

## **ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RURAL AREA WORKING PARTY**

#### **Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 27 January 2014 at 5.00 pm in Room GFR14, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor J Thorndyke (Chairman)  
Councillors Mrs Broughton, Clifton-Brown, Ray, Redhead,  
Mrs Rushen and Mrs Wade

#### **12. Substitutions**

No substitutions were declared.

#### **13. Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Stevens.

#### **14. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **15. Declarations of Interests**

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

#### **16. Parish Conference**

The Working Party considered Report E248 (previously circulated) which provided feedback to Members on the last Parish Conference which had taken place on 22 October 2013. A greater than expected number of delegates had attended due to its location at The Apex and the nature of the topics under consideration and as a result a number of housekeeping issues had arisen. The report reflected on the feedback received from delegates, listed in paragraph 4.1 of the report, and presented some options for shaping the next conference. Attached as Appendix A to the report was a suggested 'Open Space' approach to organising the Parish Conference which had been put forward by a Chairman of a Parish Council. In essence this envisaged that the venue meeting room be divided into discussion spaces with specific topics being debated in each space and with feedback being given to the main meeting subsequently.

The Working Party discussed the issues raised and agreed that it was important that Town/Parish Councils should have input into the format of conferences and that the event should not purely be about topics on which the Borough Council wished to disseminate information. In pursuance of this it was agreed that Town/Parish Councils be given early notice of the next conference and advice be given that suggestions from them for topics to be discussed would be welcomed. An estimation of numbers of delegates from each Parish likely to be attending the event should also be sought when formal invitations were issued.

The 'Open Space' approach was acknowledged as a worthwhile suggestion but there were reservations on how it would operate in practice. The question was raised of whether there was any merit in investigating a joint parish event with Forest Heath District Council. Officers pointed out that the Forest Heath Parish Forum had a different accent in the way it was organised in that it met more frequently, was managed by the parishes themselves, and was interactive in its approach through a workshop format. While it was felt the two approaches should stay separate for the time being, it was acknowledged that there may be interest in holding an occasional joint conference on a subject of mutual benefit.

The Working Party discussed the date, venue and possible topics for discussion in respect of the next Parish Conference.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the next Parish Conference be arranged for late April 2014 with a rural location, possibly Wickhambrook Village Hall, and the following be identified as topics for discussion:
  - (i) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 Agreements, ie. contributions from developers; and
  - (ii) Rural Broadband progressand Town/Parish Councils be asked prior to invitations being issued to suggest other topics to be covered; and
- (2) officers explore with Forest Heath District Council Members the possibility of arranging a Joint Parish Conference on an occasional basis on matters which arise which are of common interest to towns/parishes in both the Borough and the District.

## **17. Informal Parish and Town Council Liaison Group**

The Working Party received and noted Paper E249 (previously circulated) which were the unconfirmed action notes (including terms of reference) from the first meeting of this group which had been formed following the Parish Conference in October. It was agreed at the Liaison Group meeting that the actions should be reported to this Working Party both to keep Councillors informed and to allow any issues requiring formal decision making to be progressed. A second meeting was being arranged in February to allow the Parish representatives to work together on developing a shared template to request quotations which could then be made available to all Town and Parish Councils should they wish to use it. The Liaison Group would also have the opportunity to comment on the agenda for the next Parish Conference following the steer being provided by the Working Party at this meeting. In response to Members' questions the Working Party was advised that the Liaison Group had been formed at the suggestion of the Parish Conference initially to identify ways in which Town/Parish Councils could reduce their budgets through savings on joint initiatives such as procurement. A wide representation of Town/Parish Councils had not been sought at the outset as the intention had been for a few nominees to act on behalf of all towns/parishes. It was not envisaged the Liaison Group would be permanent but its life might be extended if it identified other issues warranting joint discussion.

## **18. Families and Communities Strategy and Locality Working**

The Working Party received and noted a narrative which advised that following the adoption of the Families and Communities Strategy by the Council on 17 December 2013, the Portfolio Holder for Rural Affairs had requested that, prior to the round of Annual Parish Meetings which would take place from March to May a briefing note be provided to all members in a form which could be used at the APMs to explain the new role of Locality Officers. Contact details of the relevant officer for the parish would be included so Parish Clerks and Councillors could contact Locality Officers. The Portfolio Holder had also pointed out the value of Parish Magazines in spreading awareness of the role of Locality Officers.

## **19. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party noted that Wednesday 26 March 2014 at 5.00 pm had been previously approved as the date and time of the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the following matters be included on the agenda for the next meeting:

- (i) Rural Action Plan – Now that this document has reached its planned end date, and has been superseded by a range of other plans, such as Rural Vision 2031, the Family and Communities Strategy and the Growth Strategy, a report be submitted on what the Rural Action Plan had achieved during its three years and on what ongoing and new actions affecting rural areas have been carried forward, and in which documents they are now contained;
- (ii) Work Programme for the Rural Area Working Party; and
- (iii) Rural Broadband update.

The meeting concluded at 6.08 pm.

**J THORNDYKE  
CHAIRMAN**