

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath  
District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 14 September 2017** at **6.00 pm** in the **Council Chamber, District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY**

Present: **Councillors**

**Chairman** Simon Cole  
**Vice Chairman** Ruth Bowman J.P.

John Bloodworth  
Rona Burt  
Brian Harvey  
Christine Mason

David Palmer  
Nigel Roman  
Reg Silvester

**177. Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared.

**178. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chris Barker.

**179. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2017, were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

**180. Public Participation**

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

**181. Announcements from the Chairman regarding responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chairman attended Cabinet on 12 September 2017, and presented the Committee's report on items it considered on 20 July 2017, which was noted. The next Cabinet meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 24 October 2017, at 6pm.

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

The Committee was reminded that on 15 September 2016, it had received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth, setting out his responsibilities covered under his portfolio.

At this meeting, the Cabinet Member had been invited back to provide his annual update. Report No: OAS/FH/17/021 set out the focus on the update, which was to:

- Outline the main challenges faced over the last year;
- Outline some key success and any failures over the last 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 Lance Stanbury opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation to address the Committee on progress made within his Portfolio since September 2016.

Firstly, the Cabinet Member introduced two new Assistant Directors; Julie Baird for Growth, and David Collinson for Planning and Regulatory Services. Both Assistant Directors were working closely in delivering the portfolio's wide-ranging remit. However, on a higher strategic level, the portfolio aimed to achieve the following:

- Creating a safer, healthier and more harmonious environment in which to work and live, through regulation;
- Using powers to create the conditions for sustainable economic growth for our region, including housing and business growth;
- Lobbying for better transport links for West Suffolk;
- Supporting our market towns, and capitalising upon key sectors;
- Using the councils investment strategy to benefit citizens through business creation to sustainable energy generation to subsidise other services;
- Promoting the region through partnership working in film, leisure and business;
- Working the LEPs and other authorities to ensure that West Suffolk received its rightful share of growth and infrastructure; and
- Developing skills and increasing employment opportunities for all.

He then explained that the Council was now seeing progress in its journey of moving towards thinking and working strategically and not just in geographical or planning terms but in how it could go beyond the boundaries of its statutory responsibilities to lever investment and the right infrastructure, job opportunities as well as growth and housing that was more than bricks and mortar but helped wellbeing and supported communities and partners. For example, the Mildenhall Hub was a public and charitable sector partnership, joining health with leisure, education with library facilities and a space for the community all in one place.

The Cabinet Member then provided some examples of what the departments under his portfolio had been involved in over the past year and looking ahead at the challenges and opportunities in the coming months:

### Strategic Plan

Work had begun on developing the Strategic direction for Growth, which was being shaped under the Strategic Plan work over the forthcoming months. This would help the Council to clearly define its Growth priorities and align its resources in promoting what it was good at to attract the right businesses, infrastructure and investments to support communities. Making sure the council protected its rural areas, whilst planning for the future and the much needed homes we need.

### Communications Strategy

A Communications Strategy would underpin the council's strategic direction for Growth, helping to attract further collaborations, market investment and other funding.

### West Suffolk Local Plan

The Council was committed to commencing a West Suffolk Local Plan early in 2018, and would accord with the emerging guidance set out in the Governments White Paper.

### Minimum Space Standards

A technical advice note had been drafted, and officers were currently looking outside the administrative boundaries to identify what standards neighbouring local authorities were achieving on sites. The technical advice note was expected to make its way through the democratic reporting process in November 2017.

### Government's Proposals on Withdrawing Diesel/Petrol Vehicles

This was a priority for the Growth Team, and a paper would be coming forward on the impact of the Government's policy and how the Council would respond. A relevant policy setting out electric charging points would then be prepared for inclusion within the West Suffolk Local Plan, which would commence in early 2018.

### RAF Mildenhall

There had been considerable progress made with partnership working with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. The Council had signed a statement of common ground for the local plan examination, which was due to start in a couple of weeks.

