



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# E41

## Council 18 June 2013

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### ***Report by Cllr Ian Houlder Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee***

This report covers the meetings of the Committee held on 6 March 2013, 24 April 2013 and 3 June 2013.

6 March 2013

#### **1. Work Programme Update**

- 1.1 The Committee now has a rolling work programme, whereby suggestions for scrutiny reviews are brought to each meeting, and if accepted, are timetabled to report to a future meeting. The work programme also leaves space for Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action. Members reviewed the current position of the work programme, and noted the items which were expected at the next meetings of the Committee.
- 1.2 The Committee considered a "Suggestion for Scrutiny" form which asked Members to agree to a review to look at the unacceptable length of time taken by housing developers to bring highways, footpaths, landscaping and open space up to adoption standards on new developments. As the success of the proposed review would significantly rest on being able to establish a two-way communication with developers, it was suggested that a more informal setting of a Task and Finish Group might be the most appropriate forum to discuss the issue.
- 1.3 The Committee agreed to the suggested review, and an informal Task and Finish Group was set up, to which Councillors Beckwith, Buckle, Mrs Byrne, Houlder, Marks, Thorndyke and F J Warby were appointed.
- 1.4 The Committee also considered a request from Councillor Mrs Rushen who had expressed an interest in joining the Educational Attainment Review Group. Additionally, the Rural Area Working Group (RAWP) had raised the issue of under-achievement in rural schools and it was suggested that,

rather than duplicating efforts, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might wish to make room for two rural Members to sit on its review group. As Councillor Mrs Rushen was a rural Member, the Committee agreed to invite the RAWP to nominate a second rural Member to the Task and Finish Group at its meeting on 13 March 2013. The Task and Finish Group would then meet in early April once the final membership had been confirmed.

## **2. Update on the Impact of the West Suffolk Partnership**

- 2.1 The Committee received an update on the work of the West Suffolk Partnership which had been established on 22 February 2012 following the dissolution of the former West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership on the same day. The Secretariat for the West Suffolk Partnership (WSP) attended the meeting and advised that residual assets from the former West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership of approximately £35,000 had been transferred to the WSP.
- 2.2 The aim of the WSP was to allow a wide range of organisations, from the public, private, voluntary, charitable and not-for-profit sectors to work together to ensure that West Suffolk took full advantage of changes in national policy and market conditions.

## **3. Loans to Organisations made by the Borough Council**

- 3.1 The Committee received a report which contained details of loans made by the Borough Council to private firms, including loan amount, security aspects and interest charges.
- 3.2 The Chief Accountant/Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that the purpose of the loans made to private firms was to promote economic development or sports development in the borough. The Council did not have a written policy on assessing loan applications, but each application received was considered on its own merit.
- 3.3 A Task and Finish Group was set up, to which Councillors Chung, Mrs Levack, Nettleton, Mrs Rushbrook, Mrs Stamp and Mrs P Warby were appointed, to formulate a policy to be used for assessing future loans requests from outside organisations.

24 April 2013

## **1. Work Programme Update**

- 1.1 For many years the Committee had ensured a Member lead on diversity across the Council, and received periodic reports and policies from the Diversity Group, a group of three Members appointed to by the Committee. As notified to the Committee at its meeting in June 2012, and detailed in Report D199 to Cabinet on 21 November 2012, the Council was moving towards establishing a Joint Diversity Group with Members from Forest Heath District Council.
- 1.2 The Committee resolved, as per the recommendation made at Cabinet on 21 November 2012, to disband the existing Diversity Group in order to allow Cabinet to form a new Joint Diversity Working Party as part of its next annual review of working parties.

## **2. Final Report of the Task and Finish Group: Review of the use and Management of Article 4 Directions in Bury St Edmunds**

- 2.1 A Task and Finish Group was set up by the Committee on 6 July 2011 to look at improving the effectiveness and management of Article 4 Directions within Bury St Edmunds. As part of this work, officers identified several parts of the two Bury St Edmunds conservation area boundaries in need of updating.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 28 February 2013, the Task and Finish Group made the necessary recommendations about how to proceed with amending the Article 4 Directions. Officers would continue with the work to implement the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, which would be submitted to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party so they could consider approving the proposed changes for public consultation.
- 2.3 In tandem with the introduction of residents parking, the possibility of establishing a grant scheme to offer grants towards the repair and reinstatement of traditional features, including boundary walls and railings, was being investigated. West Suffolk College had confirmed their interest in working in partnership on a scheme, involving the construction students to carry out the work.
- 2.4 The Committee recommended to the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party that consultation be carried out with a view to making an Article 4 Direction covering the entire area of the two Bury St Edmunds Conservation Areas and removing the permitted development rights in the two Bury St Edmunds Conservation Areas relating to microgeneration equipment; and that the possibility of establishing a grant scheme to offer grants towards the repair and reinstatement of traditional features be investigated.

## **3. Final Report of the Task and Finish Group: Litter Collection/Litter and Dog Bin Task Distribution in the Borough**

- 3.1 A Task and Finish Group was set up by the Committee on 6 July 2011 to look into littering and the provision of dog and litter bins within the Borough. The review was conducted in parallel with the wider Street Cleansing Review, which had been carried out in partnership with Forest Heath District Council, who were also investigating their arrangements for dog and litter bins.
- 3.2 In addition to the on-going work relating to the cleansing review the Task and Finish Group agreed to consider four work streams. The Committee noted that the project had been delivered within existing budgets, in conjunction with the wider cleansing review, achieving significant savings. It also noted the future work plan for consultation with Parish and Town Councils.

