

Cabinet



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Review of Cabinet Area Working Parties	
Report No:	CAB/SE/15/080	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	8 December 2015
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Purpose of report:	<p>On 28 May 2015, the Cabinet, as part of its annual review of Cabinet Working Parties, Joint Committees/Panels and other Groups (Report No: CAB/SE/15/032 refers), resolved that:</p> <p><i>'For the reasons given in paragraph 1.2.2 of Report No: CAB/SE/15/032, further consultation be carried out with all councillors and partners on the future of the Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Rural Area Working Parties with the outcomes and potential way forward being reported back to Cabinet'</i></p> <p>This report presents the outcomes of the consultation and recommends a potential way forward regarding the future of the Area Working Parties.</p>	
Recommendations:	It is <u>RECOMMENDED</u> that: (1) in accordance with the adopted West Suffolk Families and Communities Strategy, emphasis be placed on the new focus of Ward Members working with locality officers, and the ability for Borough Councillors to investigate locality issues through a variety of existing mechanisms, which could range from informal Ward Member meetings through to formal scrutiny reviews; and accordingly that	

	<p>(2) the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party be disbanded and, if required, proposals for a locality forum for Bury St Edmunds be developed with other local authorities and partners, building on the learning from Haverhill and Suffolk County Council’s Our Place meetings;</p> <p>(3) the Haverhill Area Working Party be disbanded but the need for timetabled, regular discussion meetings be recognised to enable Haverhill Borough Councillors to examine, debate and act on locality issues when needed with appropriate Portfolio Holders and officers; and</p> <p>(4) the Rural Area Working Party be disbanded and it be replaced with a quarterly Parish Forum by re-launching St Edmundsbury Borough Council’s existing Parish Conference, with the possibility of an Annual Parish Conference for West Suffolk.</p>
<p>Key Decision:</p> <p><i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i></p>	<p><i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i></p> <p>Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is set out in Section 1.3 and 1.4 below.
<p>Alternative option(s):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cabinet resolved to carry out consultation on the future of the Area Working Parties, therefore no other options have been considered.
<p>Implications:</p>	
<p><i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review has been undertaken within existing resources. Any changes required as a result of the review will also be borne from existing budgets. Reductions in staff time needed to support the working parties will be reflected in future resource planning.
<p><i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p><i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed direction as set out in the recommendations above supports the Council's Strategic Priorities and in particular, the adopted Families and Communities Strategy. 	
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Opportunities for joint working are missed	Medium	Consider engaging joint working wherever possible.	Low
Duplication of effort between member bodies	Medium	Carry out a review of working parties to ensure that they are all still relevant and adding value and do not cross over with the activities or other bodies e.g. partnership forums, scrutiny committees or task and finish groups	Low
The number of meetings cannot be accommodated with available member and officer time and resources	High	Carry out a review to disband working parties no longer required but seek tangible alternative mechanisms for members to engage in local issues.	Medium
Ward(s) affected:		All Wards	
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		Cabinet Report No: CAB/SE/15/032 28 May 2015	
Documents attached:		None.	

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendations

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Further to the resolution of Cabinet on 28 May 2015, as reproduced on the first page of this report, consultation was undertaken with borough councillors, partners and stakeholders regarding the future of the Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Rural Area Working Parties.
- 1.1.2 The purpose of any Cabinet working party is to deliver the Cabinet's priorities and functions, ideally without duplicating the role of any other committee or the ward members. In this context, the Cabinet's three Area Working Parties (AWPs) were set up to deliver specific Cabinet priorities in the rural, Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill areas. The AWP's have all evolved over time and the number of meetings has also reduced. In 2014/2015 eleven AWP meetings were held in the three areas, resulting in only three formal recommendations to Cabinet.
- 1.1.3 This reflects a change in approach, particularly in the case of the Bury and Rural AWP's, which had a member-led work programme which was designed to allow informal discussion between Ward Members, officers and partners on matters affecting their communities. This reduced the resources required to support the AWP's and allowed a very local focus on some geographically specific issues. However, it did on occasion duplicate the constitutional role of scrutiny committees, other working parties and other partnership bodies. Furthermore, while entirely legitimate and productive, it was mostly more of a locality function than the direct delivery of any Cabinet priorities, reflected in the number of onward recommendations.
- 1.1.4 In the case of Haverhill AWP, there has been a strong focus over the last year on the development of the town centre masterplan, a piece of work being carried out with the ONE Haverhill Partnership. Reflecting this partnership, the Haverhill AWP has been attended by representatives of both the Town Council and the ONE Haverhill Partnership.
- 1.1.5 Cabinet was keen, through this review, to see this positive evolution of the AWP's continue for 2015-2019 but it is equally mindful of the need, at a time of reducing resources, to reduce any duplication in the discussion of issues, within the Council and between tiers of local government and partners. In the case of Borough-wide issues, Cabinet would also like to see scrutiny committees play an even stronger role as envisaged in the new joint constitution for West Suffolk.

