

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 10 March 2016 at 6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Bill Sadler

Andrew Appleby
Chris Barker
John Bloodworth

Ruth Bowman
Christine Mason
Lance Stanbury

By Invitation:

David Bowman, Cabinet Member for Operations
Stephen Edwards, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance
Brian Harvey

Sandra Graffham, Communications Manager (Suffolk Constabulary)
Tim Passmore, Police and Crime Commissioner
Supt. Andrew Mason, Local Policing Commander for the West
Gareth Wilson, Chief Constable

59. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

60. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Reg Silvester.

61. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2016 were accepted by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.

62. **Public Participation**

Roy May, a resident of Exning and Chairman of Exning Parish Council, asked a question in connection with Item 5 on the agenda "Suffolk Local Policing Review": 'Whilst chairman of Exning Parish Council, I must point out however that any views or statements given are personal and are not necessarily those of Exning Parish Council.

Over the past twelve months regular contact between the police and parish councils by way of crime reports to monthly meetings has ceased and that a valuable link in mutual information exchange has been broken. What measures, if any, would you introduce to further the two way traffic of information handling and would you not agree are so necessary in rural policing?’

In response, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Tim Passmore stated that there had not been a policy to stop communications with town/parish councils. This vital link between the police and town/parish councils would continue. Every town/parish council would receive a written report setting out crime statistics, based on a ‘you said, we did’ document and including a point of contact and the name and contact details of the Safer Neighbourhood Team. However, if there was a major issue, Mr Passmore invited Mr May to arrange a meeting with the Constabulary.

63. Presentation by the Police and Crime Commissioner on the Suffolk Local Policing Review

The Chairman of the Committee welcomed Tim Passmore (Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)) who had been invited to the meeting to give a presentation to Members on the Suffolk Local Policing Review. He was accompanied by Gareth Wilson (Chief Constable) and Supt Andrew Mason (Local Policing Commander for the West).

The PCC opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation. The PCC informed the Committee that Suffolk was one of the safest counties to live, in the UK and he wanted this to continue. He then set out the reasons for the review, which covered the following areas:

- Strategic direction and budget;
- Managing demand;
- Partnership working;
- Protecting victims and vulnerable people;
- Commissioning and grants;
- Innovation;
- Tackling new forms of crime; and
- Preventing and reducing crime.

The policing review was not solely financial. It was about the Constabulary responding to the changing nature of crime, with resources being located according to demand. The revised policing model for the county would be divided into nine localities, each led by an Inspector, who would oversee the work of the 18 Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) across Suffolk and emergency response officers within their area. (5 SNT located in West Suffolk). Three Superintendents would oversee this work, being responsible for the East, West and South of the County.

As part of the reallocation of resources from urban to rural policing, a rural crime team had been located in Stowmarket to cover the west of Suffolk.

Three extra PCSO's had been appointed to carry out a liaison role in schools across the county. Thirty more police officers had been recruited/funded to focus on protecting vulnerable people and support the county's cyber-crime investigations and a new motorbike team in Bury St Edmunds.

Working more effectively with partners both locally and regionally was also key in providing efficiencies across the public sector and the Constabulary was committed to furthering joint ways of working in partnership. In particular, it was vital for the public sector to move parking from criminal to civil enforcement.

The PCC reassured members that no police stations were closing. However, some front desks would be closed due to low footfall, but the buildings would still be occupied by police staff and had 24 hour intercoms.

The Chief Constable informed the Committee that resources had been increased, which included the launch of a new Road Policing Team on 9 March 2016, to cover the west of the county, based in Bury St Edmunds, to deal with speeding. New technology had been introduced such as body worn videos which provided clear evidence; automatic number plate recognition and a new website would be launched in the autumn to enable local community interaction.

Supt Andrew Mason (Local Policing Commander for the West), informed Members that a response base would still be located in Mildenhall with no change to staffing. A public meeting had been arranged for Thursday 24 March 2016 in the Mildenhall Jubilee Centre to meet the new Locality Inspector (Mark Shipton) and to hear about how teams would be working within local communities. There was also three Safer Neighbourhood Teams located in the Forest Heath area (Brandon; Newmarket and Mildenhall).

