

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 14 September 2016** at **4.00 pm** at in **Conference Chamber West**, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Diane Hind
Vice Chairman Jeremy Farthing

Simon Brown
Patrick Chung
Paula Fox
Susan Glossop
Richard Rout
Angela Rushen

Clive Springett
Jim Thorndyke
Frank Warby
John Burns
Tony Brown
Paul Hopfensperger

Substitutes attending:
Margaret Marks

By Invitation:
John Griffiths, Leader of the Council
Ian Houlder, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance
Alaric Pugh, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth

100. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Margaret Marks for Councillor Sarah Stamp.

101. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah Stamp and Andrew Speed.

102. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2016, were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

103. **Public Participation**

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

104. **Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth**

[Councillor Simon Brown arrived at 4.10pm and Councillor Clive Springett arrived at 4.58pm, during the consideration of this item]

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 Planning and Growth, who had been invited to the meeting.

Report No: OAS/SE/16/021 set out the overall responsibilities of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth.

Councillor Alaric Pugh, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation, and explained that the service had improved significantly over the last five years and was heading towards being exemplary. He then set out the main focus of the presentation, that being

- What planning and growth did;
- Current success and initiatives;
- Current challenges and how they were overcome; and
- Vision for the future to 2019.

The presentation also included information on the areas covered under the portfolio; being Development Management; Planning Policy; Economic Development and Growth; Environmental Health; technical support and local land charges. Each of the areas included examples of success and initiatives, for example:

- Successful transfer of the planning helpdesk to Customer Services;
- Successful implementation of the pre-application charging;
- Suffolk Business Park Growth initiative;
- Neighbourhood planning initiative;
- Solar Power generation programme initiative
- Strengthen licensing enforcement capabilities.

The vision for 2019 was to be more proactive and responsive, for example:

- Sufficient available, accessible housing and employment land supported with appropriate infrastructure.
- Increased employment opportunities.
- More higher paid jobs.
- Increased road and rail connectivity
- Working towards a West Suffolk Local Plan
- Enabling growth through smarter regulation, stronger relationships with businesses.

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

In particular detailed discussions were held and responses provided on the Vision 2031 document and whether housing figures would need to be amended; whether there were plans in place to provide affordable homes for lower paid workers; the shortage of commercial land; taxi licensing and how the system worked; Houses in Multiple Occupation and enforcement; conservation and the deterioration of listed buildings across the Borough, for example the Corn Exchange building in Haverhill; the new pre-application advise service; growth in rural areas with regards to looking where industrial sites could be located across the borough; IT issues with the Planning Portal and devolution.

In response to two questions raised, the Cabinet Member agreed to arrange a briefing for members updating them on the A1307, and would circulate to members the parameters used regarding A-boards.

The Chairman and the Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for his informative and comprehensive presentation.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the presentation.

105. **Approach to Delivering a Sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-2020 and Consideration of the Four-Year Settlement Offer from Central Government**

The Head of Resources and Performance presented Report No: OAS/SE/16/022, which sought to gain the Committee's support for the Council's:

- Approach in delivering a sustainable medium term financial strategy 2017-2020; and
- Direction on whether it wished to accept Government's offer of a four-year finance settlement.

The Committee was reminded that the current West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy was approved by Council on 22 September 2015, and the six themes continued to be at the forefront of the council's financial strategies for delivering a sustainable medium term budget. The approach(es) taken to date in delivering a year-on-year savings programme, had in the main, been very successful in delivering balanced budgets that had held up to member scrutiny and challenge and able to absorb changes as a result of external circumstances.

The report also included information on a shift in emphasis for income generation (behaving more commercially and considering new funding models); the current medium term budget gaps and an analysis of the main factors creating those budget gaps; a new approach in delivering a sustainable medium term financial strategy 2017-2020 (Appendix C); central government's four-year settlement offer (Appendix A); and the four-year settlement offer process (accept or reject the Government's offer).

