



Council 26 February 2013

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);
- External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships;
- Rural Affairs;
- Shared Services; and
- Vision 2031

1. Shared Services

- 1.1 Since this is the 'Budget and Council Tax Setting' full Council, I wanted to begin this report by saying how proud Councillors and officers should be that we are proposing to freeze, yet again, our share of the council tax (for the third year running and indeed for the fourth time in the last five years), while maintaining the quality of the services we provide to the people of West Suffolk who we serve. This is no small achievement, particularly given rising costs and challenging economic times. I would like to thank all Councillors, officers and staff for their significant efforts in making this possible.
- 1.2 Good progress is being made on the St Edmundsbury Borough Council/Forest Heath shared services project. We aim to have completed all of the smaller service restructures by the end of June. These include Human Resources, Legal and Democratic Services, Resources and Performance, Policy and Economic Development. The remaining, larger, services (Waste, Property, Planning and Regulatory, Housing and Leisure) are currently undergoing a piece of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) work to ensure that when we bring two teams together we do it in the most efficient and effective way possible. Restructures of these larger services will follow the BPR work and should be complete by September.
- 1.3 The single payline work has also progressed extremely well and we have reached agreement with our local Unison representatives on the new scheme. If Unison nationally are satisfied that it meets equality and legal requirements, then it is hoped they will recommend that a ballot of all Unison members can commence. We will ensure that all staff who are not in Unison are fully briefed.

2. Communications

- 2.1 The communications team has been focussing on internal communications across both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath councils as staff move through some fundamental changes to the way they work.
- 2.2 External communications have included a media briefing to help explain the proposed budget, Localised Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) and the new system of business rates retention.
- 2.3 The team is also working on simple briefing notes explaining the LCTSS, plus changes to housing, welfare reform and business rates for our website. With no requirement now to send a Council Tax booklet to every household, we are working with colleagues across the county to supply the relevant, easy to understand, information online (which can be provided in printed format on request).
- 2.4 We now have over 1,400 Twitter followers, and used this as an extra communications tool to update people about bin collections during the wintry weather.

3. Economic Development

3.1 Visit from Roads Minister, Stephen Hammond MP

I was delighted to host a meeting at West Suffolk House on 24 January with the Roads Minister, Stephen Hammond, which coincided with the start of the long-awaited dualling of the last stretch of the A11. Mr Hammond was briefed by Councillors, MPs and business leaders on West Suffolk's transport infrastructure priorities. It was a very productive meeting. We discussed a number of schemes and the ways they could be pushed forward and made a reality. As well as the A14, the schemes discussed included transport links around Haverhill, a relief road for Brandon and upgrading the rail line between Newmarket and Cambridge which would improve rail capacity between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge.

3.2 Business ratepayer events

I was pleased to be able to welcome a number of businesses to our business ratepayer events that took place at Genzyme, Haverhill on 12 February and West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds on 14 February. Attendees asked questions about Council services that affect business and listened to presentations including business rates localisation with the Head of Resources; what has happened over the past year and what our plans are for the future with our Chief Executive, Ian Gallin; and how trading internationally can be good for your business with UK Trade and Investment.

3.3 Suffolk Growth Strategy

Over the past few months, the county council, district and borough councils have been working to develop an effective strategy for Suffolk to encourage economic growth, create more jobs and increase prosperity – the strategy, which is currently a draft document, is called *Growth in Suffolk*. *Growth in Suffolk* defines the public sector's ambitions and how local councils, by working

together, intend to achieve these goals and assist the growth of the private sector across Suffolk as a whole. The draft strategy was open for consultation between 21st January and 8th February and the feedback is currently under consideration. The results from this consultation, and the resulting final version of the strategy, will feed into the process of preparing a 'Delivery Plan' that will set the investment priorities, the principal activities to be undertaken and key targets to deliver our joint ambition of strengthening Suffolk's economy. I am particularly delighted that the Growth Strategy will be launched at the Apex on 27th February.

