

## Council 30 September 2013

### LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

#### ***Report by Cllr John Griffiths Leader of the Council***

**Portfolio includes:**

- Leadership of Council
- Communications
- Corporate Planning
- Strategic Economic Development (LEPs)
- Shared Services

Since the last Full Council we have, sadly, lost Councillors John Hale and Charlotte Howard to untimely deaths. They will both be greatly missed, not only by their families and friends, but also for their much valued contributions to the work of the Borough Council. It is, of course, also fitting to congratulate and welcome Paula Wade, who recently won the Bardwell by-election.

#### **1. Shared Services**

- 1.1 The Shared Services Steering Group met on 26 July 2013, for a final time. At this meeting they approved the proposed restructures of the larger services, which are now being implemented. It was extremely good news to hear that overall shared services will deliver around £3.5m between the two councils - £1m in excess of our original projections. This is a testament to the hard work of all involved - councillors and staff.
- 1.2 Inevitably a leaner, single staff team across two councils will need to work very efficiently and it is important that we as councillors recognise the demands we make on staff and ensure that these are reasonable and lead to productive outcomes.

#### **2. Strategic Economic Development**

##### **2.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)**

- 2.1.1 LEPs have been asked by the Government to develop growth plans for their areas. These plans will help coordinate economic development in local areas and prioritise investment by central government and local partners. As part of these plans, the Government has also invited LEPs to develop a Structural and

Investment Fund Strategy (SIFS) for use of the European Structural and Investment Funds for the period 2014/2020 in their local areas.

- 2.1.2 The LEP growth plans provide the context for both the county and district level growth plans. The LEPs continue to receive funding devolved from central government and how they spend that funding will be dependent upon what these Growth Plans set out as their priorities. I have therefore been very keen to ensure that we are involved in the development of these plans for growth.
- 2.1.3 Since West Suffolk is part of both the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP), it is essential that we contribute to both growth plans. The two LEPs are at differing stages of development in terms of producing their plans. The GCGP is currently in the process of establishing a sub-group to draft the plan, and NALEP has produced a draft plan for consultation.
- 2.1.4 LEPs were required to submit their draft growth plans to Government this month and final growth plans are due to be submitted to Government in January 2014.

## **2.2 Business Festival**

- 2.2.1 I am very pleased to report upon another successful West Suffolk Business Festival this year. I had the pleasure to both open the festival at the Menta Trade Fair and Food, and Drink Expo at Ickworth House and also to close the event at the Business Awards held at The Apex.
- 2.2.2 Two years ago the Business Festival broke new ground, being the first event of its kind in the region. Through our partnership with Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and others we expanded the geographical coverage and the events took place throughout West Suffolk.
- 2.2.3 This year's 'Future Focussed' Business Festival included events over ten days organised by more than 20 different partners and organisations. The highlights of this year's programme included the Menta Trade Fair; Suffolk Chamber of Commerce's 'The Future of Business in Suffolk' with Stephen Aguilar-Millan, Director at the European Future's Observatory, who shared his thoughts on business and the future; the Fresh Festival which aims to create the entrepreneur of tomorrow; and the business awards. FHDC and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) jointly sponsored the Lifetime Achievement Award for Services to Businesses in West Suffolk and we were pleased that Jane Vincent from WS Training (and a number of other organisations) were presented with this award.

## **3. Communications**

- 3.1 Improvements continue to be made to the website, for example through use of software to detect broken links. An analytic tool is also being used to gain more information about how visitors use the website to get information, the most popular pages and so on. This will help us to make changes to pages where appropriate to make information and transactions easier to access.

- 3.2 Work continues on developing a West Suffolk Communications Strategy, shared with FHDC. The aim is to set out how the joint Communications team will support services to engage with their customers and local communities. The strategy is set to be considered by Cabinet in November 2013 and Council in December 2013.
- 3.3 The Communications team has coordinated information for the media and public responses regarding the series of unauthorised Traveller encampments in Bury St Edmunds. This has included regular updates on the website and explanations about the protocol followed when dealing with these encampments. Support has also been given to help promote the West Suffolk Business Festival and the final stages of consultation on Vision 2031.

#### **4. Corporate Planning**

- 4.1 Work is continuing on refreshing our Corporate Plan for the period 2014/2016. All Members have been involved in discussing the things that they want to see happening over the next two to three years, and Cabinet Members have been involved in discussions with FHDC Cabinet Members to identify areas where we can achieve these priorities by working together.
- 4.2 It is the right time to review it, given all that has changed for local government in the national arena, and everything that has been achieved by our local communities since April 2012 when the Plan was first published.
- 4.3 During the autumn and winter period, we will be working with officers on the details of the refreshed Corporate Plan, alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 4.4 We are preparing for the Peer Challenge which will take place from 13 to 15 November 2013. Peer Challenge forms part of the local government sector's approach to self-regulation following the abolition of the Audit Commission. The Peer Challenge is made up of Councillors, a Chief Executive from another authority and other senior officers. Peer Challenges are improvement focussed and are not aimed at judging councils. Consequently, Peer Challenge is not an inspection, like CPA or CAA, and is, or should be, focussed on what is of most importance.
- 4.5 The Challenge Team will be visiting both SEBC and FHDC to find out more about our delivery of shared services and our plans for the future. In particular, they will focus on Governance and Leadership, Economic Development and Growth and our approach to partnerships. The Team will be keen to talk to councillors and may well attend some committee meetings. We will keep you informed of any arrangements and will of course feedback their findings.