

Informal Joint Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee



Notes of Informal Discussions held on Thursday 29 January 2015 at 5.00 pm in the Council Chamber, District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall

PRESENT: St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC)

Councillor Sarah Broughton
(Chairman of the informal discussions)

Councillors Diane Hind, Beccy Hopfensperger, Derek Redhead, Paula Wade, Frank Warby and Patricia Warby

Forest Heath District Council (FHDC)

Councillors Michael Anderson, Chris Barker, David Bimson, Simon Cole, Tim Huggan, John McGhee, Colin Noble and Tony Wheble

IN ATTENDANCE: SEBC – Councillor David Ray, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Resources
FHDC – Councillor Stephen Edwards, Portfolio Holder for Resources, Governance and Performance

Prior to the formal meeting, at 5.00pm informal discussions took place on the following three items:

- (1) Key Performance Indicators and Quarter 3 Performance Report 2014-15;
- (2) West Suffolk Strategic Risk Register Quarterly Monitoring Report – December 2014; and
- (3) Work Programme Update

All Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend the District Offices, Mildenhall to enable joint informal discussions on the above reports to take place between the two authorities.

The Chairman of Forest Heath's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee welcomed all those present to the District Offices, Mildenhall and advised on the format of the proceedings for the informal joint discussions and subsequent separate meetings of each authority, prior to handing over to the Chairman of St Edmundsbury's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, who would be chairing the informal joint discussions.

SEBC's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee noted that under its Constitution, FHDC permitted public participation at its Performance and Audit Scrutiny meetings. Therefore, for the purpose of facilitating this Constitutional requirement, it was proposed that public speaking should be permitted prior to the start of the informal discussions to enable any questions/statements to be considered by both Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees. On this occasion however, there were no questions/statements from members of the public.

Each report was then considered in the order listed on each authorities agenda.

1. **Key Performance Indicators and Quarter 3 Performance Report 2014-15**

The Business Partner (Resources and Performance) presented the report, which set out the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) being used to measure the Council's performance for 2014/2015. The report also included the third quarter indicators covering April to December 2014 for both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, together with a combined performance for West Suffolk, where relevant.

Appendix A contained all the KPIs for both Councils and West Suffolk. The current quarter three performance summary for Forest Heath showed that of 26 indicators, 12 were green, 4 were amber, 0 were red and 10 were data only indicators. For St Edmundsbury, the current quarter three summary showed that of a total of 27 indicators, 11 were green, 4 were amber, 2 were red and 10 were data only indicators. For West Suffolk there were a total of 19 indicators, of which 7 were green, 4 were amber, 1 was red and 7 were data only indicators.

It was reported that the general performance in dealing with the various planning applications was steadily improving. Performance on both minor and other applications had improved significantly since quarter two, with performance of other applications exceeding target. The team were now getting to grips with the inherent back-log and the Council should see sustained improvements across all categories of applications. As requested by the Committee at its November 2014 meeting, some new indicators had been added in relation to planning enforcement, which provided information on the number of enforcement cases both opened and closed in the past quarter.

Members scrutinised the report and asked questions to which officers duly responded. In particular discussions were held on:

- (1) **EDG001** – New and existing businesses benefitting from the Council's Business Grant scheme. Officers agreed to provide a written response as to why no grants were awarded in the third quarter.
- (2) **HOU015** – Number of planning enforcement cases closed. Officers agreed to provide a written response as to the number of planning enforcement cases currently in the planning system.

2. **West Suffolk Strategic Risk Register Quarterly Monitoring Report – December 2014**

The Head of Resources and Performance presented the third quarterly risk register monitoring report in respect of the West Suffolk Strategic Risk Register. The Register was updated regularly by the Risk Management Group and at its

recent meeting the Group reviewed the target risk, the risk level where the Council aimed to be, and agreed a current risk assessment. These assessments formed the revised West Suffolk Risk Register (Appendix 1).

Since the last assessment report presented to the Committee on 26 November 2014, there had been no new risks identified and no risks had been amended or closed. Some individual controls and actions had been updated and those which were not ongoing and had been completed by December 2014 had been removed from the Register.