4. External Relations

4.1 West Suffolk Partnership (WSP)

- (a) In my last report I gave a brief update on the launch of the WSP Network on 5 December 2012. The Network is the tier of the partnership which brings together local voluntary, community, business and faith groups, all tiers of local government and other public agencies. Over 60 people attended, of whom 20 volunteered to help shape the Partnership and its work. Feedback sheets revealed that delegates placed most value on the opportunities to network and that several potential new pieces of work were generated by the connections made on the day. Work is being done to follow-up on this and capture those outcomes so that the value of holding these events can be understood and enhanced.
- (b) In March the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive its annual report on the impact of the WSP. This will provide an opportunity to assess how the WSP is functioning and what value it adds.

4.2 Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP)

Grahame Nix has recently been appointed as Chair of the GCGP LEP and on 28 January he was given a tour by officers to highlight the many assets that West Suffolk has, including Haverhill Research Park, Suffolk Business Park, and Station Hill in Bury St Edmunds. Officers also gave a presentation to Grahame and his colleagues outlining the opportunities for growth in West Suffolk. Cllr James Waters, Leader of Forest Heath District Council, and I were pleased to be able to meet Grahame during the tour and look forward to working more closely with him in the future to deliver on our growth agenda.

4.3 New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership

- 4.4 The last Board meeting and AGM of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership in Norwich had to be cancelled due to severe weather conditions. I am delighted to say that this will now be taking place on 13th June 2013 at the Apex.

5. Property, Asset, Facility and Estate Management

5.1 Letting of retail units

- (a) 2012 saw West Suffolk Property Services agree lets on three out of four previously vacant premises in Risbygate Street, Bury St Edmunds. In June 2012 a let was agreed on 96 Risbygate Street, the former Anglia Arms gun shop, fully refurbished by West Suffolk Property Services. The

new tenant is set to open his hair and grooming salon in the next few weeks. At the end of November 2012 a lease was completed at 100 Risbygate Street, which has seen Kendall & Ko Ltd open their new boutique shop, whilst the Lash and Brow beauty salon has opened at 102. West Suffolk Property Services now has only one vacant shop unit on Risbygate Street to let to complete their full occupation schedule.

- (b) Elsewhere in Bury St Edmunds, negotiations are underway to agree a new lease for the occupation of 59 Cornhill, the former Specsavers unit, once restoration works have been completed.

5.2 **Victory Ground**

- (a) The Community Asset Transfer and sale of the Victory Ground to the new community interest partnership comprising Bury Cricket Club, South Lee School and Victory Sports Ground was completed in early January. National grants have been obtained from a number of sporting bodies to assist in this exciting project.
- (b) Just a few days later on Wednesday 16th January I was delighted to take part in the official ground breaking ceremony for the new Victory Ground Facilities Project. Work has started to build a new sports hall and pavilion and these facilities will be available for community use, as well as being a key venue for regional events. We look forward to the project completion later this year and this excellent new addition to sports and leisure facilities in the Borough made possible by the Community Asset Transfer.

6. **Rural Affairs**

- 6.1 A Rural Initiatives Grant of £8,000 has been awarded to The St Edmunds Archers towards a purpose-built indoor range at Whepstead, with a clubhouse and associated amenities, including kitchen and toilet facilities and parking.
- 6.2 The Rural Area Working Party met on 24th January 2013 and I was pleased to be given the opportunity to take part in a workshop on the rural profiling pilot project, led by an external facilitator - Stephen Hill, Director of C20 future planners. The workshop encouraged Members to consider how local authorities can go beyond housing needs surveys, to build a more complete profile of rural communities, and engage with communities to find and deliver solutions. A further report will be presented to the Rural Area Working Party in March, setting out proposals for taking the pilot forward. Other items included how we evidence rural housing need; the rural youth work programme; and the Rural Area Working Party work programme for the coming year.

7. **Vision 2031**

- 7.1 Having a long term vision for our future development and service provision across the Borough remains a high priority for the Borough Council. There has been a slight delay in the production of the final drafts of the Vision 2031 document as we are awaiting the results of additional evidence-based work to support the Bury St Edmunds Vision 2031. However, this will not significantly impact on the overall timetable and it is planned to take the draft consultation documents through the committee process in May with a view to commencing consultation towards the end of June. After this last round of consultation the final documents will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination

by an Independent Planning Inspector, which is likely to take place in early 2014.

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