



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

D237

Council **18 December 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 24 October and 5 December 2012.

24 October 2012 meeting

1. Final Report of the Car Parking Charges Review Group

- 1.1 This review was prompted by the presentation of a petition to full Council on 28 February 2012 by Mr Mark Cordell, Chief Executive of Bid4Bury, regarding the "across the board" increase in car parking charges proposed from April 2012. The Leader of the Council responded by asking the Committee to carry out a review into car parking charges throughout the Borough to see if there were more entrepreneurial ways of charging.
- 1.2 A Task and Finish Group set up by the Committee carried out research into the background to previous years' charging changes, and gathered evidence to support changes to the charges from 2013 onwards. After meeting with the Bury Society, Bid4Bury, the Bury Chamber of Commerce, Bury and Haverhill Town Councils and local businesses, plus public surveys carried out across the car parks in September and October 2012, as well as looking in detail at each of the car parks in the Borough individually, the conclusions of the Review Group were that some car parking charges should alter, but that many should remain the same.
- 1.3 A number of other issues with regard to car parking also arose during the course of the review, and these were covered in the extensive recommendations brought to Cabinet in November. The Cabinet received the Committee's recommendations and intends to report back with its response on 12 December 2012, after the dispatch of this full Council agenda, and any actions agreed by Cabinet arising from the Committee's

recommendations will be incorporated in the normal budget setting process for 2013/2014.

2. Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and Guidance – Joint “West Suffolk” Policy

- 2.1 As the shared services programme with Forest Heath District Council progresses, and the joint staff structure is implemented, a Joint Safeguarding Policy for West Suffolk will be important to avoid any confusion on the process for referring concerns, along with contact details of where to go for advice and support. The Committee had input into the preparation of this joint policy, making some suggestions for amendment which were taken through to Cabinet and the version of the policy being approved by full Council today.
- 2.2 The joint policy enables Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury to fulfil their statutory obligations under the Children Act 2004 by establishing effective arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. The new Head of Housing for West Suffolk will take on responsibility as “designated officer”, alongside two deputy officers, whose contact details will be added to the policy, which will then be widely circulated. It is also important that future legislation changes are incorporated into the policy, and it will therefore be reviewed on an annual basis.

3. St Edmundsbury Tenancy Strategy Monitoring Report

- 3.1 The St Edmundsbury Tenancy Strategy was developed and approved through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and full Council in June 2012. In October 2012 the Committee carried out a six-month review of the Strategy’s impact.
- 3.2 Key issues discussed included the slowdown in the delivery of affordable homes and turnover of affordable housing, the continued increase in the demand for homes, affordable rents, under-occupancy, the number of single households on the register and the need for more one bedroom properties, communication of the housing reforms under the Localism Act to tenants, the need to be flexible and look at each case individually, and the need for the Housing and Planning teams to work closely with regard to affordable housing requirements in new developments.
- 3.3 An action plan is being worked on jointly with Forest Heath District Council, and a further joint report be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of both councils in April/May 2013.

5 December 2012 meeting

1. Two Year Review of the Apex

- 1.1 The Apex opened in October 2010. Prior to 2009, the Council had intended the new venue as a hall for hire, but it was decided at that time, given its potential, to invest in the building operationally as a programmed arts venue. It was recognised that this decision should be reviewed by Cabinet after two years of operation. The March 2009 Business Plan for the Apex

also contained a commitment to look at alternative governance models for the project after two years.

- 1.2 On 25 July 2012 Cabinet received Paper D85 which comprised the initial report for the review. Cabinet agreed at that time to proceed to the development of a business case for a wider arts trust (or "Single Operation") to run both the Theatre Royal and the Apex. Given the interest in the review, it was agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would not only carry out its own two year review of the Apex, but also advise Cabinet on the merits of the indicative business case for the Single Operation, and of any existing plans to achieve savings through a retained in-house operation.
- 1.3 At its meeting on 5 December 2012 Members firstly considered a review of the Apex's performance in its first two years, alongside existing in-house plans for the Apex. Members recommended the existing in-house plans for the Apex, for adoption and incorporation, as appropriate, into normal budget-setting for 2013/14.
- 1.4 Next, Members had been asked to scrutinise the business case for the proposed Single Operation with the Theatre Royal and identify any strengths and weaknesses in order to assist the Cabinet in making a recommendation to full Council in February 2013, if the Borough Council received a request from the Theatre Royal in the New Year to join it as a partner.
- 1.5 Although the Committee did not feel the Council was yet in a position to support any specific proposals, there was a consensus that the work with the Theatre Royal to develop the collaboration between the two venues should continue. Accordingly, it was recommended that all opportunities for collaboration with the Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds, continue to be explored.
- 1.6 Finally, in relation to both the indicative business plan for a Single Operation, and the general principle of sharing any services with the Theatre, the Committee identified a number of issues which would need to be taken into account in any subsequent decision making by the Council, and which the Cabinet was asked to note.
- 1.7 The Committee also expressed its concern about what was now an extremely tight timetable for any decision by the Council in order to accommodate the Theatre Royal's requirement to agree a new operating model with the Arts Council by the end of March 2013. Members asked the Cabinet and officers to ensure that there was proper time built into any new decision-making timetable for further detailed deliberations by Councillors, whether through scrutiny or full Council.