

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath  
District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 10 September 2015** at **6.00pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

**Chairman** Bill Sadler

Andrew Appleby  
Chris Barker  
David Bimson  
John Bloodworth  
Ruth Bowman

Simon Cole  
Christine Mason  
Reg Silvester  
Lance Stanbury

28. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

29. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

30. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2015 were accepted by the Committee and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

31. **Public Participation**

Mrs Sara Beckett, a resident of Newmarket, wished to address the Committee on Item 9 on the agenda; Work Programme Update.

She advised the Committee that back in October 2013, it was agreed by the Development Control Committee that a Joint Task and Finish Group would be formed to consider Members Planning Code of Good Practice. She believed the Task and Finish Group had been deferred and that it would be looked at after the Election. It was now two years since the Task and Finish Group was established and questioned whether anything had happened and whether anything would be happening.

Mrs Beckett thanked the Committee for their time.

*(Councillors David Bimson and Reg Silvester arrived at 6.03pm during the consideration of this item)*

### 32. **Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth**

As set out in the Council's Constitution, at every ordinary Overview and Scrutiny meeting at least one Cabinet Member would be invited to attend to give an account of his or her portfolio and answer questions from the Committee. Therefore, to carry out this constitutional requirement, members were asked to consider the responsibilities of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth, who had been invited to the meeting.

Report OAS/FH/15/008, set out the overall responsibilities of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth, which were:

- Building control
- Conservation
- Development Control
- Enforcement
- Environmental health
- Growth areas and regeneration
- Licensing
- Planning policy
- Rural development
- Tourism (strategic)
- Town centres

Councillor James Waters, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation. He then explained that the Planning and Growth Unit was responsible for a number of high profile services. The briefing provided a summary of what the unit was dealing with. The Cabinet Member was particularly interested in reviewing the work and providing a list of priorities going forward particularly the activities of Development Management in delivering prompt decisions and economic development was focusing on providing business opportunities in Forest Heath.

Members discussed the presentation in detail and asked a number of questions of the Cabinet Member to which comprehensive responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on the following:

- (1) Size of the portfolio – The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that the portfolio was a full-time job alongside his leadership role. However, the role of portfolio holder for planning and growth was taken on for an interim period and in the future he would be looking for resources in taking the portfolio forward.
- (2) Economic development (public transport)– It was acknowledged that there was more work that could be done in securing more funding locally for the integration of public transport.
- (3) Economic development (attracting businesses) – The Cabinet Member advised that Committee that there was a Small Business Grant Fund and the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme to help support and attract businesses to the West Suffolk.

- (4) Industrial units (types) – It was acknowledged that the right types of business units were needed to attract a variety of businesses, such as having air conditioning/temperature controlled units.

The Committee raised the issue of the lack of a decent rail stop and the lack of housing in Newmarket and questioned whether devolution would help. The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that devolution would not constrain West Suffolk as it was a “can do” community.

Finally, the Committee congratulated the enforcement team on the work being carried out in driving down the backlog in older cases.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the presentation by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth.

*(Councillors Andrew Appleby and Simon Cole arrived at 6.05pm during the consideration of this item).*

### 33. **Presentation on the Role of Newmarket Vision and Discover Newmarket**

The Director (Liz Watts) and the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, Councillor Robin Millar had been invited to the meeting to give a presentation on the role of Newmarket Vision and Discover Newmarket, and to answer questions from the Committee. The Director provided a broad overview on the role of Newmarket Vision, which included its:

- History
- A specific action list
- Structure (community planning; education; transport; town centre; steering group)
- How it worked
- Relationship with local authorities
- Representation
- Achievements to date (Newmarket music festival; under starters orders; launch of Discover Newmarket)
- Future projects (cinema project; parking strategy; community rail partnership)
- Funding (Forest Heath officer time: 100 hours per month; no other allocated funding)
- Consultation
- Measures of success (delivery of action plan; progress towards the 20 year vision).

