

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2017/18	
Report No:	OAS/FH/18/014	
Report to and dates:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	7 June 2018
	Cabinet	26 June 2018
Portfolio holder:	Councillor James Waters Leader of the Council, Forest Heath District Council Tel: 07771 621038 Email: james.waters@forest-heath.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Davina Howes Assistant Director (Families and Communities) Tel: 01284 757070 Email: davina.howes@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Purpose of report:	The draft West Suffolk Annual Report highlights the key activities and developments that have been achieved over the financial year 2017/18, with regard to the priorities set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan.	
Recommendation:	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p>It is <u>RECOMMENDED</u> that, Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p>(1) Considers the draft West Suffolk Annual Report; and</p> <p>(2) Makes any amendments and recommends the draft West Suffolk Annual Report to Cabinet.</p>	

Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>		<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Consultation:		The draft Annual Report summarises progress in achieving the priorities set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan which was informed by feedback from residents, business and stakeholders.	
Alternative option(s):		It is good practice for councils to report on progress against their priorities in this way and ensures transparency on how they spend public money. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury could report separately on their work to achieve their priorities. However, this would not reflect some of the excellent work which has been delivered jointly across the whole of West Suffolk. Also, it would not show the continued joint working between Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury.	
Implications:			
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> • The Annual Report covers evidence to support the achievement of the equality objectives from the Strategic Plan.	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		None	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Misunderstanding of the role of the report (i.e. it can only give highlights of W Suffolk's activities, not every action taken).	very low	Develop a communications plan to clearly explain the role of the report	Negligible
Ward(s) affected:		All wards	
Background papers:		West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-2016	
Documents attached:		Appendix A - Draft Annual Report 2017/18	

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

1.1 Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2017/18

- 1.1.1 The draft West Suffolk Annual Report highlights the key activities and developments that have been achieved over the financial year 2017/18, with regard to the priorities set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan. Following a decision by Portfolio Holders, this year's annual report will be a designed typeset document.
- 1.1.2 The draft report also contains a number of case studies and examples from West Suffolk to illustrate the achievements described. These have been carefully drawn from a range of localities, urban and rural locations, and service areas, in order to demonstrate the range of activities undertaken by the councils. In some cases, initiatives were only focused on one specific area, however, so examples are necessarily drawn from these localities.

2. Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 Forest Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committee have raised the following questions for Councillor Waters to answer as part of the Annual Report item. The questions are as follows:

- 1. What do you think will happen among the Suffolk district councils with this unitary council idea that SCC has?
- 2. Any more news on Barley Homes or the Airbase situations?
- 3. What is the biggest advantage you see for emerging West Suffolk Council at the national table?
- 4. With so much going on is there anything Overview and Scrutiny should be looking at in your view between now and May 2019 that concerns you?

3. Response to Questions by Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1 What do you think will happen among the Suffolk district councils with this unitary council idea that SCC has?

- 3.1.1 Given the pressures and challenges facing local government and the wider public sector, it's important to always be reflecting on whether there are better ways of doing things to save money and achieve better outcomes with our communities. But as the district and borough Leaders made clear in our joint letter to the then Leader of Suffolk County Council in April, we believe that the best way to proceed is through partnership and that large-scale organisational change at this stage would be disruptive, and a distraction.
- 3.1.2 The district and borough leaders have jointly committed to looking at alternative solutions to unitary governance that will deliver proper, more transparent and collaborative reforms that will help address our shared financial challenges more swiftly and sustainably and will improve services

for the people of Suffolk at grass-roots level, rather than focussing on governance and structural reform.

- 3.1.3 My belief remains that the 'Suffolk System' is working for our communities and that we need to put our collective efforts into sustaining and improving that approach, building on our success and achieving even more, through effective and innovative partnership working.

3.2 Any more news on Barley Homes or the Airbase situations?

Barley Homes

- 3.2.1 Leaders of all three shareholding Councils (St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Forest Heath District Council and Suffolk County Council) met on 29 March and agreed the primary purpose of Barley Homes is to:

- Firstly to deliver homes which would not have otherwise been built; including providing market housing which better meets local needs and more affordable provision.
- Establish Barley Homes as a reputable house builder which other local authorities will want to do business with, and which provides an alternative market operating model for the future.
- Generate additional revenue streams for the councils through dividends, capital receipts and rental income.

