

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 14 July 2022** at **5.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

Chair Stephen Frost

Trevor Beckwith

Mike Chester

Patrick Chung

James Lay

Margaret Marks

David Palmer

Sarah Pugh

Marion Rushbrook

David Smith

Julia Wakelam

In attendance

John Griffiths, Leader of the Council

181. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor David Smith substituting for Councillor Diane Hind.

182. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Diane Hind, Joe Mason, Sarah Stamp and Ian Shipp.

183. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

184. **Declarations of interest**

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

185. **Announcements from the Chair regarding responses from the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

No announcements were made on this occasion regarding responses from the Cabinet to reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

186. Public participation

There were no members of the public in attendance on this occasion.

187. Draft West Suffolk Annual Report (2021 to 2022)

The Leader of the Council, Councillor John Griffiths thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present Report No: OAS/WS/22/013, which outlined the draft West Suffolk Councils' Annual Report (2021 to 2022) and was before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments.

Throughout this year the Council had seen dedication, support and community spirit, which made West Suffolk such a very special place to live and work.

The Leader was proud that the Council was at the forefront during 2021 to 2022 as it responded to and began to recover from the impact of Covid 19. At the same time, the Council never lost sight of its core values of supporting its communities and businesses and planning for current and future housing needs. Alongside this, the Council continued to deliver high quality services in waste and recycling, determining planning applications and helping local organisations through the families and communities' work. As part of the response to Covid 19, the Council continued to administer grants for local businesses.

In collaboration with the Anglian Revenues Partnership the Council distributed its entire allocation of the Hardship Fund, helping residents with rent shortfalls to remain in their homes.

Six town centres benefited from projects undertaken to encourage shoppers back into town centres and support local businesses with Government "Welcome Back" funding. Community groups across West Suffolk were also supported through the Government's "Community Restart" fund for Covid specific projects.

The Council had delivered on a number of significant projects including the Mildenhall Hub, bringing together a range of services for the benefit of local people and the new Brandon Leisure and Health Hub, which included upgraded fitness facilities and community health facilities.

The draft West Suffolk Council Annual Report (Appendix 1) before the Committee provided highlights of all the work that all members and staff had achieved over the past year. The annual report was a small insight into the good work and positive outcomes which the Council delivers day in and day out. The Leader wished to thank everyone involved on delivering another excellent year of achievements during a difficult time which was fast-moving and ever-changing. The Council had never been busier or had greater challenges to face.

The Council was continuing the approach taken in the 2020 to 2021 Annual Report, by producing a shorter document using infographics, as opposed to the full written report. Feedback received suggested that infographics gave a stronger and more easily digestible summary of the Council's work and could

be used in a number of ways, including for example, for briefing materials, social media and parish councils.

The Chair thanked the Leader for his presentation. The Committee then examined the document in detail and asked a number of questions of the Leader, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

In particular, discussions were held regarding electric vehicle charging points; Covid business grants; the Clinical Commissioning Group; homelessness levels and how families and individuals could be supported to maintain a tenancy and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Comments and suggestions made by the Committee during its discussions on the draft Annual Report, for example included:

- Page 1: reference be made to the council's wider suite of documents that report on the performance of the council, including the Annual Statement of Accounts and performance dashboards. Furthermore, that these reporting routes help the council to understand where we need to improve, the challenges we face and areas of focus for the future.
- Page 3: eighth bullet point, the figure of 39,000 tonnes of household waste sent for processing at the Energy from Waste facility in Great Blakenham be confirmed
- Page 8: third bullet point, a link to the Housing Needs Assessment be included alongside a brief overview of the content of the assessment.
- Page 9: third bullet point, include the outcomes from the 1,232 households at risk of homelessness who were provided with advice and support.
- Page 10: add further examples of actions carried out by the council to improve biodiversity.

Officers agreed to look at the comments and suggestions and would incorporate into the final document, where appropriate, to be presented to Cabinet.

The Leader of the Council wished to thank the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for scrutinising the draft Annual Report and for their comments.

It was then proposed by Councillor Julia Wakelam, duly seconded by Councillor Margaret Marks, and with the vote being unanimous it was:

RECOMMENDED

That the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2021 to 2022, attached at Appendix 1 to Report number OAS/WS/22/013, be recommended to Cabinet for approval, subject to comments made during the meeting.

188. **Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 July 2022 to 31 May 2023**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/22/014, which informed members on forthcoming decisions to be considered by the Cabinet for the period 1 July 2022 to 31 May 2023.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan and did not request any further information on items contained in the Plan.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the 1 July 2022 to 31 May 2023 Decisions Plan.

189. **Work programme update**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/22/015, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2020-2021 (Appendix 1).

The Committee considered the report, and there being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the update.

The meeting concluded at 6.05pm

Signed by:

Chair