1.2 Initial Proposals from Cabinet

- 1.2.1 As part of the consultation documentation, consultees were asked for their views on possible alternative mechanisms for the future consideration of locality issues.
- 1.2.2 The initial proposals, agreed informally with Cabinet Members, put forward to be tested as part of the consultation were:

Bury St Edmunds: Building on one of the existing arrangements with local partners such as Suffolk County Council's Our Place meetings, Our Bury St Edmunds (the Business Improvement District (BID)), Chamber of Commerce, etc., there is a possibility of setting up a new locality forum in Bury St Edmunds. However, setting up more regular liaison between the borough, county and town councils (as achieved in Haverhill through ONE Haverhill), as well as other partners, might be an idea to pursue in the short term.

Haverhill: Building upon the existing arrangements of the ONE Haverhill Partnership (allowing for its current review of future working arrangements), there is the potential to establish a new locality arrangement in Haverhill, working with Ward Members and locality officers.

Rural Area: Mirroring the success of a similar approach in Forest Heath, a quarterly Parish Forum could be held, to allow the discussion of rural issues between parish, borough and county council representatives and partners, with invited speakers. An annual Parish Conference, potentially for the whole of West Suffolk, could then be organised.

1.2.3 For clarification, any of the arrangements above could refer matters to Cabinet or a scrutiny committee. Similarly, it was pointed out in the consultation materials that there was nothing to stop councillors arranging informal and ad hoc meetings of their own to consider a locality issue (which already occurs).

1.2.4 In terms of any outstanding business in the work programmes of the Area Working Parties (AWPs), it was suggested that these matters could be referred, as appropriate, to Portfolio Holders (in consultation with local councillors), Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committees, other working parties or any successor arrangements of the AWPs so these matters are still progressed as necessary.

1.3 **Consultation Process**

1.3.1 Borough councillors, partners and stakeholders were invited to reply by 30 September 2015; however some further discussion was held with partners in respect of potential future arrangements beyond this date as reported to Cabinet on 20 October 2015. Parish councils were also consulted at the Parish Conference on 12 October 2015. The feedback has now been analysed and recommendations formulated taking the responses received into account.

1.4 **Brief Summary of Consultation Responses Received**

1.4.1 Responses were received from seven borough councillors, Our Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk County Council (Public Health and Protection), the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (WSCCG), Bury St Edmunds Town Council and Haverhill Town Council plus 11 attendees of the Parish Conference on 12 October 2015. The following provides a summary of the responses received:

1.4.2 **Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party (BAWP)**

- Some Borough Council members from Haverhill felt that the current structure and arrangements of ONE Haverhill would not be a suitable model for replication.
- Not a detrimental step if this Working Party no longer existed and the ONE Haverhill model may be worthy of consideration provided that the purpose and focus is clear to ensure meetings remain productive.
- Working with key partners such as the County Council is essential as so many issues overlap borough and county responsibilities and residents do not appreciate the distinction.
- Support for potential alternative models for locality engagement, such as the creation of an organisation offering a similar environment to BAWP but which is broader than the current form.
- Clarity is required on the issues that should and can be discussed.

1.4.3 **Haverhill Area Working Party (HAWP)**

- A desire from Borough Council members from Haverhill to work together to deliver beneficial changes.
- A desire to see HAWP membership broadened to include all elected Haverhill members at each level of local government and other agencies such as WSCCG, Police and the Chamber of Commerce, to take on the key issues in Haverhill.
- Recognition of a need for a democratically accountable hybrid, chaired by an elected borough council Member but including town and county council Members.
- Recognition of the good collaborative work on the Haverhill Masterplan (which was led by the ONE Haverhill Partnership)
- Recognition that the presence of a Cabinet Member on the ONE Haverhill Partnership has probably resulted in greater awareness of Haverhill and its problems at both borough and county level.
- Recognition that HAWP and the ONE Haverhill Partnership have similar objectives – improving the quality of life in Haverhill; however this can sometimes lead to a lack of clarity over who has 'ownership' of a particular issue which can lead to duplication with matters being considered at both forums by representatives on both HAWP and the ONE Haverhill Partnership.
- Many positives recognised for collaborative working, however, a number of concerns were raised regarding the suitability of the ONE Haverhill Partnership to take forward locality issues on its own.
- Feedback informed the Borough Council that a recent review of the ONE Haverhill Partnership is looking to understand where partners might work together to share resources, knowledge and expertise making it much more enabling.
- Suggestion that all 10 Haverhill Borough councillors should be on any local group.
- Suggestion that future meetings should take place in Haverhill (although Haverhill Town Council also stated that meetings could be held at West Suffolk House to assist in saving officer time and resources)
- Recognition of the local scrutiny role of HAWP.
- HAWP should be retained but its Terms of Reference should be amended to facilitate shorter, more focussed meetings.

- With many new Councillors in Haverhill since the elections in May 2015, HAWP should be given a chance to operate, at least for a trial period.

