

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 15 September 2016** at **6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY**

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Ruth Bowman

John Bloodworth
Christine Mason
Reg Silvester

Nigel Roman
David Palmer

By Invitation:

Lance Stanbury, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth

98. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

99. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Chris Barker, Rona Burt, Simon Cole and Brian Harvey.

100. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2016, were accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

101. **Public Participation**

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

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

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.

The Committee was reminded that on 10 September 2015, the Committee received a presentation from the then Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth (Councillor James Waters), setting out responsibilities covered under the planning and growth portfolio.

At this meeting, the newly appointed portfolio holder for Planning and Growth from May 2016, Councillor Lance Stanbury, had been invited to the meeting to provide a follow-up presentation on his portfolio and the work of his predecessor. Report No: OAS/SE/16/021 set out the focus for the follow-up presentation, which was to:

- Outline the main challenges faced since May 2016;
- Outline some key successes and any failures since May 2016 and any lessons learned;
- Set out the vision for the Planning and Growth Portfolio through to 2019 and were you on target to meet that vision.

Councillor Lance Stanbury opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation. The presentation 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;
- A11 Corridor Study;
- USAFE regeneration possibilities study;
- Single Issue Review and Site Allocation Local Plans;
- Solar Power generation programme initiative;
- Strengthening licensing enforcement capabilities.

The vision and priority to 2019 was:

- Involving members fully in the 21st Century Planning Process, and training had already started with members.
- Economic Development by creating a department to support and drive commerce.
- Local plan – implementing the plan in full. The local plan should be seen as an active document as a positive means to get things done.

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

In particular discussions were held on initiatives in supporting market towns and the creation of masterplans; the A11 technology study to attract the IT sector along the A11 corridor; the Community Infrastructure Levy; and the

provision of suitable business properties to attract higher salaried jobs to Brandon and the surrounding area.

The Cabinet Member wished to thank officers for all the work they were doing and for the Committee's scrutiny of his portfolio.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for the follow-up presentation on his portfolio.

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

103. **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/FH/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 15 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 sought clarification on the meaning of "*income inflation assumptions are less than cost inflation assumptions*", to which the Head of Resources and Performance duly responded.

The Committee scrutinised the report in detail and asked a number of questions, to which officers duly responded. In particular discussions were held on the Government's four-year settlement offer and questioned on what grounds would some local authorities reject the four-year settlement offer.

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/FH/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.

104. Local Air Quality Strategy Progress Report (2015-2016)

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/023, which reported on work that had been undertaken during 2015-2016 to meet the Local Air Quality Regulations across the District and recommend changes to the approach and specific actions.

Road transport was a major source of air pollution both nationally and locally. The Councils in West Suffolk worked with other organisations to maintain and monitor the quality of air in the locality. Suffolk County Council and the Highways Agency were key partners and worked with council officers to secure good air quality.

For the majority of the District, air quality remained good. However, work had concluded that some areas of the major towns warranted further monitoring to confirm that this continued to be the case in respect of the main pollutant of concern, Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂).

During the year, in addition to the routine work, officers undertook a more strategic review of the approach to air quality across West Suffolk. The timing and scope of the review reflected several factors and needs:

- Changes to statutory guidance published by the Department of the Environment (Defra)
- The role of Suffolk County Council Highways Department in respect of air quality management in the light of experience locally and across Suffolk
- Experience gained with respect to air quality regulation and planning since the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012
- The need to revise, consult upon and adopt an Air Quality Strategy in Forest Heath District Council when it lapses in 2012-2017 given that a

shared service approach has been operating for over three years and no equivalent was adopted in St Edmundsbury.

- The need to raise awareness of the issues of Local Air Quality as they affect the District.

The results of the review were set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report with additional detail provided at Appendix 1. Attached at Appendix 2 was the new streamlined report as recommended by Defra.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which comprehensive responses were duly provided.

In particular, discussions were held on the air quality in Brandon. Members were disappointed to see that there had not been a substantial decrease in NO₂. Officers advised members that they were working with Suffolk County Council to look at why NO₂ levels had not decrease as anticipated in Brandon.

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

RECOMMENDED

That the Licensing and Regulatory Committee undertake external consultation on the proposal to amend the declared area of the Air Quality Management Area in Newmarket, subject to technical approval from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

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

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/024, 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.

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.

106. Decisions Plan: September 2016 to May 2017

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/025, 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 asked questions to which officers provided responses.

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

107. **Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/026, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2016-2017 (Appendix 1).

The Chairman updated the Committee on the issue of parking enforcement in Newmarket in relation to specific roads. A reworded suggestion form had not been resubmitted at this time, because since the Committee's last meeting, the Council's representative, Councillor Brian Harvey on the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel had raised the Committee's concerns with the Panel regarding parking issues in Newmarket. A task force team on enforcement had been established to try and "blitz" areas where parking was an issue in Newmarket. If following this initiative, parking issues in Newmarket had not improved, a reworded suggestion form on parking enforcement in Newmarket could be resubmitted to the Committee in January 2017, for further consideration.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the update on the current status of its forward work programme.

The Meeting concluded at 7.43pm

Signed by:

Chairman