## **4. Report of the Loans to Organisations Task and Finish Group**

- 4.1 The Committee received the final report on the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group set up by the Committee on 6 March 2013, to formulate a policy to be used for assessing future loan requests from outside organisations.

- 4.2 The Group proposed a draft loans policy, which included a matrix for assessing any future loan applications along the lines of the criteria and matrix used by the Grants Panel for assessing grant applications. In considering procedures for the future scrutiny and approval of loan requests it was considered that all loan requests, including top up loans, should be considered by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee prior to approval by Cabinet and full Council.
- 4.3 The Head of Resources and Performance further suggested that, given the significance of the proposed new policy, the Council should obtain some external validation prior to its approval, particularly on:
- (1) State aid implications;
  - (2) Regulation implications, i.e. financial services; and
  - (3) Treasury management implications.
- 4.4 The Committee resolved that the draft Policy for Granting Loans to External Organisations, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report D340, be subject to external validation, following which it would be amended if necessary and presented to Cabinet for adoption.

## **5. Quarter 4 Directed Surveillance Authorised Applications**

- 5.1 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 requires that Members should scrutinise the authority's use of its surveillance powers on a quarterly basis. In June 2010 it was agreed that this requirement should be fulfilled by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Monitoring Officer advised that in Quarter 4 no such surveillance had been authorised.

### 3 June 2013

#### **1. Annual Report (2012-2013)**

- 1.1 The Constitution requires that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive reports from the Leader of the Council or representative(s) of Cabinet, either prior to the commencement of each financial year or at its first meeting after each Annual Council meeting on "the state of the Borough", the Cabinet's priorities and its performance in the previous year.
- 1.2 The Leader of the Council attended this meeting of the Committee, and presented the Annual Report for 2012-2013. Many of the commitments set out in the Corporate Plan for 2012-2016 were ambitious and would take time to complete and the report set out how the Council was working towards achieving them.
- 1.3 Issues discussed included housing provision, continued engagement with Bid4bury, the timetable for completing the replacement works on the Bury St Edmunds Skatepark, free parking in Haverhill, progress made in investigating "pay-on-exit" parking at the Parkway car park, the successes of community engagement in the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and how shared services with Forest Heath District Council was progressing.

## **2. Decisions Plan – June 2013 to May 2014**

- 2.1 Members considered the latest Decisions Plan, covering the period June 2013 to May 2014 and did not request any further information or involvement in any of the current planned decisions.

## **3. Monitoring the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership**

- 3.1 The Committee received its annual update on the progress of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) from 1 April 2012 to date. It is the duty of the Committee, as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee designated under the Police and Justice Act 2006, to scrutinise the work of the Partnership.
- 3.2 The report updated Members on the work of the CSP during 2012-2013, the informal inclusion of Babergh CSP into WSCSP, changes to future funding mechanisms during 2012-2013 and changes to Health membership of the Partnership from April 2013.
- 3.3 The Committee noted the excellent work carried out by the Partnership during 2012-2013, in particular the work of the Town Pastors.

## **4. Housing Reforms: Review of Tenancy Strategy**

- 4.1 The Committee received an update on the St Edmundsbury Tenancy Strategy which was approved by Cabinet in March 2012 and adopted by full Council in June 2012.
- 4.2 The report provided an update on the initial impacts of the policies and progress in terms of implementing the Action Plan as previously requested by the Committee. Appendix 1 of Report E12 set out the data currently available from the housing register across the whole of the Cambridge Housing Sub Region as at March 2013. The data formed part of the report currently being developed by the housing sub-region to provide monitoring information.
- 4.3 Issues discussed included the length of fixed term tenancies; tenancy renewals; the bedroom tax relating to under occupancy and the application process for affordable housing.

## **5. Report of the Educational Attainment Task and Finish Group**

- 5.1 A Task and Finish Group was set up by the Committee on 5 September 2012 to consider data on Educational Attainment in St Edmundsbury along the lines of the data provided in the Forest Heath review of Educational Attainment, and to make any necessary recommendations to the Committee arising from consideration of that data.
- 5.2 The Group met on 9 May 2013 to consider the "headline" data for St Edmundsbury which showed overall that educational attainment compared well to Suffolk averages, often exceeding them and in many schools compared well nationally. However, there were some clear pockets of underachievement.

5.3 The Group noted that a Families and Communities Strategy was currently being developed for both West Suffolk Councils. Following discussions the Group identified a number of issues relating to educational attainment which it wished to be put forward for consideration during the development of the Strategy. These were set out in the report, and the Committee resolved that they be forwarded for consideration by the Portfolio Holder for Community and officers involved in drafting the Families and Communities Strategy.

**6. Work Programme Update and Appointments to Task and Finish Groups and Suffolk Joint Scrutiny Panels/Committees**

6.1 As this was the first meeting of the civic year, the Committee reviewed the membership of its Task and Finish Groups and other groups.

6.2 The Committee nominated Councillor Beckwith to continue as the Council's representative on the Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. No substitute Member was nominated, and the nomination of Councillor Beckwith will be confirmed at this meeting of full Council.

6.3 Finally, the Committee reviewed the Task and Finish Group which was currently running. Following the establishment of a Task and Finish Group in March 2013 to review new housing development sites, it was suggested that the review could be extended to encompass housing developers in Forest Heath as a Joint Scrutiny Review.

6.4 The Committee considered the invitation to widen the review to a Joint Scrutiny Review and subject to Forest Heath's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 June 2013 agreeing to the joint review, agreed to reduce the current membership of the Group from 7 to 3 from St Edmundsbury Borough Council and 3 from Forest Heath: