitimacy of the designation. Legal advice has confirmed that both the exceedence of the pollutant must be outside **and** that members of the public must be regularly present in that location.
- 1.11 The re-evaluation of the review and assessment of air quality in Great Barton, has confirmed that no members of the public are regularly present at that location. It is concluded that the Air Quality Management Area should not have been designated and that the Order should be revoked.

2. Youth and Community Development

2.1 Awareness raising for young people – drugs and alcohol misuse/healthy relationships

I am delighted that the two projects outlined in Councillor Everitt's report are active in Haverhill. The Matthew Project 'street team' will be working alongside the 'On the Spot' bus in the Market Square and with those young people who access the 'Chill out zone' at the Leisure Centre. The Catch 22 workshops will be provided for young people who have connections with the Cangle and Coupals Court.

2.2 Operation Gunpowder

Between 22 October and 3 November 2012, teams from St Edmundsbury, Havebury, the Police, Red Cross and the Volunteer Centre knocked on 1,313 homes around Haverhill to check that residents had the support they needed in the run up to Halloween and Bonfire Night. The goal was to reach those who felt lonely or vulnerable and may not have known about all the local services available to them. Residents were offered advice and assistance, and referred to specialist services to talk more about crime, fire safety or accommodation concerns. The teams spoke to 590 Haverhill residents, a few of whom were found to be in urgent need of more support, and 20 people were referred for further fire safety checks.

2.3 Community Centre Transfer

A community-based group in Haverhill has been in discussion with the Council about a potential transfer of the Chalkstone Community Centre. Although discussions are at an early stages officers are ensuring they receive the

information and support they require in order for them to be able to make an informed decision on whether or not to proceed.

3. Strategic Housing and Homelessness

- 3.1 We are currently consulting on the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which ends 14 December 2012 and the Empty Homes Strategy which ends 21 December 2012. If Members have any questions or comments then they should contact Kim Langley on 01638 719344 kim.langley@forest-heath.gov.uk.
- 3.2 The Cold Weather Provision at Tayfen House is now open, and will be as long as the weather remains inclement. There are 6 bed spaces available per night; users are issued with a sleeping bag, toiletry kit and this year Havebury have arranged for the Lighthouse Project to provide cold food each evening and morning to rough sleepers. Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI, a health and social care charity) and Open Road (a local drugs and alcohol charity) are prepared to accept referrals from them so that rough sleepers can shower. Referrals must be through the West Suffolk Housing Options Team. Placements are initially for 3 nights but may be extended. Users are expected to work with the Housing Options Team in finding alternative accommodation. Not having a permanent placement may give the user the incentive to engage with Housing Options. Users should have a local connection with either St Edmundsbury or Forest Heath. Sara Lomax, Housing Options Officer, is the contact officer between the Housing Options Team and Tayfen, and Sara is monitoring usage of the provision.

Suffolk Coordination Service (SCS) update

- 3.3 Following a competitive quotation process, the contract for the Suffolk Coordination Service software was awarded to Capita Business Services Ltd. Capita's product offers considerable functionality and their team bring with them a wealth of experience in working with supported housing providers and local authorities alike.
- 3.4 Members of the Project Team have since met with Capita on 6 November 2012 to undertake an initial Project Initiation Meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to plan the key phases and timescales for the implementation of the software for the SCS and across Short Term Accommodation Based Services (STABS). Full implementation across Suffolk is projected to take until May/June 2013.
- 3.5 To ensure the controlled management of change and active involvement of Service Providers during the roll-out and implementation of the SCS, the Project Working Group, which formed to evaluate the software suppliers, has now re-structured into a Steering Group and Implementation Team. As implementation lead the West Suffolk Housing Transformation Manager, Julia Vernon heads this team. Members include representatives from Suffolk County Supporting People team as well as supported housing providers across Suffolk.
- 3.6 We hope this adjustment will help ensure the Coordination Service and software meets the functional and operational requirements of Service Providers and best practice is adhered to whilst managing a project of this complexity.

3.7 Key accomplishments since last update:

- Procurement of the preferred software product and contract award to Capita.
- Expressions of interest from service staff willing to join the User Acceptance Testing (UAT).
- Project Implementation Meeting with Capita to set out the time-scales for the configuration and deployment of the software across STABS county-wide.
- Recruitment of second Coordination Service Officer (CSO).
- Project Working Group agreement to re-structure the group into a Steering Group and Implementation Team for the remainder of the project.
- Agreement of Terms of Reference for the Steering Group and Implementation Team.
- Suggestion and agreement from members of the newly formed Steering Group to proceed with a County-wide event to process map how STABS providers and the SCS will interact.

3.8 Upcoming tasks for this project phase:

- County-wide process mapping event on 18 December 2012, 1000–1300hrs, West Suffolk House.
- Continue consultation on the Single Application Form.
- Deepen engagement with service providers across the county about the project during forthcoming Locality Meetings on 5, 6 and 13 December.
- Continue building toward other aspects of the software configuration.