- 3.2.2 We also agreed that we should proceed with the planning applications for the three Haverhill sites in the approved business plan at Town Hall, which was submitted on 17 May and Westfield's and Castlehill (in tandem with preparing a development brief).

- 3.2.3 In addition, we agreed officers should work on drawing up a pipeline of sites and the governance model would now include the introduction of a client side relationship management group, to include senior managers from all councils, who would further support and brief the Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG).

- 3.2.4 We would also continue to meet quarterly to review progress, however, following the change of leadership at Suffolk County Council we are now waiting for the appointment of the new Cabinet member with responsibility for Barley Homes and confirmation of who they wish to include on SAG and reconfirmation of the direction of travel.

- 3.2.5 Meanwhile work will continue on the three committed sites and an interim business plan is being prepared by Barley Homes, which it is intended will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in July 2018.

Airbases

- 3.2.3 **RAF Mildenhall:** The next stage in the RAF Mildenhall project was to work with Homes England and their appointed contractors to undertake further studies and produce a development brief for the base. Homes England have

now been informed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) that at this stage, the decision has not been made to pass the site to Homes England for development, so Homes England have put a halt to this work.

3.2.4 We have followed this up with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) who have advised that following the US announcement, they will not be vacating RAF Mildenhall until 2024 at the earliest. Mildenhall is no longer a priority site for the MOD and no further decisions will be made until there is more clarity about the departure date.

3.2.5 We continue to liaise regularly with both the MOD and DIO and will ensure that as soon as there is any change in this position we will be actively involved.

3.2.6 **RAF Lakenheath:** In my statement at full Council on 25 April, I spoke about encouraging local suppliers to contract with the US for routine work on the base. In addition, opportunities exist through the work to develop the base to receive the two new squadrons of F35 fighter jets, being managed by the MOD (DIO).

3.2.7 We brought together a partnership of Councils, Chamber of Commerce, Local Enterprise Partnerships, West Suffolk College and Job Centre Plus to ensure that our local businesses are well placed to take advantage of the supply chain opportunities that will arise from these significant contracts that will deliver over \$1billion investment at the base.

3.2.8 We are aware of reports in the press regarding the concerns of MPs about sites earmarked for closure and will monitor the situation.

3.3 What is the biggest advantage you see for emerging West Suffolk Council at the national table?

3.3.1 We said in our business case for a single West Suffolk Council that it would give us a unified voice to more effectively lobby Government and attract internationally recognised businesses. The recent debates in Parliament showed what a strong reputation West Suffolk has at the national level, and how the process of becoming a single council has added to that, especially in terms of how strong local support was from our partners. Indeed the Minister echoed this in his own speech in the Commons.

3.3.2 I believe that with that good reputation, and a more resilient financial situation, we will be in an even better position in the future to attract investment into West Suffolk for housing and growth. We are already a trusted partner that Government wants to work with because of our strong track record in public service reform, and so I believe that will continue to be the case and bring us new opportunities. We have already seen interest from the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in our area and working more closely as well as the possibility of helping encourage investment.

3.4 With so much going on is there anything Overview and Scrutiny should be looking at in your view between now and May 2019 that concerns you?

- 3.4.1 Firstly, I would like to thank Overview and Scrutiny for the important work they have done this year.
- 3.4.2 Having looked at the existing work programme, it already includes many of the things I might suggest in terms of operational and policy matters – so I am very happy that we continue doing as we are doing, as I am sure that the committee will invite Cabinet when needed to consider (and keep up to date on) items that are going to Joint Cabinet Planning – giving the Cabinet a chance to come along and discuss specific projects, and inviting officers as necessary.
- 3.4.3 It is now about looking to the future of Overview and Scrutiny, and the committee can add value in thinking about how scrutiny will work after 2019, and that's something it might do jointly with St Edmundsbury Overview and Scrutiny members.