1.4.4 **Rural Area Working Party (RAWP)**

- Desire to retain RAWP but with the majority of work being done by email. An annual scheduled meeting should be held with the ability to arrange additional meetings should business be of particular significance.
- Quarterly parish forums seem a good way forward and the existing annual Parish Conference is well attended and very useful.
- Suggestion (in 1.1.2 above) sounds great, think parish councils will also welcome this approach.
- Rural areas should have a mechanism for discussing common issues.
- Of the 11 respondents present at the Parish Conference, 10 were in favour of the proposal provided in 1.1.2 above.

1.4.5 **Other General Comments**

- Consistency in the decision regarding the future of the Area Working Parties i.e. either all are disbanded or all remain.
- Speaking with other longer-serving councillors, things have moved on and the Area Working Parties have probably served their purpose.
- Support shown by the WSCCG for all three initial proposals from Cabinet, as provided in 1.1.2 above.

2. Families and Communities Strategy: Context

- 2.1 In accordance with the Council's adopted Families and Communities Strategy, the following proposals are designed to promote a locality based approach, which aims to be led by Members working in their communities and supported by locality officers.
- 2.2 Much of the development of local issues will involve the commissioning of projects and initiatives that are community-led hence the need for the Borough Council to engage in more collaborative working with other tiers of local government and key partners.
- 2.3 The proposals in section 3 below have therefore not only taken the outcomes of the consultation into account regarding the future of the Area Working Parties but also emphasise the ability for Ward Members (and the communities they represent) to drive the development of issues affecting their areas through a variety of mechanisms.

3. Comments in Response to Consultation and Amended Proposals

3.1 Bury St Edmunds

- 3.1.1 Taking the above feedback into account, there appears to be a need for greater collaborative working on developing proposals for Bury St Edmunds in a more directed and cohesive way.
- 3.1.2 It is therefore proposed that the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party should be disbanded and, if considered appropriate, evolve by building on the

learning from Haverhill and Suffolk County Council's Our Place meetings. This would ensure that the Borough Council fully integrates with Bury St Edmunds Town Council, Suffolk County Council and other key partners to ensure local proposals in Bury St Edmunds can be driven forward more effectively and efficiently. Greater clarity on the purpose and objectives need to be established to ensure meetings remain productive and focussed on what is being set out to be achieved.

3.2 **Haverhill**

3.2.1 The fundamental issues which came forward from the consultation mainly relate to the constitution and governance of the ONE Haverhill Partnership, and how the town's Borough Councillors will engage in locality issues. It is clear from the consultation and subsequent discussions that the consultation proposal set out in 1.2.2 above can be adapted to address the concerns raised.

3.2.2 The ONE Haverhill Partnership is currently undertaking a review of its future working arrangements and our Families and Communities Team and Haverhill Town Council are working with them on this work. We could therefore formally feed in the comments from Members as part of this process. In particular a need for:

- a revised "vision" and remit for the ONE Haverhill Partnership;
- clarity around membership of the ONE Haverhill Partnership's Board to formally include a variety of elected Members (Town/ Borough/County) and other stakeholder representatives;
- consideration of how the ONE Haverhill Partnership ensures openness and transparency and a high level of public engagement; and
- a re-emphasis of the ONE Haverhill Partnership's delivery role and commitment to partnership working to ensure focus remains on what is being set out to be achieved.

3.2.3 However it is acknowledged that the ONE Haverhill Partnership is only a specific project delivery mechanism and does not address the need for the involvement of all elected Members in Haverhill in debates on focused local issues. Therefore, as per the alternative mechanisms outlined in 1.2.1 above, it is suggested that, when needed, specific Haverhill issues that the Borough Council has an involvement in could be dealt with via regular, timetabled meetings of all Haverhill Borough Councillors with relevant Portfolio Holders and officers. In this model, engagement with partners would continue to be through both the ONE Haverhill Partnership and directly between Borough Councillors and the Town Council.

3.3 **Rural Area**

3.3.1 The consensus of opinion emerging from the consultation appears to support the initial proposal to disband the Rural Area Working Party and re-launch the Parish Conference as a quarterly Parish Forum. This would allow continued discussion of rural issues, whilst expanding the engagement to incorporate town/parish, borough and county council representatives and partners to develop proposals collaboratively to achieve common aims and objectives.

- 3.3.2 An annual Parish Conference, possibly for the whole of West Suffolk, would provide the opportunity for representatives from all tiers of local government to engage with other key partners to develop issues arising from the quarterly Parish Forums that may affect or involve the whole of the rural Borough (or West Suffolk).
- 3.3.3 As highlighted in the initial proposal for an alternative mechanism in 1.2.1 above, groups of rural Ward Members would also be encouraged to arrange and support their own ad hoc local forum to discuss a specific locality issue, which is entirely consistent with the Families and Communities Strategy.

4. Scrutiny Reviews

- 4.1 In addition to the proposals above, and subject to meeting specific criteria and approval of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, borough councillors could submit a 'suggestion for a scrutiny review' as an alternative method for seeking consideration of a specific issue through the formal decision making process.