

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 8 November 2018** at **6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Rona Burt

Chris Barker
John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey
Christine Mason

Robert Nobbs
David Palmer
Nigel Roman
Reg Silvester

By Invitation

Susan Glossop, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth (SEBC)
James Waters, Leader of Forest Heath District Council

263. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutions declared.

264. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies received.

265. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2018 were confirmed as an accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.

266. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from the public.

267. **Announcements from the Chairman regarding responses from the Joint Executive (Cabinet) Committee to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other updates from the Chairman**

The Chairman advised that he attended the Joint Executive (Cabinet) Committee on 2 October 2018, and presented the Overview and Scrutiny Report from its 13 September 2018 meeting, which was noted.

268. **West Suffolk Housing Strategy and West Suffolk Tenancy Strategy**

[Councillors Chris Barker and Rona Burt arrived at 6.07pm during the consideration of this item].

The Leader of the Council, Councillor James Waters provided Report No: OAS/FH/18/029, which presented the West Suffolk's draft Housing Strategy (Appendix 1) and draft Tenancy Strategy (Appendix 2).

A review of the Housing Strategy was due in 2018. By adopting a new strategy the Councils would be aligning its priorities with the Strategic Framework 2018-2020 and responding to new legislation and additional duties. Attached to the report were a number of appendices relating to the Housing Strategy which provided additional information:

- Appendix A: Was an illustrative summary of the types of housing available as well as the council's role in supporting the delivery and availability of each of these options.
- Appendix B: Sets out data relating to West Suffolk's population and housing that had supported the development of the strategy.
- Appendix C: The implementation plan would identify the main tasks needed to increase and improve the provision of appropriate housing over the next five years. The plan was being developed during the consultation period and would be finalised once the consultation had concluded.
- Appendix D: provided an overview of the Equality Impact Assessment. No negative impacts as a result of the strategy had been identified.

The strategy had been informed by an engagement exercise that included Councillor workshops and a consultation event with key partners. The formal consultation was taking place for a six week period between 9 October and 20 November 2018 and involved an online survey that was available on the council's webpages.

As at 5 November 2018, 21 responses had been received and there was strong support for the priorities and actions set out in the strategy and for the issues that the council was addressing. Specific comments had been received that relate to affordable housing, the need for appropriate housing for specific groups and the importance of infrastructure and transport to support the needs of individuals and communities.

A review of the Tenancy Strategy was also due in 2018. The Localism Act 2011 required local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy that outlines

how councils and registered providers approached issues which affected tenants living in the area.

Informal discussions had taken place with registered providers operating in West Suffolk about the proposed changes. As with the Housing Strategy, the formal consultation was taking place for a six week period between 9 October and 20 November 2018 and involved an online survey that was available on the councils webpages.

As at 5 November 2018, two responses had been received which would help the council continue to develop how it worked with registered providers and assist tenants living in West Suffolk.

The Housing Strategy and Tenancy Strategy, together with any feedback or comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, would be considered by the Joint Executive (Cabinet) Committee on 11 December 2018.

The Committee considered the report and the attached appendices in detail and asked a number of questions, to which comprehensive responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on rough sleepers / homelessness; specialist housing providers and securing suitable provision; and bringing empty homes back into use (privately owned and registered providers).

In response to a question raised, members were informed that it was not in the interest of registered providers to leave properties empty. Where a registered provider had empty homes, these were on a rolling work programme to bring them back into use.

In response to a question raised regarding whether the council knew where rough sleepers were coming from, members were informed that the Housing Forum met on a weekly basis to discuss all of those who were rough sleepers. The Housing Forum was able to monitor if there was any migration from outside of the area, which it had not seen any evidence of.

During the meeting, the Committee did not suggest any amendments to be made to the draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy or the draft West Suffolk Tenancy Strategy.

Councillor Rona Burt then moved the recommendations, this was duly seconded by Councillor Nigel Roman, and with the vote being unanimous, it was:

RECOMMENDED:

That Draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy and the Draft West Suffolk Tenancy Strategy, attached as Appendix 1 and 2 to Report No: OAS/FH/18/029, be approved by Joint Executive (Cabinet) on 11 December 2018 and Council on 18 December 2018, where appropriate.

269. Introduction of Universal Credit Full Service in the Forest Heath Area

[Councillor Brian Harvey declared a local non-pecuniary interest as his granddaughter worked for the Citizen Advice Bureau at the District Offices, and remained in the meeting].

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/18/030, which updated and informed members on the council's preparation for the implementation of Universal Credit Full Service in the Forest Heath area.

The Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) initiated the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) full service in St Edmundsbury on 18 October 2017, with plans in place do to the same for Forest Heath on 12 December 2018.

The report included information on learning from the St Edmundsbury implementation; observations from the Anglia Revenues Partnership, the Housing Options Team, Havebury Housing and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB); considerations and plans for the Forest Heath roll out and what's been done so far to prepare.

