

Council **25 February 2014**

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 22 January 2014 and 5 February 2014.

22 January 2014

1. Draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014/2016 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2016

- 1.1 Prior to the formal meeting, the first informal joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting was held with Members of Forest Heath District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. All Members of the St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend the District Offices in Mildenhall to enable joint informal discussions on the two documents to take place between the two authorities prior to their presentation to both authorities' Cabinets and Councils during February 2014.
- 1.2 The report summarised the considerable work that had been carried out to date on the development of a Draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and sought both Committees' views on the draft documents.
- 1.3 The draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan represented a revision of the existing St Edmundsbury Borough Council Corporate Plan 2012/2016 and the Forest Heath District Council Strategic Plan 2012/2016. The revised West Suffolk Strategic Plan for 2014/2016 would shape the allocations made in the MTFS for this period. As in previous years, the MTFS for 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 would make some reasonable assumptions about the likely future financial context for the Councils and sought to identify areas where future pressures would be addressed.

- 1.4 Members from both authorities posed a variety of questions on the content of the draft documents, including comments on the language and terminology of the documents; the lack of detail particularly in the Strategic Plan, which was considered to be lacking in substance with regard to how the priorities were going to be achieved by the Councils; that emphasis be included on the 'day job' (the delivery of all services provided by the Councils, including those that did not directly relate to any of the priorities); more emphasis on partnership working and links to another public body; and working with families and communities and the exact role the Councils would play.
- 1.5 Due to the reservations that Members of both Overview and Scrutiny Committees expressed, the general consensus was that the draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan and MTFS could not be progressed until the suggestions made by the two Committees had been reflected in the documents and presented again to these Committees.
- 1.6 It was therefore, agreed, for formal resolution as part of the subsequent separate formal meetings of each Committee, that a second informal extraordinary joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting be held in early February 2014, prior to both authority's budget-setting meetings of Cabinet and Council, to enable both Committees to jointly reconsider revised versions (including tracked changes) of the Draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014/2016 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2016.

2. Decisions Plan – February to May 2014

- 2.1 Members considered the latest Decision Plan, covering the period February to May 2014. Clarification was sought on two items on the Plan, these being the latest position with regard to the Procurement of Waste Transfer and Recycling Services and the Homelessness Temporary Accommodation Provision to which responses were provided.
- 2.2 The Committee did not request any further information or involvement in any of the current planned decisions.

3. Quarter 3 Directed Surveillance Authorised Applications

- 3.1 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 3 no such surveillance had been authorised.

4. New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group – Progress Report

- 4.1 A Joint Task and Finish Group was set up with Forest Heath District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2013, (paper D315 refers). The group to date has met on three occasions and is tasked with:

- Jointly reviewing the unacceptable length of time taken by housing developers to bring highways, footpaths and community facilities (landscaping/open-space/drainage/sustainable urban drainage) up to adoption standards on new developments.
- 4.2 Eight developers with development sites in West Suffolk were invited to a round table discussion held on 4 November 2013, to which one developer attended and one sent their apologies on the day of the meeting.
- 4.3 It came to light during the session that discussions are currently taking place between Suffolk County Council (SCC) Highways Authority and developers on the use of Section 37 Agreements which is the preferred option for most developers. The outcome from the round table session was:
- (1) A letter be sent to the Director of Economy, Skills and Environment at Suffolk County Council (SCC), setting out the Group's observations on Section 37 Agreements and to find out whether SCC was looking at Cambridgeshire County Council who used Section 37 Agreements to find out how they worked and whether any changes were needed; and
 - (2) Officers to look at what can be achieved corporately at the planning stage.
- 4.4 Members noted the progress made by the Joint Task and Finish Group to date.

5. Work Programme Update

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Members reviewed the current position of the work programme, and noted the items which were expected at the next meetings of the Committee and the scheduling of an additional extraordinary informal joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting in early February 2014 to reconsider the Draft Strategic Plan 2014/2016 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5 February 2014

1. West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014/2016 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2016

- 1.1 Following on from the first informal joint overview and scrutiny session held on the 22 January 2014, a second joint informal session was held on 5 February 2014.
- 1.2 Both Councils Overview and Scrutiny Committees made further comments on the revised Draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014/2016 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2016.

1.3 The Committee recommended to Cabinet the approval of the draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014/2016 to Council for adoption.

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