

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 20 April 2017** at **6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Ruth Bowman J.P.

John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey
Christine Mason

David Palmer
Nigel Roman
Reg Silvester

148. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared.

149. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chris Barker.

150. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2017, were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

151. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

152. **Work Programme Update and Formation of a West Suffolk Information Strategy Joint Task and Finish Group**

[The Chairman agreed for this item to be brought forward on the Agenda]

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/013, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2017-2018 (Appendix 1).

The Committee was also asked to consider nominating two members with appropriate skills to sit on a "West Suffolk Information Strategy Joint Task and Finish Group". The purpose of the Information Strategy would be to seek

to recognise the strategic value of information to the Council and would promote and facilitate good information management practice, based on:

- a set of underlying data sharing principles;
- seeking to define how we use information currently;
- how we should be using information in the future;
- how this can deliver key outcomes to both our staff, our operations and our customers/consumers ; and
- describing where technology can help facilitate this.

The Committee considered the request made by the Service Manager (ICT) and nominated Councillor Brian Harvey and Councillor Simon Cole to sit on the Joint Task and Finish Group with St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Finally, the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) informed the Committee that its next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 8 June 2017. However, due to a General Election being announced this week to be held on 8 June, it was proposed that the meeting be rescheduled to be held on Tuesday 6 June 2017, at 6pm in the Council Chamber.

The Committee **noted** the update on the current status of its forward work programme and its June meeting being rescheduled to take place on 6 June 2017,

It was then proposed by Councillor Ruth Bowman, seconded by Councillor Nigel Roman, and with the vote being unanimous, it was:

RESOLVED

That Councillor Brian Harvey and Councillor Simon Cole be nominated to sit on the West Suffolk Information Strategy Joint Task and Finish Group with St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

153. Monitoring Community Safety Activities Including Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

[The Chairman agreed for this item to be brought forward on the Agenda]

It is the duty of the Committee, as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee designated under the Police and Justice Act 2006, to scrutinise the work of the Partnership.

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/011, which updated Members on the community safety activity in West Suffolk, including the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) from April 2016 to March 2017.

Over the past year the WSCSP continued to meet and discharge its statutory duties by carrying out an annual assessment of crime, producing an annual plan and carrying out Domestic Homicide Reviews, as required.

In May 2016, the WSCSP completed and published its partnership plan and project plan for identified community priorities for 2016-2017. Attached as Appendix A to the report, was the WSCSP project plan.

The report also set out the work of the Strong and Safe Communities Group; the multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Group and the Public Space Protection Orders.

Members scrutinised the report and asked questions of officers, to which responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on officer time involved in community safety and the cash award received from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and gang violence.

Discussions were also held on the numbers involved in anti-social behaviour. In response, officers informed the Committee that figures were referred to the Multi-Agency Group who looked at vulnerable cases of anti-social behaviour. There had been six cases in Forest Heath and a number were also pending.

In response to particular questions raised:

- 1) Domestic abuse figures were published and reported to the Community Safety Partnership on a quarterly basis. A "deep dive" exercise had recently been completed on domestic abuse and work was about to commence on the other workstreams.
- 2) Suffolk Constabulary had introduced a new ICT system called "Athena" which brought together areas of investigation management including crime recording, intelligence and custody and case preparation. It was able to provide local parish reports on crimes, burglary's etc.

Finally, the Committee was reminded that the Police and Crime Commissioner would be attending Council on 26 April 2017, and all members would be able to ask questions and raise concerns, in particular how useful the Safer Neighbourhood Teams were.

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

154. **Annual Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities**

[Councillors John Bloodworth, Ruth Bowman and Nigel Roman left the meeting at 6.45pm during the consideration of this item.]

The Committee was reminded that on 21 April 2016, the Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, setting out responsibilities covered under the portfolio.

At this meeting, the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities had been invited back to the meeting to provide a follow-up presentation on his

portfolio. Report No: OAS/FH/17/010 set out the areas of responsibility and the focus of the follow-up presentation, which was to:

- Outline the main challenges faced during the first year;
- Outline some key successes and any failures during the first year and any lessons learnt; and
- Set out the vision for the Portfolio through to 2019, and whether on target to meet that vision.