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

In response to a question raised regarding a funding issue from April 2019, it was reported that the council had received information a few weeks ago that ministers had decided to change the way that funding was being awarded to Local Authorities, which was an unexpected announcement. Currently the council received funding to cover both elements of the Universal Support package for Universal Credit customers (Personalised Budgeting Support and Assisted Digital Support), and the council chose to work with the CAB in the St Edmundsbury area in order to deliver the budgeting element, and the council paid them to do so. From April 2019, the government would now fund the CAB directly which could potentially undermine arrangements the council currently had in place within the partnership. However, all partners were determined that this would not happen.

The Chairman raised concerns regarding the government announcement and suggested the council makes representation to the government because of the following:

- 1) The way the decision was communicated (unexpected with no early warnings/consultation with any of the key agencies, including the DWP.
- 2) The impact the removal of the funding from the council would have on capacity and our ongoing ability to support UC customers.

- 3) In West Suffolk the council already had in place arrangements with the CAB which worked well, and the recent decision could potentially pose a risk to that working relationship.

In response, officers confirmed they could write to the minister, but would continue to monitor the support it provided to UC claimants and potential claimants.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report, in particular the learning from the St Edmundsbury rollout and the support and advice available to residents and councillors.

270. **Review of Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre - Final Report**

Councillor Christine Mason presented Report No: OAS/FH/18/031, which summarised the review of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre and presented a draft Action Plan (Appendix F) for taking forward the recommendations from the Christmas Fayre Joint Task and Finish Group.

On 18 and 19 April 2018, both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committees resolved to establish a Joint West Suffolk Task and Finish Group (the Group) to complete a review of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre. The Group met to discuss the planned approach to the review and to consider the specific areas to be explored. It was agreed that the review would explore the following areas:

- Principle and ownership
- Vision
- Timing and length
- Format and venues
- Type of stalls
- Links to wider economy (retail and tourism)
- Transport and accessibility
- Finance
- Staffing and volunteers
- Safety and Security
- Examples from other places
- Communications and marketing
- Management and resources

The report summarised the review of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre and presented a proposed three-year action plan for taking forward the recommendations from the Group. It also included an introduction; the background to the review; engagement; evidence base and Christmas Fayre review findings and recommendations. Also attached to the report were a number of appendices, namely:

Appendix A – Christmas Fayre key details document.

Appendix B – 2015 Christmas Fayre Review Action Plan and progress table.

Appendix C – Christmas Fayre Engagement/surveys summary document.

Appendix D – Information from Christmas Fayres held in other places and scheduled of Christmas events in West Suffolk.

Appendix E – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats document.

Appendix F – Proposed Three Year Action Plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth then thanked the Committee for the opportunity to address the Committee, and commended the Group on its work which had resulted in the recommendations proposed. She then updated members on how important it was to ensure the safety of the public at events, and referred to paragraph 5.32 in the report. She explained that two weeks ago, the Council led a table-top exercise to test how all partners would be able to respond in the event of an incident occurring at the Fayre. This unfortunately took place after the Group's final meeting, but raised some important points and hoped the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would support an additional recommendation arising from the review. This would add the following wording to Appendix F on "Safety and Security" as follows:

"An Independent Peer Review of the Council's Command and Management of the Christmas Fayre and Event Safety Plan is commissioned. This should consider the management and skills/expertise to deliver the roles required, learning and development as well as whether the skills set within the organisations involved are fit for purpose for continuing to deliver the Plan in the future. The recommendations of the review will be considered by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth".

In addition, the Portfolio Holder suggested a further minor change for the purposes of clarity; in Appendix F under "Finance", which states "Contact town centre organisations offering them the opportunity to contribute towards the Christmas Fayre". She proposed that the word "organisations" be replaced with "stakeholders", as this felt a broader word which potentially captures all parties who might contribute.

The Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) then updated members on the outcomes from the St Edmundsbury Overview and Scrutiny Committee who had considered the report on Wednesday 7 November 2018, and had recommended an additional recommendations as follows:

"That the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) be recommended to accept the proposed amendments put forward by the Cabinet Member for Planning Growth, subject to an Annual Report on the Christmas Fayre being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and specifically in 2019, to report back on discussions with the Destination Management Organisation and the BID (Our Bury St Edmunds) on willingness; desire of businesses to have/provide additional Christmas stalls throughout the town, over a longer period to create "Christmas in Bury".

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

In particular discussions were held on how many stewards attended the event and how they communicated with each other; the "possible" increase in the "provision of" park and ride and health and safety.

In response to a question raised, members were informed that the Christmas Fayre was run as a community event, therefore there was no charge made by the Police as it was a non-profit making event. The Christmas Fayre organisers took on board Police advice. There was a health and safety plan in place and CCTV cameras were installed across the town to monitor crowd control.

The Chairman congratulated the Group on an incredibly thorough piece of work and the report presented to the Committee reflected that.