Newmarket Vision’s 20 year vision had 10 bold statements, which included 45 specific actions, split across four specific broad areas:

- Community Planning
- Education
- Transport / Traffic
- Town Centre

Councillor Robin Millar, Cabinet Member for Families and Communities explained the role of the Steering Group, which was established to keep the whole project on track by supporting the four delivery groups in delivering the agreed actions as quickly as possible. The Steering Group was represented by:

- Councillor Sarah Stamp (SCC – Communities Portfolio Holder)
- Councillor Robin Millar (District Council – Families and Communities Portfolio Holder)
- Councillor John Berry, substituted by Councillor Warwick Hirst (Newmarket Town Council Representative)

The Steering Group was currently looking at the role of the steering group and delivery groups, its achievements and its own structure going forward with a focus on being more of an enabler rather than an authorising body.

Members discussed the presentation in detail and asked a number of questions of the Cabinet Member and the Director who provided comprehensive responses. In particular responses were provided to questions as follows:

- (1) Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan – Ownership of this plan belonged to the Town Council and not the Newmarket Vision Group.
- (2) Benefits from Newmarket Vision – along with officer time, money from the locality budget was going through wards and ward members to help with issues the community cared about.
- (3) Engagement was important and was at the heart of the locality working. Newmarket Vision gave a great opportunity for district councillors to be more proactive in their ward areas.
- (4) Councillor Appleby suggested the Council should review the position of the Newmarket Vision Group and consider establishing Working Groups of the district councillors of the different areas of the district to consider local matters, in consultation with the parish and town councils and such bodies and persons in affirming the roles of elected councillors and councils to represent residents.

The Cabinet Member responded by acknowledging that there had been some criticisms of the Newmarket Vision and that he was very keen to address these. However, there were 111 people actively involved in Newmarket Vision, largely people from Newmarket who wanted to play an active role in shaping their community. Councillor Cole suggested that these participants ought to be vetted in some way (such as by election) and Councillor Millar refuted that suggestion as completely undermining the role of the community to play an active part in things that mattered to them. Councillor Millar then reiterated that the Steering Group was currently looking at changes to its structure going forward, and would be happy to update the Committee in six months time on progress.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the presentation on Newmarket Vision subject to an update being provided in six months.

**34. Local Air Quality Strategy Progress Report 2014-2015**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/15/009, which reported on work that had been undertaken during 2014-2015 to meet the Local Air Quality Regulations across the District. Both Councils (Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury) continued to satisfy the requirements of the Regulations and for the most part, air quality in West Suffolk was good.

Under the Public Health Outcome Framework Air Quality indicator, West Suffolk had better air quality compared to both the rest of the East of England and the English average. With regard to the key pollutant of concern, Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), monitoring confirmed that levels were generally dropping across West Suffolk over time. Both councils continued to lobby Suffolk County Council for action in relation to highways improvements within the locations where NO<sub>2</sub> levels approached or slightly exceeded the National Air Quality Objectives.

The Committee considered the report and asked a number of questions to which comprehensive responses were duly provided. In particular, discussions were held on:

- (1) The improvement of the air quality in the High Street, Newmarket.
- (2) The effects on air quality from aviation and agricultural activities.
- (3) Whether air quality had an effect on the racing industry.

The Committee also discussed the air quality in Brandon following the completion of the A11. Councillor David Bimson suggested that another check should be carried out as large vehicles were still going through Brandon even though traffic had been signposted to avoid travelling through Brandon. The Service Manager (Environment and Regulation) agreed to discuss the approach to monitoring further with Councillor David Bimson, Ward Member for Brandon.

There being no decisions required, the Committee **noted** the work undertaken in order to improve local air quality in West Suffolk.

**35. Decisions Plan: September 2015 to May 2016**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/15/010, which requested that Members peruse the Cabinet Decisions Plan for the period September 2015 to May 2016, for which it would like further information on or which might benefit from the Committee's involvement.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan and suggested that more publicity was needed in promoting the Community Chest Grant Funding.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the Decisions Pan.

36. **Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/15/011, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2015-2016 (Appendix 1).

Members were reminded to complete the Work Programme Suggestion Form when submitting future items for potential scrutiny (Appendix 2). This enabled suggestions received to be considered by the Committee at each meeting.

The Committee considered it's rolling work programme, and there being no decision required, **noted** the items expected to be presented to the Committee during 2015-2016, subject to earlier discussions to include an update on Newmarket Vision in six months time.

The Meeting concluded at 7.25pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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