Councillor Robin Millar opened his verbal update by thanking the Committee for the invitation and then provided a number of examples, outlining challenges faced; successes and lessons learnt; and the vision through to 2019, such as:

- Councillors new way of working with locality budgets – (challenge)
- Evaluating outcomes – (challenge)
- Community Chest funding. £250,000 had been allocated to 16 projects – (key success)
- First Care had been commissioned to test the model being used for families and communities – (key success)
- Customer Services: 20,000 calls taken in June 2016 due to the Referendum; 142,000 calls taken last year; 87% of calls answered; 20,000 customer emails received; 52,000 face-to-face contacts; processed 38,000 online forms – (key success)
- Civica technology software to manage the customer services system. The functionality not as successful as led to believe – (least successful)
- Evaluating the Families and Communities Portfolio – (vision)
- Embedding families and communities into the way councillors and officers work – (vision)

Members discussed the update and asked a number of questions of the Cabinet Member and officers, to which responses were provided.

In particular discussions were held on how the portfolio was integrating with outside services such as youth development and safeguarding work; the work of locality officers and recent staff turnover; and the need to evaluate what was being spent under the Families and Community Portfolio to better understand whether it was making a difference to communities and residents. In response to a particular question raised:

- 1) The Families and Communities Portfolio was influencing services beyond its control. It was a massive change in the way that councillors worked as they developed and became leaders in the wards they represented. It was a different way of working for local government.

The Committee suggested a future member development session should be held so members could share with others how they were using their locality budgets, which the Cabinet Member agreed to progress.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for the update on his portfolio.

There being no decision required, the Committee:

- 1) **Noted** the update provided by the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities; and
- 2) **Noted** that the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities would look at arranging a future member development session on role of members and how they were using their locality budgets.

155. **West Suffolk Housing Strategy: Update on Progress Against Action Points**

[Councillor Brian Harvey declared a non-pecuniary interest as Forest Heath District Council's representative on the Shareholder Advisory Group (Barley Homes)]

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/012, which asked Members to review progress made against the West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018.

The draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy was considered in detail at a joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting with St Edmundsbury Borough Council on 23 July 2014 and was approved by Forest Heath Council on 8 October 2014.

Attached at Appendix A to the report was a detailed update on progress as at the end of December 2016, against 40 objectives under the above headings. The remainder of the report summarised each of the headings, key achievements to date and work underway and highlighted challenges and external factors impacting on delivery.

Members considered the report in detail and asked questions of the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, and the Service Manager (Strategic Housing) to which comprehensive responses were provided.

In particular discussions were held on building housing to lifetime standards; standards for space guidance; high density housing in rural areas; local lettings policies; the implications of housing on health, and the impact of universal credit.

In response to particular questions raised:

- 1) Universal credit: Landlords would no longer be paid directly, so tenants would now have to manage their own budgets. The Housing Options team and ARP would be implementing the new scheme before the full service was rolled out in Forest Heath in September 2018.

- 2) Member workshops would be arranged, in particular covering the welfare reform / universal credits.

The Committee agreed that it would be useful to continue having a Housing Strategy post 2018 when the current one ends, acknowledging that there was no legal requirement to have one.

It was then proposed by Councillor Brian Harvey, seconded by Councillor Reg Silvester, and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1) **Noted** the progress made to date against the actions arising from the West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018;
- 2) **Noted** the challenges facing delivery of the West Suffolk Housing Strategy; and
- 3) **Noted** that a further report would be presented to the Committee in early 2018 in order to monitor delivery in 2017.

156. Review and Revision of the Constitution (Quarterly Report)

The Monitoring Officer provided a verbal update on revisions which had been made to the Constitution during the last quarter. These had mainly been changes made to the officer structure / amendments to job titles.

She explained that in the past the Committee received a report each quarter on minor changes which had been made, and was happy to carry on that process if the Committee found that to be useful, or the Committee might only wish to receive updates when substantial changes were being made to the Constitution.

The Committee considered the proposal and felt that it would be helpful to only to receive updates on substantial changes being made to the Constitution.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the verbal update and that in future the Committee would only receive updates on substantial changes made to the Constitution.

157. Directed Surveillance Authorised Applications (Quarter 4)

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 required that Members should scrutinise the authority's use of its surveillance powers on a quarterly basis.

The Monitoring Officer advised that in Quarter 4, no such surveillance had been authorised. She then explained that these surveillance powers would mainly be used by the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) for carrying out benefits checks.

The Committee felt that it would be useful to see how ARP were using the surveillance powers.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** that the Monitoring Officer would provide the Committee with an update at its July 2017 meeting on surveillance authorisations carried out by the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP).

The Meeting concluded at 8.05 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