However, following the December review, the probability of the Inherent Risk of WS1A had been changed from 2 to 3 to reflect the importance of Business Rates Retention and improved financial reporting. Also, in light of the recent news concerning the closure of RAF Mildenhall, the probability of the Inherent Risk WS12 had been changed from 2 to 3 to highlight the risk of losing a large employer and contributor to the local economy.

Members scrutinised the report and asked questions to which officers duly responded. In particular discussions were held on inherent risk WS12, - loss of a key employer, which included RAF Mildenhall. Members noted that in future reports, RAF Mildenhall would be reported as a separate risk.

Members on this occasion did not make any suggestions for amendments to the Risk Register.

(Councillor Diane Hind arrived during the consideration of this item)

3. **Work Programme Update**

The Head of Resources and Performance presented the report, which provided information on the current status of each Committee's Work Programme for 2015.

On the conclusion of the informal joint discussions at 5.15pm, Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee withdrew from the Council Chamber to the Training Room to hold their formal meeting.

The Chairman then formally opened the Forest Heath District Council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee in the Council Chamber at 5.30pm.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 29 January 2015** at **5.30 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall, IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Colin Noble
Vice Chairman Tony Wheble

Michael Anderson
Chris Barker
David Bimson

Tim Huggan
John McGhee

Substitutes attending:
Simon Cole

By Invitation:
Councillor Stephen Edwards, Portfolio Holder for Resources,
Governance and Performance
Councillor James Waters, Leader of the Council

17. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bloodworth, Geoffrey Jaggard and Michael Jefferys.

18. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Simon Cole substituting for Councillor Michael Jefferys.

19. **Public Participation**

Public participation had been included within the previous informal discussions and there had been no questions/statements from members of the public.

20. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2014, were unanimously accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

21. **Key Performance Indicators and Quarter 3 Performance Report 2014-2015**
(Report No PAS/FH/15/001)

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting with St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, the Committee formally considered Report No PAS/FH/15/001.

Members had scrutinised the report in detail and had asked a number of questions to which responses were duly provided.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the performance against the Key Performance Indicators for Quarter 3, 2014-2015.

22. **West Suffolk Strategic Risk Register Quarterly Monitoring Report - December 2014**
(Report No PAS/FH/15/002)

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting with St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, the Committee formally considered Report No PAS/FH/15/002.

Members had scrutinised the report in detail and had asked a number of questions to which responses were duly provided.

Following on from the informal discussions, the Committee also requested to further consider the risk associated with the potential impact of the withdrawing of external investment from within the horseracing industry in Newmarket.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the West Suffolk Strategic Risk Register Quarterly Monitoring Report for December 2014, along with the request to further consider the risk associated with the impact of the withdrawal of external investment from within the horseracing industry in Newmarket.

23. **Work Programme Update**
(Report No PAS/FH/15/003)

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting with St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, the Committee formally considered Report No PAS/FH/15/003.

Members had considered the report and asked questions to which responses were duly provided.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the work programme for 2015.

24. **Presentation from the Leader of the Council**

Councillor James Waters, Leader of the Council and the Cabinet updated the Committee on his community leadership role as the political head of the

Council and also provided an assessment of how the Cabinet system was operating.

The following areas were specifically discussed:

(a) Shared Services

Councillor Waters referred to the significant savings which had been achieved through the implementation of Shared Services with St Edmundsbury Borough Council. Members and Officers were also commended on how they were working together to achieve this.

(b) Economic Development

Councillor Waters explained that the Council was undertaking a programme of refurbishment works on the business units within the Forest Heath district.

(c) Closure of RAF Mildenhall Air Base

Councillor Waters referred to the recent announcement of the closure of the RAF Mildenhall Air Base and explained that the potential impact of the closure had initially been met with positivity, from both the Council and from within the local community.

Members stated that in relation to the base closure, it would be important to ensure that the Council were involved in early discussions as to the relinquishing of any assets which could become of use to the community, including any economic development opportunities. Councillor Waters agreed that it was important to ascertain this information as soon as possible, as there were some excellent facilities on the Base, which could be targeted towards the community. Overall, the Council and the community needed to be in control of the change, finance, infrastructure and effects on the community, which the closure would have.

