

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 9 November 2017** at **6.00 pm** in the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Ruth Bowman J.P.

Chris Barker
John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey

Nigel Roman
David Palmer
Reg Silvester

184. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared.

185. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rona Burt and Christine Mason.

186. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2017, were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

187. **Request for an apology from Councillor Silvester**

The Monitoring Officer introduced this item, and explained that following comments made at the Council meeting of 26 July 2017, and a subsequent complaint being made, it had been determined that Councillor Silvester had breached the Code of Conduct and was being requested to apologise at the next available meetings of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Council.

Councillor Reg Silvester: Councillor, I give you my sincere apologies. I regret any distress that my language or remarks may have caused you at the Council meeting on 26 July 2017. My remarks were not directed at anybody, not the council. I was simply expressing the language that might come from my public in Brandon, and you yourself have attended a number of meetings in Brandon, and you know that sometimes the language, shall we say, can be direct. So I would just like to give my apologies to you for any distress that

might have caused you. There is also a possibility that I will not be here on 20 December 2017. I would therefore like to give my apologies also to the Chairman of the Council for any difficulties at that meeting that may have caused her in handling the issue.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the apology to Council would if necessary be carried forward to the February 2018 Council meeting.

188. Public Participation

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

189. Announcements from the Chairman regarding responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman attended Cabinet on 24 October 2017, and presented the Committee's report on items it considered on 14 September 2017, which was noted.

190. Draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework

[Councillor Brian Harvey declared a non-pecuniary interest as Forest Heath District Council Shareholder Representative on Barley Homes Group, and remained in the meeting during the discussions and subsequent voting].

Councillor James Waters, Leader of the Council presented Report No: OAS/FH/17/023, which sought input into the development of the draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2018-2020. The strategic framework represented a revision of the existing West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-2016.

The report summarised the work that had been carried out so far on the development of a draft West Suffolk strategic framework and sought views on the draft document attached at Appendix B to the report. The work undertaken to date had involved the formulation of a draft vision and strategic priorities, based on a review of West Suffolk's existing priorities, and set against a background of evidence about West Suffolk and the issues being faced. The three priorities that emerged from the work continued to be growth; resilient families and communities; and housing which were supported by a draft set of projects and actions.

Attached at Appendix A, was a diagram which showed how St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council were contributing to outcomes in West Suffolk alongside others, including residents, families and communities, businesses, the voluntary sector and other public sector partners, including Suffolk County Council and town and parish councils.

The aim of the framework document was to set out the council's priorities for the final year of two separate councils and to set the direction in the first year of a new single council. Decisions on what would happen after May 2019 would be for the new administration, whether or not that was a single council, but it was good practice to set the strategic direction beyond the end of the current administration to allow time for new priorities and plans to be developed.

The draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework would be considered by both councils' Cabinets and Councils in December 2017. The document would be proof-ready, formatted and designed, including the addition of photographs in advance of being published. A communications plan for the final stages of the process was also being finalised to ensure all Members, staff and partners were updated on how the final plan had developed.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which comprehensive responses were provided. Discussions were held on the infographics to be included at a later date; how the aspirations in the Strategic Framework would be evaluated; bringing growth forward in Forest Heath; Barley Homes and concerns about the withdrawal of land which was sold to another developer and issues with Universal Credit.

In particular, responses were provided in relation to the following questions raised:

- Universal Credit: Officers were talking to all agencies involved with Universal Credit (UC) , including the Citizens Advice Bureau, which was due to be rolled out in Forest Heath in September 2018. The Assistant Director (Families and Communities) explained that UC was about money management, and there were already concerns about the system and delays in payments being made. She confirmed she would be happy to provide the Committee with a briefing on the role out of UC in Forest Heath in 2018.
- Infographics: The infographics evidence data would be included in the draft document for Cabinets consideration in December 2017. The infographics would summarise statistics for West Suffolk, and would set out the emphasis of its importance. District Councillors were given ward profiles, and officers had now looked at the data for towns and zoned the rural areas. Councillors would then be able to compare data across Wests Suffolk. Officers agreed that they would be happy to present the data to the Committee, which would also be available on the council's website.

In response, the Chairman of the Committee advised that he would like to see the council working with parish councils and web links to all parish councils to access the data which would also help them in their jobs.

