

Council **25 February 2014**

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

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

Portfolio includes:

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

1. Leadership of Council

- 1.1 Please accept my apologies for not being able to be with you this evening. I believe that this is the first time I have had to miss a Full Council meeting but would like to thank all councillors (across the political spectrum)) officers and staff for their past and ongoing contributions to ensure that St Edmundsbury continues to be an excellent Council in the service of our residents and businesses during these ever more challenging times for local government.
- 1.2 On behalf of the whole Council, may I also welcome Councillor Tony Brown as the new councillor for Haverhill East Ward. I'm sure we all much look forward to working with Tony on issues affecting not only Haverhill but the whole of the Borough – indeed West Suffolk - in the coming months.
- 1.3 I am very pleased that we nominated my colleague Councillor Dave Ray for the Local Government Information Unit's Councillor Achievement Award. I am even more delighted that he has now been shortlisted along with Councillor Stephen Edwards at Forest Heath in the category for outstanding contribution for financial performance. This joint shortlisting is a great tribute to the benefits of working together to secure the financial future of both councils while improving the service we are able to provide for, and with, our residents. Both councillors have lifted and carried forward a tremendous amount of financial and human resources work for the two councils and fully deserve recognition of their tireless efforts.

- 1.4 In the spirit of transparency, we have responded as quickly as we could to Central Government's requirement for a recorded vote on the budget decision, recommending the necessary change to standing orders on the same day the regulations come into force. While the tight timescale means that on this occasion we can resolve only to follow the letter of the law, we are referring the matter to Democratic Renewal Working Party to see if there are other situations in which a mandatory recorded vote would increase public confidence in our decision-making process.

2. Corporate Planning

- 2.1 As I have previously reported, my Cabinet colleagues and I have been working with Forest Heath's Cabinet to develop a shared Strategic Plan which is closely aligned to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It was important to get the input of all councillors and I am delighted that both Overview and Scrutiny Committees had the opportunity to consider the content of the draft Strategic Plan and MTFS. The Committee's input was most helpful and enabled a number of changes and improvements to be made to the documents.
- 2.2 The Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge Team visited again in February. This was a follow up to their visit in November and this time the Team focussed on our approach to economic growth and housing. They were also interested to see what progress we had made since November. Again, the Team provided us with some really constructive feedback which we will share with members in due course.

3.. Strategic Economic Development (LEPs)

- 3.1 Following Lord Heseltine's No Stone Unturned review, the Government confirmed its commitment to negotiating a Growth Deal with every Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Through Growth Deals, the 39 LEPs can seek freedoms, flexibilities and influence over resources from Government; and a share of the new Local Growth Fund (LGF) to spend on the delivery of their priorities. The LGF is set at £2 billion for 2015/16, with a commitment to at least maintain this level to 2020/21. The Government has asked LEPs to set out their Growth Deal in a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) that brings together all the resources at their disposal so that each LEP has one plan driving its approach to investing in local priorities.
- 3.2 New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP) submitted the first draft of their SEPs on 19 December 2013. Comments from members and officers on the draft documents were submitted during February 2014 to both LEPs for their consideration. LEPs will be expected to submit their final SEPs by the end of March 2014, and in the interim officers are working with both NALEP and GCGP to assist them in the preparation of their final documents.
- 3.3 Following consultation with stakeholders (including comments submitted from West Suffolk), NALEP and GCGP submitted their final European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-20 Strategies to Government in January 2014. These documents form an integral part of the SEPs.

4. Communications

- 4.1 As ever, the West Suffolk Communications team continues to produce and co-ordinate information for the public and media on a wide range of topics, including the budget, Strategic Plan and Vision 2031 examination. The number of media queries received and responded to by the team remains high.
- 4.2 Some improvements have been made to our website, including the 'where to stay' and 'what to see' sections. Further work is in progress to migrate the 'out and about' events website to a new West Suffolk Diary website which will enable customers to book and pay for events online. We have also begun to consider how we might improve the council's website and increase our online offer so that customers can access our services at a time which is convenient to them.
- 4.3 Internally, the team has helped to produce supporting information for the Peer Challenge Team, produce weekly electronic newsletters (Wavelength) and supported the Chief Executive's staff briefings. The team is also working with the Democratic Services and Member Development Panel to look at ways of improving member communications.

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