Councillor Rona Burt then moved the recommendations, this was duly seconded by Councillor Nigel Roman, and with the vote being unanimous, it was:

RECOMMENDED: That

- 1) The Christmas Fayre Review Report (OAS/SE/18/032) and the Three-Year Action Plan (Appendix F), be approved, subject to the inclusion of the following paragraph in Appendix F under "Safety and Security":**

"An Independent Peer Review of the Council's Command and Management of the Christmas Fayre and Event Safety Plan is commissioned. This should consider the management and skills/expertise to deliver the roles required, learning and development as well as whether the skills set within the organisations involved are fit for purpose for continuing to deliver the Plan in the future. The recommendations of the review will be considered by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth".

- 2) To modify the Finance Section, contained in Appendix F, in order to replace the word "organisations" with the word "stakeholders".**
- 3) That the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) be recommended to accept the above recommendations (1 and 2 above, subject to an Annual Report on the Christmas Fayre being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and specifically in 2019, to report back on discussions with the Destination Management Organisation and the BID (Our Bury St Edmunds) on willingness; desire of businesses to have/provide additional Christmas stalls throughout the town over a longer period to create "Christmas in Bury".**

271. Garden Waste Collection Service Review - Final Report

Councillor Rona Burt presented Report No: OAS/FH/18/032, which summarised the review of the Garden Waste Collection Service (GWCS) by a

Joint Task and Finish Group and presents recommendations for the service moving forward.

On 6 and 7 June 2018, both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committees resolved to establish a Joint Task and Finish Group to review the progress of the GWCS and to consider the Motion put forward by Councillor Nettleton to introduce a sliding scale of subscription charges. The Joint Task and Finish Group met on five occasions to discuss the planned approach to the review and to consider the specific areas to be explored. It was agreed that the review would explore the following areas:

- Finance
- Customer access
- Service terms and conditions
- Impact on residual waste
- Communications and marketing
- Operational changes
- Impact of proposed changes

The report included the background to the review and progress to date; the review carried out by the Joint Task and Finish Group and proposed recommendations. Also attached to the report were a number of appendices, namely:

- Appendix A – Summary of meetings
- Appendix B – Financial modelling
- Appendix C – Subscription charges of other councils
- Appendix D – Subscriptions through the Customer Access Team
- Appendix E – Information flow and process map
- Appendix F – Examples of branding used
- Appendix G – Summary of meeting content, observations, recommendations

Throughout the four meetings, the Joint Task and Finish Group reviewed the various elements of the GWCS, experiences from other councils and the options moving forward. At the final meeting the Joint Task and Finish Group formulated its recommendations, which were set out in Section 4 of the report. Subject to the approval of the recommendations, officers would then develop an Implementation Plan.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which comprehensive responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on the proposed increase to the subscription charge; ensuring the GWSC was financially self-supporting; gate fees; the amount of garden waste being put in the black bins; the tendering process for the composting contract, and whether the Council received an income from the final product.

In response to a question raised, members were informed that there was no issue with flytipping with regards to garden waste.

In response to a question raised, members were informed that householders were able to purchase bags of high quality soil-improver from 11 household waste recycling centres across Suffolk.

Councillor Rona Burt then moved the recommendations, this was duly seconded by Councillor Brian Harvey, and with the vote being 9 for and 1 against, it was:

RECOMMENDED:

That the recommendations, as set out in Section 4 of Report No: OAS/FH/18/032, be approved by the Shadow Executive (Cabinet).

272. Annual Report by the Cabinet Member for Operations

The Committee was reminded that on 9 November 2017, it had received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Operations setting out responsibilities covered under his portfolio.

At this meeting the Cabinet Member had been invited back to provide his annual update, and Report No: OAS/FH/18/033 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.

The Cabinet Member, Councillor David Bowman firstly thanked the Committee for the questions submitted, as set out in the report, and introduced Jonathan Miles, Principal Growth Officer (Economic Activity and Investment).

The Committee then asked a number of follow-up questions relating to markets delivery; and who was responsible for the safety barriers behind the market stalls; to which comprehensive responses were provided.

In particular discussions were held on the make-over and relocation of Newmarket's market to the high street, which had been an overwhelming success, and had a positive impact on the high street. Members looked forward to the roll-out at other markets across West Suffolk.

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

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the Cabinet Members annual report.

273. Work Programme Update

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/18/034, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2019 (Appendix 1).

The report also requested that Members identify questions they would like the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture to cover on 10 January 2019.

The Committee considered Appendix 1 and due to the size of the work programme suggested that the Joint Executive (Cabinet) Committee Decisions Plan and the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Decisions Plan be removed from the January 2019 meeting to allow sufficient time to consider the rest of the proposed agenda.

Also, at the time of the meeting members had not identified any questions they wished to put to the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, but would submit questions following the meeting to the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) by Wednesday 21 November 2018.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the update and the removal of the Decisions Plans from the January 2019 meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 8.04 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