- Evaluation: The Strategic Framework was a high level document, and measuring successes was always an issue. However, the Strategic Framework was aligned with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and all council services. Work would also continue on the performance framework, which was reported through the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Comments were made on the following areas of the draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework document:

- (1) General: - suggest including reference in the Strategic Framework document to links with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- (2) Page 15: Point 2 – suggest including growth examples coming forward in Forest Heath.
- (3) Page 15: Point 5 – suggest revisiting the wording relating to Barley Homes and becoming self-sufficient.
- (4) Page 16: Point 15 – suggest including more detail on the role out of Universal Credit.

It was then proposed by Councillor Ruth Bowman, seconded by Councillor Nigel Roman and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RECOMMENDED:

That subject to the approval of Cabinet and Council the Draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2018-2020, attached as Appendix B to Report No: OAS/FH/17/023, be adopted, inclusive of comments made during the meeting.

191. West Suffolk Growth Outcomes and Investment Strategy

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/024 and supporting PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 1), which sought views on the four principles proposed for the emerging West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy. At this stage, officers were proposing a set of four principles to ultimately inform the development of the final strategy, which were:

- Principle 1: Investing in our Place and People
- Principle 2: Acting commercially
- Principle 3: Collaborating to maximise benefit
- Principle 4: Using our powers and policies

The presentation (Appendix 1) included information on the evidence base and needs of the community; where the council would be focusing its energy and resources to achieve good growth in West Suffolk; what the council's role should be in responding to its growth priorities; a map setting out the roles and high level strategies and resources which would apply in delivering growth across West Suffolk; the council's role as an investor; what the council's Investment Strategy should be; how projects would be assessed on a case by case basis using an assessment criteria; understanding stakeholders and partners, and what was the council's overall Strategy for investment.

The principles had been considered by the West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group, and after consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be presented to Joint Cabinet on 14 November 2017. The final strategy itself would then be developed for subsequent agreement.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was requested to consider any other factors which should be assessed by Cabinet as they developed the final strategy.

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

Members asked questions with regards to the previously approved £20m investing in our growth agenda fund. They sought clarification around whether that was from borrowed money which officers provided that confirmation of and that actual borrowing would be the subject of a treasury management process by the Council. This would be considered on a case by case basis taking into account current cash flow balances and short/long term borrowing requirements alongside external treasury management advice. It was further explained that the Council would monitor and manage the total Investment Fund, with the aim of achieving an overall net return of 1% (after borrowing costs). However, this was an assumption and the Council would continue to monitor this as part of the annual budget setting process and review of its investments from the fund.

In response to a question raised, members were advised that the council was committed to a number of projects, and would look at match-funding were possible.

It was then proposed by Councillor Ruth Bowman, seconded by Councillor Brian Harvey and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RECOMMENDED:

That subject to the approval of Cabinet and Council the principles of the emerging West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy as outlined in the presentation, Appendix 1 to Report No: OAS/FH/17/024 be endorsed.

192. Annual Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Operations

The Committee was reminded that on 10 November 2016, it had received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Operations, setting out this responsibilities covered under his portfolio.

At this meeting, the Cabinet Member had been invited back to provide his annual update. Report No: OAS/FH/17/025 set out the focus of the update.

The Cabinet Member was provided in advance of the meeting with some key questions identified by Scrutiny Members on areas they wished to be appraised on during the annual update, which were included in the report along with responses, specifically:

- 1) **Newmarket Market:** Update on the re-development of the market.
- 2) **Civil Parking Enforcement:** Progress update.
- 3) **West Suffolk Operational Hub:** What have the implications been in the projects delay, and what are the high risk areas?

Councillor David Bowman opened his presentation by thanking the Committee for the invitation to address the Committee on progress made within his

Portfolio since November 2017, which included an outline of main challenges; key successes/failures and the vision moving forward. He also welcomed the new format in providing questions in advance.

The Committee asked follow-up questions relating to the Newmarket Market; Civil Parking Enforcement and the West Suffolk Operational Hub, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

The Committee acknowledged the ambition project in relocating the market to the High Street, which included improving the overall look of the market for up to 24 pitches with appropriate gazebo's, as well as working closely with market traders, local retailers, Newmarket Town Council, the Newmarket Business Improvement District (BID) and the Jockey Club, with the proposed launch taking place in April 2018.

