

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath  
District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 10 January 2019** 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  
Nigel Roman  
Reg Silvester

## **By Invitation**

Andy Drummond, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture  
David Bowman, Portfolio Holder for Operations

## 274. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared for the meeting.

## 275. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Palmer.

## 276. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 8 November 2018 were confirmed as an accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.

## 277. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements from the public.

## 278. **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 confirmed that he had no announcements to make.

## 279. **Annual Report by the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Andy Drummond, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture, to the meeting. Prior to the meeting, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had indicated to Councillor Drummond that they wished to ask questions in relation to Brandon Country Park, and specific responses to the questions asked had been included in Report No. OAS/FH/19/001, which also included a copy of the Brandon Country Park Action Plan.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note the improvements made to the Country Park since Forest Heath had acquired the freehold of the site, and reviewed photographs provided by Councillor Drummond of the resurfaced car park. The Committee received assurances that people visiting the car park had a range of options to pay for car parking.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed to committee members that the Council continued to seek to increase income generated on the site. Marketing material had been developed, and a specific website created. Verse had become responsible for the running of the café, and the Council received a return both from any profits generated by Verse and rental on the site. Members of the Committee recognised the importance of continuing to work towards a position where the Park seeks to break-even year on year, and recommended that West Suffolk Council continues to monitor this closely.

Further questions were asked by the Committee, in particular:

- Training provided to staff members, particularly health and safety;
- The risk assessment process and regular risk reviews undertaken;
- Insurance arrangements for the site.

The Portfolio Holder responded to the questions, and confirmed that copies of the latest leaflets promoting Brandon Country Park would be forwarded on to each committee member.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder and Officers for attending the meeting.

With the vote being unanimous, and it was:

### **RECOMMENDED:**

**That Cabinet ensures that the West Suffolk Council closely monitors the income generated at the Brandon Country Park in future to ensure it breaks even.**

## 280. **Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022**

The Committee received Report No. OAS/FH/19/002, which presented the Council's draft Customer Access Strategy, 2019-22.

The report was presented by the Service Manager – Customer Services, in lieu of the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Robin Millar, who apologised that he

could not be present. The Service Manager – Customer Services, confirmed that the Customer Access Strategy was due to be reviewed at this stage, and the report proposed to build on the success of the previous Strategy. It was confirmed to the Committee that as a result of the Council’s approach, 20% of customers had switched to alternative forms of contact with the Council, resulting in savings of approximately £125,000 per year.

Members of the Committee queried the overall reduction in contact by customers noted in the report, and the fluctuations in customer contact during the year. It was confirmed that the Council will tend to receive more queries from customers during an elections period, and during annual billing cycles. Overall, it was considered that customer contact had reduced as people were able to obtain answers from the website. The Service Manager – Customer Services confirmed that monitoring was undertaken with other public services in Suffolk to ensure that customers were approaching the right organisation with queries, and were not being diverted to other service providers. It was confirmed the Council remained committed to ensuring members of the public could access services through a range of means, including face to face contact. Members were encouraged to let the Council know if they heard concerns about the service provided.

A query was raised in regard to the risk that new forms of technology, to improve customer services, was not affordable to the Council. The Service Manager – Customer Services clarified that the Council considers it important to procure the right solutions for the Council, and not simply what the market provides at a particular time. As a result, it could be more effective to delay procurement of software to ensure the optimal product was purchased at an affordable rate.

With the vote being unanimous, it was:

**RECOMMENDED:**

**That the Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022, be approved by the Shadow Executive (Cabinet).**

**281. Car Parking Update**

The Committee received Report No. OAS/FH/19/003, which provided an update on Car Parking over the past year.

In presenting the report, the Portfolio Holder, Councillor David Bowman, identified that the use of the car parks had increased by 1% during the year, but the income had reduced due to people staying for a shorter time in the car parks. Councillor Bowman noted that the Council was generally performing well against national trends for car parking income, and that a strategic review of car parking across West Suffolk would be undertaken following the formation of the new Council.

The Committee raised concern regarding Grosvenor Yard Car Park, Newmarket. Significant building work had been undertaken near to the site, which had left the surface in a poor state of repair. Councillor Bowman recognised the concern, and identified that a plan was in place to resurface

the car park once work had been undertaken by Anglian Water on the site. Councillor Bowman confirmed the Council was being compensated for the loss of use of the site during the building works. The Car Parking Manager confirmed he would investigate concerns raised about the lighting of the site.

Discussions were held by the Committee relating to parking enforcement. The Portfolio Holder noted his frustrations with the delays in implementing Civil Parking Enforcement in Suffolk, and efforts continued to apply pressure on the Department of Transport to implement the necessary legislation. The Committee identified that there were problems within Newmarket and Brandon as a result of illegal parking. The Committee requested detailed information on the costs and income from enforcement activities, and it was agreed a written answer would be provided.

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

## 282. **Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No. OAS/FH/19/004, which provided the Committee with details on their future work programme.

The Chairman noted that the next meeting would be the final meeting of the Forest Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and asked members to provide the Service Manager – Democratic Services with any questions to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by 18 January 2019.

A committee member queried whether the West Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee could review the progress of Barley Homes. The Service Manager – Democratic Services confirmed that the Council had committed to develop a further business case of Barley Homes. The West Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have the right to develop their own work programme but any requests such as this would be provided to the future Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider.

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

The Meeting concluded at 7.25 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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