

## **Council 17 December 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

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

- 1.1 The final phase of the major restructuring at Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury has now been completed, and I am very pleased to report that we are now operating a single staff team across both councils. This has delivered £3.5m in savings. I would like to extend my support and thanks to all of the staff who have been through this often difficult (for all concerned) process; sadly, if inevitably and unavoidably, many have left both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath as a result of the restructuring, and I know all members will join me in wishing them the very best for the future.
- 1.2 In many ways we are at the end of the beginning. However, and now that we have our single team in place, we can continue the journey of transforming the way we work – by becoming more commercial, more in tune with our customers, and even more flexible in our service delivery.

#### **2. Corporate Planning**

- 2.1 As I highlighted in my September report to Full Council, my Cabinet colleagues and I have been working with Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) Cabinet Members to review the council's priorities in light of shared services and our financial situation. We have focused on ensuring that our priorities are achievable and affordable within the Medium Term Financial Strategy. While very pleased with the progress we have made in identifying a set of priorities for the next couple of years I look forward to further input from all Councillors; and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will of course have the opportunity to formally consider these priorities in January.

- 2.2 In November we had the first “tranche” of our Peer Challenge in partnership with Forest Heath District Council. Firstly, may I thank all the Members involved with the various focus groups, interviews and observations. The three days were very intense in terms of the number of people the Peer Challenge Team met with. However, and as a result of these meetings, they have provided us with an external perspective on the work we are currently undertaking around shared services, future priorities, financial management and governance.
- 2.3 The Team were very approachable and offered sound observations regarding our future direction. The three days culminated with a presentation of the team’s key findings to Cabinet members at both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath. Initial feedback is now being considered by Cabinet and will of course be made available to all Members.
- 2.4 The Team will return on 13, 14 and 15 February 2013 for the second phase of the Peer Challenge which will look more closely at economic development, as well as determining the progress we have made against the issues highlighted in this first tranche.

### **3. *Strategic Economic Development (LEPs)***

- 3.1 On 19 December 2013 the Local Enterprise Partnerships will be sharing the first draft of their Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) with Government. The SEPs will help coordinate economic development in local areas and prioritise investment and the documents will include a list of their priorities and objectives for growth (in terms of projects) that they intend to focus their activities and resources upon. The final versions of the SEPs will then be submitted to Government in March 2014, in order that they can be considered for funding from the Single Local Growth Pot. Officers are working closely with both the New Anglia LEP and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP to ensure that West Suffolk projects are identified for inclusion.
- 3.2 The 2007-13 European funding period is nearing completion and a new single EU Growth Programme for the period 2014-20 has been agreed. This programme will combine the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, with a contribution from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.
- 3.3 The Government has given Local Enterprise Partnerships responsibility for producing European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-20 Strategies to cover their area and to illustrate how they intend to allocate their share of the European funding. These strategies will form part of the LEPs’ wider Strategic Economic Plans; the final versions of which are due to be submitted to Government in March 2014.
- 3.4 The notional seven year allocations for the LEPs that cover West Suffolk are €94.5 million (approximately £80.8 million) for New Anglia LEP (NALEP) and €75.5 million (approximately £64.6 million) for Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP (GCGP). These figures are for European Regional

Development Fund and the European Social Fund only; the allocation for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development will follow later in 2013.

- 3.5 West Suffolk councils have been working with NALEP and GCGP during the stakeholder consultation period to help the LEPs draw up their draft strategies. This consultation enabled the LEPs to establish a priority ranking of the European Thematic Objectives. Following analysis of consultation responses, both LEPs produced their draft strategies and submitted these to Government in October 2013. Following a request from the LEPs for comments on their draft strategies, officers have provided a West Suffolk response to NALEP and GCGP for consideration before the final version of their strategies is submitted to Government in January 2014.
- 3.6 The Greater Ipswich City Deal has now been signed by Government and aims to make Suffolk more prosperous by:
- supporting 3,500 young people into work in the Greater Ipswich area;
  - creating and piloting a Youth Job Centre;
  - increasing local private and public investment in skills by at least £10 million;
  - creating 5,000 new apprenticeships by 2019;
  - creating 3,000 additional high value jobs and 400 new businesses across Suffolk and Norfolk; and
  - developing a new approach to skills, led by employers, and a highly skilled local workforce.

The effects of this City Deal will not just be felt in Ipswich. The entire county stands to benefit because of the investment and improvements that will be made as a result and our officers will be working to ensure that these benefits are indeed realised in West Suffolk.

#### **4. Communications**

- 4.1 The West Suffolk Communications team continues to produce and coordinate information for the public and media on a range of topics, including events such as the Christmas Fayre.
- 4.2 A new venture is the car parking campaign, which is already proving extremely useful in the run-up to Christmas. The communications team is working with the car parks staff during their busiest time of year. The launch of the new 1000 space seasonal park and ride at the CLAAS site on the Saxham Business Park was followed up with operational information about road closures, parking and traffic management over the Christmas period. The 'Free from three' on Tuesdays in Bury has been extended to 'Free from three on Thursdays' in the lead-up to Christmas and 'Free on Saturday' in Haverhill. Staff have been trained to use social media and are giving direct updates to #buryparking followers about the spaces available.
- 4.3 Internally, the team helped to produce background information for November's Local Government Association Peer Challenge. The information explained the progress of our shared services journey with Forest Heath District Council, how we have reorganised to form one staffing structure serving two councils and

how we will be tackling future challenges. Other internal communications for staff include weekly electronic newsletters (Wavelength) and staff briefings with the Chief Executive. The team is also working with the Democratic Services team to look at ways of improving communications to councillors at both councils following consultation earlier this year.

- 4.4 Before closing, I am conscious that this is St Edmundsbury's last Full Council Meeting before the New Year. 2013 has been a perhaps particularly challenging year for all of us - particularly given the financial constraints we have weathered, and anticipate - but we have made very considerable progress on so many fronts. Councillors and officers alike have risen admirably to meet the challenges we face, and continue to deal with a variety of issues (many of which are covered in separate portfolio and other reports) while continuing to freeze our Council Tax and maintaining the quality of services we provide to those we serve.
- 4.5 I should like to record my personal thanks to all concerned for this - not only to my fellow Councillors but to our officers and staff, as well as our many partners. May I also take this opportunity to wish every single one of you a Very Happy Christmas and a healthy, happy and successful New Year.

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