The Committee considered the report, and with the vote being unanimous, it was,

RECOMMENDED

That subject to the approval of full Council, the Cabinet:

- 1) Support the approach to delivering a sustainable medium term financial strategy 2016-2020 as set out in Report No: OAS/SE/16/022;
- 2) Accept Government's offer of a four-year Finance Settlement, and authorises the Head of Resources and Performance (Chief Finance Officer) to advise Government of Council's decision; and
- 3) The Council's existing Medium Term Financial Strategy document and this approach paper be recognised as the Council's Efficiency Plan, for the purposes of accepting any four-year Finance Settlement under (2) above.

106. Final Report of the New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/16/023, which provided the findings and recommendations of the New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group.

The Joint Task and Finish Group (the Group) was formed in March 2013, to look into the problems of adoption sometimes encountered on larger housing developments, and related to both open space and highways matters. Problems had been encountered in the past when houses were occupied before the promised open space or access roads had been completed and adopted.

The Group considered ways in which the Development Management Service and other corporate teams (such as Parks), and Suffolk County Council Highways could work smarter together to avoid these problems in the future with major housing schemes.

It was reported that both Cambridgeshire County Council and Northamptonshire County Council had protocols in place to ensure that suitable planning conditions were imposed with major developments to ensure that phasing of streets and adoptions were controlled through the planning process. In addition, Central Government recommended the use of similar standard conditions where appropriate.

The use of such conditions needed to be agreed with Suffolk County Council (SCC), as Highways Authority. SCC had indicated that they would be amenable in using such conditions, subject to all other Suffolk authorities signing up to their use. The use of such conditions was generally seen as good practice and other colleagues in Suffolk were also informally amenable to their use.

In addition to moving forward with conditions to address matters of concern regarding adoption of roads, there were a number of other ways identified in which officers could work more corporately in ensuring issues regarding adoption of highways and other facilities, such as open space and play

facilities were well planned with joined up thinking from the start of the development process. This was felt to be particularly important for major developments and strategic sites across the two authorities. A new pre-application advice regime which was tailored to the type of development proposed had just been launched across West Suffolk. The service included involving key stakeholders/consultees such as the highways authority and the Council's Parks team for major and strategic sites. Best practice recommended that early involvement from consultees, in particular, ensured a smoother process and a better scheme being delivered when a planning application was formally submitted.

The Group had concluded that the introduction of standard conditions regarding adoption would improve the situation currently encountered and the good practice pre-application advice and the development team approach would also provide benefits in addressing the concerns raised by the Group.

The Committee considered the report of the Joint Task and Finish Group and asked questions to which responses were provided. In particular, some members were concerned about roads which had not been adopted. The Head of Planning and Growth advised members to provide a list of roads, which he would then raise with Suffolk County Council Highways.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RECOMMENDED

That the Head of Planning and Growth progresses with Suffolk County Council and the other Suffolk authorities the introduction of standard conditions regarding highway adoption.

107. Decisions Plan: September 2016 to May 2017

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/16/024, which requested that Members peruse the Cabinet Decisions Plan for the period September 2016 to May 2017, for which it would like further information on or might benefit from the Committee's involvement.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan, and discussed the West Suffolk Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, to which the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth provided information.

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

108. Work Programme Update

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/16/025, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2016-2017 (Appendix 1).

The Chairman informed members that following the Committee's last meeting she had drafted a work programme suggestion form, and had also met with the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities and the Head of Families

and Communities regarding the Bus Station in Bury St Edmunds. At that meeting it was confirmed that the savings objectives had been met, and secondly the tenant had paid and therefore the capital costs of the conversion were being met. The Council was currently at a delicate, but advanced stage of negotiations with a tenant for the front part of the Bus Station. Therefore, as Chairman of the Committee I have agreed for a report to be presented to the Committee once negotiations had concluded. She made the Cabinet Member and Head of Service aware of the Committee's main concerns and of residents, namely:

- the short tenure of the café;
- if it had been financially successful;
- that there were no contact details on the machines, should there be any failures; and
- the lack of contact details where real time information was unavailable.

As a result of further input on behalf of Overview and Scrutiny, the Head of Service promised to be pro-active and had signage made by the Borough Council, rather than waiting on Suffolk County Council and the tenant. All vending machines now displayed contact information, and there was clear signage with contact details for bus companies and the relevant transport information helplines or website.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the Work Programme for 2016-2017 and the update on the Bus Station at Bury St Edmunds.

The Meeting concluded at 5.50pm

Signed by:

Chairman