In response to a question raised, the Cabinet Member informed the Committee that if the improvements proposed for Newmarket market were successful, subject to resources they could potentially be rolled out to other market towns in West Suffolk.

Members were informed that the formal application (Order) to apply for the transfer of Civil Parking Enforcement from the Police to Forest Heath District Council had now been submitted to the Department of Transport, with a planned implementation date of 1 April 2019. Work would soon begin in developing area parking plans for West Suffolk, which would be discussed further with members and partners.

Members were also advised that the Police were still responsible for parking enforcement until it was devolved to the Council.

In response to a question raised regarding people parking on double-yellow lines in Brandon due to insufficient parking capacity, the Cabinet Member agreed to look into this further with the Ward Member and officers.

Members discussed the West Suffolk Operational Hub; whether Suffolk County Council was still fully committed to the project; the estimated cost in the delay of the project, and the land which was held under an Options Agreement (legal agreement). Officers advised that following the Development Control Committee on 2 November 2017 the matter had now been referred to the Secretary of State (SoS). Once a decision was made by the SoS whether or not to call in the planning decision for his determination, the Council would start re-engaging with the community in moving forward with the next phase of the project. All partners as a whole were bearing the additional costs in the delay.

The Committee noted the challenge of supporting large projects along-side the day job of delivering frontline services; the recruitment of frontline waste operatives and property staff; developing our markets and working towards Civil Parking Enforcement in Suffolk with partners across the county. Members discussed the Bar-tec back office technology which originally introduced with the brown bins service, which held information such as backdoor collections, who subscribed to the service and contamination issues.

This had now been rolled out to the black and blue bin collections and was currently being extended to the trade waste and street cleaning services.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for Operations and officers for their attendance and **noted** the update.

193. Decisions Plan: November 2017 to May 2018

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/026, which requested that Members peruse the Cabinet Decisions Plan for the period November 2017 to May 2018 for which it would like further information on or might benefit from the Committee's involvement.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan, and in particular discussed the "Applications for Community Chest Funding 2018-2019", which was scheduled to be presented to Cabinet on 12 December 2017. The Committee noted that its next meeting would be after Cabinet met in December 2017. It therefore requested it would like to receive a written response setting out an overview of applications received; whether applications matched the council's priorities and an indication of the demographic spread of applications received across Forest Heath. The Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) agreed to pursue this with the Assistant Director (Families and Communities).

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the November 2017 to May 2018 Decisions Plan.

194. Work Programme Update and Suggestion for Scrutiny

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/17/027, updating Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2018 (Appendix 1).

The Committee considered its rolling work programme, and there being no decision required, **noted** the contents programmed for 2018.

The report also requested that Members identify questions they would like the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture to cover in his annual update to the Committee on 11 January 2018.

The Committee considered the report and at the time of the meeting had not identified any questions they wished to put to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture. Therefore, the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) would email the Committee asking for questions to be submitted to her by Friday 17 November 2017.

Finally, attached at Appendix 2 to the Report was a completed "suggestion for scrutiny" form, submitted by Councillor Simon Cole, suggesting the Committee considers carrying out a post implementation review of the Home of Horseracing Project, a year after its official opening, and reviews the museums future plans on how the council could assist in its delivery as a partner.

The Committee was asked to consider the suggestion as to whether it would be appropriate for scrutiny, including potential outcomes and if added to the work programme to decide on an appropriate timescale for future reporting.

Councillor Simon Cole presented the suggestion to the Committee and set out why he felt it was appropriate to now carry out a post implementation review of the Home of Horseracing project.

The Committee debated the issue and taking into account information provided by Councillor Simon Cole, the Committee agreed to include the suggestion into its forward work programme for 2018.

It was then proposed by Councillor Simon Cole, seconded by Councillor Chris Barker and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED

That:

- 1) A review of the Home of Horseracing Project be included in the Committee's forward work programme for early 2018.
- 2) The Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) works with the Director (Project Sponsor for Forest Heath District Council) and representatives of the National Horseracing Museum to agree a mutually convenient date to hold an Extraordinary meeting in early 2018, with the venue to be confirmed.

The Meeting concluded at 8.05pm

Signed by:

Chairman