Members discussed the presentation in detail and asked a number of questions of the PCC, Chief Constable and the Local Policing Commander, to which comprehensive responses were provided on workforce plan; reward/recognition; benchmarking figures with other counties and the new police connect website. Discussions were also held on the following:

- (1) Decriminalisation of parking: Work was underway with district, borough and county councils to transfer responsibility for parking enforcement to the local authority. This would allow Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to spend more time on local problem solving.
- (2) Funding for Crime Prevention Panel: The PCC advised that it might be possible for the Crime Prevention Panel to apply for funding from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Grant. The guiding principle for the funding was delivering the police priorities.
- (3) Access to justice: Members raised concerns regarding the proposals to close a number of courts. Access to justice was important and people needed a court that they could easily reach. Local justice for victims was needed. The PCC acknowledged that this was a high priority for the constabulary and the Local Criminal Justice Board. Alternative options

were currently being looked at, such as "pop up courts". However, any support from local authorities would be gratefully received.

The Chairman thanked the PPC and his officers for an informative presentation.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the presentation on the Suffolk Local Policing Review.

64. **Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance**

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 Resources and Performance, who had been invited to the meeting.

Report No: OAS/FH/16/004, set out the overall responsibilities of the Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, which were:

- Business development / commercial
- Cabinet management and support
- Civic office (Mayor)
- Democratic services (including member's support)
- Financial services (including audit)
- Health and safety
- Human resources (including payroll)
- ICT
- Learning and development
- Legal services
- Performance and risk management
- Procurement
- Scrutiny management and support.

Councillor Stephen Edwards, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation. He then set out the overall areas of responsibility (legal and democratic services, finance and performance and human resources); current priorities for human resources, legal and democratic services; ICT Plan; finance and performance challenges; finance and performance plan; Anglia Revenues Partnership Plan; future uncertainties and member development.

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

- (1) Pensions – Officers confirmed in response to a question from Cllr Stanbury that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) was now a 'career average' pension scheme and no longer a final salary scheme, with some protections in place for members in the LGPS prior to 2014.

Pension projections had been built into the Council Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Suffolk LGPS was in a financially sound position.

- (2) National living wage – Officers informed members that the Government legislation on the National Living Wage could have a considerable impact on the Local Government pay spine and therefore the Council in future years would carry out work to mitigate that risk.
- (3) IT (paperless working) – Officers informed members that moving to a paperless system was a significant culture change and users needed to be confident on its reliability. In response to a question from Councillor Ruth Bowman, it was the view of the officers that the progress of members towards paperless working had been slower than anticipated. Progress of staff had been more significant with officers using mobile equipment and working 'paperless' more regularly. Further training and support would be provided in the move towards more paperless working.
- (4) IT (resilience) – Officers informed members that the council carried out regular business continuity exercises to test the resilience of the various IT systems and was investing in resilience. The council also held a list of IT systems which had service level agreements.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance for his informative presentation.

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

65. **West Suffolk Housing Strategy: Progress Report against Action Points**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/005, 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 meeting with St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 July 2014 and was approved by and Forest Heath's Council on 8 October 2014 and St Edmundsbury Council on 23 September 2014.

The West Suffolk Housing Strategy included a series of ambitious objectives against which key actions and targets had been formulated. These actions and targets were reviewed and, if necessary, amended, deleted or added to on an annual basis. The Housing Service reviewed progress against the Housing Strategy actions on a quarterly basis. The Housing Strategy grouped the objectives under the following headings:

- Planning
- Rural housing
- Developers and providers
- Private sector housing
- Adaptations and improvements
- Community
- Energy efficiency

- Land and resources
- Homelessness
- Efficiency and effectiveness; and
- Care and support.

Attached at Appendix A to the report was a detailed update on progress as at the end of December 2015, 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 on private sector housing, homelessness and registered providers to which the Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Housing provided comprehensive responses.

There being no decision required, 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** an update would be presented to the Committee in early 2017 in order to monitor delivery in 2016.

66. **Cabinet Decision Plan: April to May 2016**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/006, which requested that Members peruse the Cabinet Decisions Plan for the period April 2016 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 there being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the Decisions Pan.

67. **Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/007, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2016 (Appendix 1).

Members were advised that the Chairman had written to the Suffolk County Council Portfolio Holder for Roads and Transport on 11 February 2016, inviting him and appropriate officers to the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 21 April 2016. However, to date, no response had been received from the Portfolio Holder. The Committee was disappointed in the lack of response and felt the work programme item on "transport links for rural villages in Forest Heath" should not be pushed back. Councillor Lance Stanbury suggested inviting some of the interested transport companies to come and speak to a future meeting of the Committee.

Members considered the report, and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED

That the Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Lance Stanbury and the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) meet to consider which transport companies to invite to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Meeting concluded at 8.28 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
