

Markets Review Working Group – Recommendations Report

Report number:	OAS/WS/22/008	
Report to and date(s):	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	16 June 2022
	Cabinet	19 July 2022
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Decisions Plan: **This item is included in the Decisions Plan.**

Wards impacted: **All**

Recommendation: **It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the proposed recommendations attached as Appendix A to this report so that they may be reported to Cabinet.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 In November 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a work programme suggestion form, presented by Councillor Ian Shipp, encouraging a review of West Suffolk Council markets.
- 1.2 The purpose behind this review was to look at the strategic role of West Suffolk Council, aligning the operation of the markets to the council's strategic vision and supporting their development to meet the corporate priorities.
- 1.3 This report sets out the final recommendations that result from the Markets Review Working Party for discussion prior to presenting to Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Markets Review Working Group (MRWG) has met six times. At its first meeting the Chair and Vice Chair positions were confirmed along with the terms of reference. Members of the working party received baseline information about the markets in each of the towns; had a discussion about the visions for the markets; and confirmed the expectations of the review.
- 2.2 The baseline information presented to the group was very comprehensive and covered the following information: details about each market including when, where, what size, charges; other markets, events and initiatives; how we promote the markets; how we attract new traders; market trends and external influences; Operations responsibilities including the services provided to each market, the role of the Market Supervisor, staffing levels etc; operational issues with the markets; what we did to make the markets COVID-19 safe; parking and traffic management; power supply; competition for space; and detailed information about the market finances including a breakdown of income from each market.
- 2.3 At the second meeting of the MRWG in September 2021 the group received information in response to their questions from the previous meeting; had a presentation on case studies of best practice markets elsewhere; and then agreed the proposals for the engagement plan.
- 2.4 In November 2021 the third meeting of the MWRG was held. The group received a presentation giving information regarding the market survey (see next section below); the proposals for bringing information to the group from expert witnesses; the timetable; and a presentation from Cllr James Lay regarding other markets he had researched and his main findings.

- 2.5 In February 2022 the following expert witnesses were in attendance to answer the questions set by the review group:
- 2.6 Paul Brown, Town Manager for Love Newmarket and Newmarket BID; Julie Clark, former Haverhill Town Centre Manager; Mark Cordell, CEO for Our Bury St Edmunds; Brendan Dyson, Member Support and Business Development Manager, (National Market Traders Federation); Paul Firman, Market Trader and Haverhill Town Councillor; Tania Murphy, Field Support Officer, (National Market Traders Federation); and Roz Scott, Freelance Market Co-ordinator.
- 2.7 The expert witnesses provided detailed feedback to the review group that ranged from local intelligence and feedback up to best practice from elsewhere.
- 2.8 In March 2022 the review group received a presentation on the Markets Review evidence that had been gathered throughout the process. The presentation covered the following areas:
- Benchmarking
 - Notable small markets
 - Notable large markets
 - Common themes of market transformation
 - Overview of the survey
 - o Responses to survey
 - o Key findings from those who do not shop on West Suffolk markets
 - o General findings across all towns from quantitative questions
 - o Quantitative results for each market or market day
 - o Overview of qualitative results
 - o General findings from qualitative questions
 - Views from expert witnesses
 - Conclusion
- 2.9 Also, at this meeting Members gave feedback from their visit to Saffron Walden market; highlighting specific matters that were relevant to the consideration of this group. Finally, this meeting discussed the draft recommendations that were emerging.
- 2.10 The final meeting of the review group was held on 18 May 2022. The review group received a presentation by officers which recapped on the background to the markets review; the number of meetings held, findings from the review and proposed recommendations. All members in attendance confirmed they were happy to endorse the proposed recommendations for presentation back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee today.

3. Findings

- 3.1 Based on their evidence-gathering, benchmarking and engagement work, the Review Group did not reach any conclusions that would suggest a fundamental change in the way the markets in West Suffolk were configured or operated. Rather, they identified approaches and enhancements that could build on the existing work in order to support the markets to grow and improve in the future.
- 3.2 From the beginning of the review, it was clear from the initial evidence base that a review of the Market Licence Regulations (MLR) would be needed to make sure that these were equitable and up to date. This matter was re-enforced by the survey responses – in particular responses from the traders.
- 3.3 It is important to note that each of the five markets in our towns are different however there are factors, such as footfall, that are shared by each location. The ability of market stalls to survive, thrive and increase in number comes down to their trading (and profit) levels. It is considered that more people (footfall) bring the opportunity of more spend. Therefore, the promotion of markets and the continuation of special market events are seen as key elements that help to generate footfall.
- 3.4 Members of the public, through the survey responses, told us that the markets were particularly helpful during lockdown. Many people felt safer shopping from the market stalls in the open air. Further the opportunity of markets to support people's wellbeing came through from the surveys.
- 3.5 The visit undertaken by Members of the review group to the Saffron Walden market and its organisers supported the view of good promotion, encouraging footfall and using the markets as support for people and their wellbeing. In addition, it was clear to Members that it was possible for Saffron Walden market to operate at a profit. Whilst every market and indeed every town is different it was useful to understand how we may work towards financial self-sufficiency.
- 3.6 The survey responses were varied. Different key issues were considered to be important in different towns and indeed on different days. There were some requests, for example more seating or bicycle hoops, in towns where these elements have already been provided. In general, though, many of the survey respondents were clear that the markets could do more to promote more sustainable shopping habits. Again, it was noted that there are many stalls that have already changed their practices to ensure they are more sustainable. In addition, it was understood that we are holding entire market events dedicated to sustainability.

- 3.7 Finally, the expert witnesses interviews, which included representatives from the National Market Traders Federation, validated the work the Council was currently doing for our markets including the special initiatives such as the Makers Markets and our initiatives to support start-ups and business growth, as they saw this as generally good practice.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Following the assimilation of all of the information received by the review group and taking into account the feedback given at the last meeting, a series of recommendations have been drafted. These recommendations are set out in **Appendix A** attached to this report.

- 4.2 The proposed recommendations sit under the overarching banner: - "Creating Successful Markets - maximising the potential of markets and special events on the markets to support the vitality and viability of town centres."

The recommendations fall broadly into five themes:

1. Grow the customer base for markets by raising awareness and attracting new customers to West Suffolk markets.
2. Provide opportunities for shoppers and members of the public to engage in community and wellbeing activities through markets.
3. Increase footfall in town centres more widely by improving their vitality through markets and events.
4. Support effective running, growth and ongoing financial viability of West Suffolk markets.
5. Reduce the environmental impact of West Suffolk markets and promote more sustainable shopping habits.

- 4.3 **Appendix A** sets out the ways in which these themes will be addressed and provides the opportunity for progress on these recommendations to be monitored.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 If members of the Overview and Scrutiny are happy with the proposed recommendations, they will be presented to Cabinet on 19 July 2022.

6. Background documents associated with this report

- 6.1 Report number [OAS/WS/20/017](#) (Work Programme Update) and [Appendix 2](#) (Work Programme Suggestion Form).