### A11 (Cambridge to Norwich) Tech Corridor

The Council was playing a central role in the establishment of this brand.

## Infrastructure

The Council was working with Suffolk County Council, as well as neighbouring authorities, including the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in progressing work on the vital improvements needed for roads such as the A14; A11; A47 and A1307 as well as rail enhancements.

## Apprentices

The Council had successfully completed its first year of intake of planning apprentices. West Suffolk had three apprentices as part of the Suffolk Countywide Cohort of 10.

## Building Control

The new Building Control Team was now settled and was maintaining the market share following increased competition from private providers. They were working to capacity and looking to growth business, where possible.

## Hatchfield Farm

Since the appeal had been rejected, the Council was awaiting the reconsideration by the Secretary of State. The Cabinet Member felt that the decisions made by the council throughout this application had been vindicated.

The Cabinet Member concluded his presentation by stating that he was determined that the council used its powers and its influence to positively change the district for the better. That the council would continue to develop its Local Plan, not just as a rule book for development, but as a proactive tool that created an environment that would positively promote good growth. He was also determined that the council punched above its weight; to create a West Suffolk brand through its Communications Strategy that would attract business investment and new people to the area, as well as improving West Suffolk for its existing residents.

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

In response to particular questions raised, members were advised that:

- Hatchfield Farm: The Cabinet Member echoed the Committees disappointment that no decision had been reached. However, Members should take comfort in that the Council had done everything right.
- Single Council: A number of options had been discussed regarding the possible make-up of Development Control within a Single Council. The Cabinet Member stated that he was attracted to maintaining the two Development Control Committees and operating from one Local Plan.

- Apprentices: The Councils Apprenticeship Programme had attracted some planning apprentices and had it also taken advantage of the Governments apprenticeship levy (funding). The Council was committed to the concept of "growing its own staff" into a career path. The council had won awards for its apprenticeship programmes and had gained an exceptional reputation across West Suffolk.
- Tech Corridor: The tech corridor was a concept/marketing tool to bring together existing sites along the A14, as well as promoting a brand, which was in the early stages. The Council was looking at how it promoted what's good in West Suffolk, and officers were also travelling around to Cambridge businesses to find out what they needed with regards to expanding their businesses outside of Cambridge along the A14 corridor.

The Committee also discussed the quality of industrial units; RAF Mildenhall and having the correct infrastructure in place as and when it closed; re-examining commercial land and the need for more industrial areas and the timescale for developing the new West Suffolk Local Plan.

Finally, the Committee discussed commercial advertising and commented that the Council did not advertise in local papers, and felt that this was a missed opportunity. The Cabinet Member agreed with officers to looking into this further.

The Chairman wished to thank the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth for his attendance.

Councillor Rona Burt moved the recommendation, this was duly seconded by Councillor Nigel Roman and with the vote being unanimous, it was:

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth be asked to look into all aspects of commercial advertising across West Suffolk, including local newspapers.

**183. Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/022, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2017-2018 (Appendix 1).

The report also requested that Members identify questions they would like the Portfolio Holder for Operations to cover in his annual update to the Committee on 9 November 2017.

The Committee considered the report and came up with the following questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder for Operations at its November meeting:

- Newmarket Market: Update on the re-development of the market.

- Civil Parking Enforcement: Progress update.
- West Suffolk Operational Hub: What have the implications been in the projects delay, and what are the high risk areas?

Finally, the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) informed members that St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had arranged an Extraordinary Committee meeting for Wednesday 25 October 2017 at 4pm when the Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transports would be attending to discuss how communication could be improved between the various tiers of local government for the benefit of all residents and Councillors in West Suffolk, and the New Suffolk Highways Structure. The Chairman of St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Diane Hind, therefore wished to extend the invitation to members of Forest Heath's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to attend as observers.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the current status of its forward work programme for 2017-2018.

The Meeting concluded at 7.15 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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