The Council needed to ensure that it was in discussions with USAFE and the MOD with regard to timeframes for the withdrawal. At the same time, it would also be important to consider the impact of the potential increase of squadron/personnel at RAF Lakenheath.

Councillor Waters explained that there was a meeting of the Mildenhall, Molesworth and Alconbury (MAM) Working Group being held on 30 January 2015. It would be his intention to attempt to obtain some definitive timelines from the MOD with regard to the exit strategy and also of their future requirements for the base. It would also be important to understand the infrastructure requirements involved with the moving of personnel/aircraft to the Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany.

The Chairman also reminded the Committee, that as part of the informal discussions, it had been agreed that the closure of RAF Mildenhall would be reported as a separate risk on the Risk Register.

(d) The Cabinet

Since the introduction of the Leader/Cabinet system in May 2012, the Cabinet Members had all worked hard and some tough decisions have had to be made. Councillor Waters welcomed feedback from the Committee as to what they considered to be the strengths and weaknesses of the Cabinet and where the Cabinet could engage and work better.

The Chairman stated that he considered that the introduction of the Leader/Cabinet system within Forest Heath, had worked very well.

Members referred to the current structure of the Cabinet and its portfolios and questioned as to whether this was deemed to be appropriate in order to maximise the workload of the Cabinet. Councillor Waters acknowledged this and explained that, following the District Council elections in May 2015, the size of the Cabinet and the portfolio holder roles and responsibilities would be reviewed, to ensure that they continued to align with the Council's priorities.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Councillor Waters for his attendance and presentation and there being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the presentation.

25. **Financial Performance Report (Revenue and Capital) Quarter 3 (2014-2015)**
(Report No PAS/FH/15/004)

The Committee received Report PAS/FH/15/004, which set out the financial position for the third quarter and the forecasted outturn position for 2014/2015.

Attached to the report at Appendix A, was the Revenue Budget Summary for April to December 2014, which showed a current underspend of £728,000, with a forecast position for the year end showing an underspend of £148,000 (which was a slight decrease on the £190,000 underspend which had been forecasted at the end of September 2014, as reported to the Committee in November 2014).

Appendix B to the report detailed the Council's capital financial position for the first nine months of 2014/2015, showing expenditure of £4,147,000.

Members were requested to note the year end forecast position and the significant variances as outlined in the report. Budget holders would continue to work with Resources Business Partners and Business Support Advisors for the remainder of the financial year in order to monitor the forecast position and an outturn position would be presented to the Committee at the end of the financial year. It was reported that the forecasted year end position would also be fed into the 2015/16 budget setting process. Initial reporting showed that the overall business rate yield anticipated for 2014/2015 was higher than the forecasted yield as part of the NNDR1 return back in January 2014. The Council would continue to monitor the business rates closely with Anglia Revenues Partnership and a further update would be provided in the

year end outturn report. Any additional income or shortfall against what was forecast would be transferred from the Business Rate Reserve.

Members referred to paragraph 1.3.1 and queried as to why there had been no capital expenditure spent against the Families and Communities service area as at 31 December 2014 (even though there was a revised budget figure of £107,000 for 2014/2015). Members requested for this position to be clarified accordingly, along with information on any revenue expenditure, as at the same period.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the year end forecast financial position, along with the request of further information on the capital and revenue expenditure for the Families and Communities service area.

26. **Delivering a Sustainable Budget 2015-16 - Update
(Report No PAS/FH/15/005)**

The Committee received Report No PAS/FH/15/005 , which updated the progress made towards delivering a balanced budget for 2015/2016. Additional pressures and the progress made to-date in achieving the 2015/2016 savings target were set out in Table 1 of the report. These were now being incorporated into the budgets, over and above those items reported in November 2014, as part of Report No PAS/SE/14/008.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the progress made on delivering a balanced budget for 2015/2016.

27. **Urgent Business**

There were no items the subject of Urgent Business.

The Meeting concluded at 6.36 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
