

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 14 March 2024** at **5.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

Chair Sarah Broughton
Vice Chair Marion Rushbrook

Susan Glossop	Andrew Martin
Beccy Hopfensperger	Julia Wakelam
Birgitte Mager	Kevin Yarrow
Andrew Smith	Dawn Dicker
Luke Halpin	Don Waldron
Rowena Lindberg	

In attendance

Mike Chester, Appointed representative on the Police and Crime Panel
Donna Higgins, Cabinet Member for Families and Communities

271. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

272. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Brown, Aaron Luccarini and Andrew Speed.

273. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

274. **Declarations of interest**

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

275. **Announcements from the Chair regarding responses from the Cabinet to reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chair informed members that she attended Cabinet on 6 February 2024 and presented the Committee's report from its meeting held on 18 January

2024. As per the minutes confirmed above, Cabinet noted the comprehensive update received on housing, presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing.

276. Public participation

There were no members of the public in attendance on this occasion.

277. UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund - Progress Update

[Councillor Luke Halpin arrived at 5.15pm during the consideration of this item].

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/24/004, presented by the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, which provided an update, requested by the Chair in January 2024 on how the Council had been allocating funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) to projects and initiatives in West Suffolk.

The report included information on how the £1.9 million UKSPF and the £753,000 REPF allocations had been spent to date in the district and where allocations remained to be spent next year. Appendices A to D provided details of the projects which had been funded and the remaining allocations.

The UKSPF and REPF were introduced by the Government to succeed EU funding, with the purpose of supporting councils to make improvements for local communities and businesses. Councils had to submit three-year investment plans for the funding in 2022 and identify so-called "interventions" set by Government against which the funding would be spent. There were also strict rules around capital and revenue spending and the outcomes and outputs that must be achieved.

Funding had been used to support a wide range of important projects, across the voluntary, community and social enterprise, private and public sectors, which would make a difference in local areas. However, West Suffolk's allocation was not large compared to other councils, and that there had been challenges with the funding.

The Committee considered the report and appendices in detail and asked questions of the Cabinet Member to which responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on making ward members aware of funding so they could inform community groups in their wards of what was available; how the funding was publicised to community groups/organisations and what happens to funding if not all allocated by 2025.

In response to a question raised on whether feedback was collected on how funding had helped organisations, the Committee was informed that there was a grant agreement in place with every organisation that required the submission of monitoring information to the council and then to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to show the benefit from the funding provided.

In response to a question raised on what criteria had the Government used to allocate funding to local authorities, the Committee was advised that funding had been allocated on a local authorities' population size and level of deprivation.

In response to a question raised on double funding and core funding, the Committee was informed that where UKSPF had been given to organisations who were also funded from other council funding streams, it was used for specific projects and not for core funding. For example, the Theatre Royal had received funding so they could hold outreach activities. In relation to Citizens Advice, officers agreed to provide a written response.

In relation to the £38,109 funding provided in 2023-24 to support projects for town and parish councils and Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) for high street improvements, the Committee questioned how it was used, to which a breakdown was provided as follows:

- Clare:
- The provision of two poles on Market Hill to expand the current hanging basket display.
 - The supply and installation of six heritage bollards to the pavement in the area of the War Memorial, in order to enhance the visual appeal of the area, and to provide an additional safety feature to protect pedestrians.
 - Repainting shop fronts in the town centre to improve the aesthetics of the area.
- Brandon:
- High St infrastructure improvements including bridge parapets; street furniture painting and repositioning; bin storage; drain cleaning and repair and removal of raised curbs.
- Bury St Edmunds:
- Deliver an ice rink in Charter Square as part of the Christmas in Bury St Edmunds event. The UKSPF contribution would allow this attraction to be free over the Christmas period driving footfall to the town centre.
- Haverhill:
- To install a digital display screen at the Market Square/Queen Street end of the main shopping street in Haverhill to promote events in town to increase awareness, important public messages, the weekly market, business events etc.
- Mildenhall:
- To offer grants for businesses in the town centre who will be conducting work on the exterior of their buildings.
- Newmarket:
- Newmarket High Street shop front improvement assistance scheme, to encourage business owners to improve their frontages in line with the West Suffolk Shop Front Policy and Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan shop front standards guidelines.

Business owners would be able to apply for some funding towards:-

- a: Shop front improvement (to carry out structural changes).
- b: Shop front painting (smaller upgrades).

At the conclusion of the discussions the Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for her attendance and noted the challenges which officers had faced. She also suggested more communication on this topic as it was a good news story for West Suffolk.

There being no decisions required the Committee **noted** the progress made so far in allocating West Suffolk's UKSPF and REPF allocations to local projects and initiatives.

278. **Suffolk County Council: Health Scrutiny Committee - 24 January 2024**

[Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, also a Suffolk County Councillor, wished it to be noted that she did not sit on the Suffolk County Health Scrutiny Committee].

Councillor Andrew Martin, the Council's appointed representative on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee presented report number OAS/WS/24/005, which Councillor Sue Perry attended on his behalf on 24 January 2024. The report set out what was considered at the meeting, with the primary focus of the meeting being:

- Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT) mental health services.
- West Suffolk Hospital Future Systems Programme update.

Attached to the report was the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 – Report from Councillor Perry.

Councillor Martin also provide a verbal update on the NSFT Joint Mortality Review Group which had been set up and co-chaired by Caroline Aldridge and had now been disbanded.

The Committee considered the report in detail and asked questions to which Councillor Martin responded.

In response to a question raised in relation to what influence did Suffolk County Council have to influence the NSFT, it was reported that Suffolk County Council was the commissioning function, and not an accountability function. The NSFT as an organisation was not providing the necessary services needed. General commissioning was allocated by the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

The Committee then discussed what its role was and how it could support the Council's appointed representative more on the Health Scrutiny Committee, to which officers agreed to look into.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the frustrations and supported the update presented by Councillor Andrew Martin.

279. **Suffolk County Council: Police and Crime Panel - 26 January 2024**

[Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, also a Suffolk County Councillor, wished it to be noted that she did not sit on the Suffolk County Council Police and Crime Panel].

[Councillor Julia Wakelam left the meeting at 6pm during the consideration of this item].

The Committee received report number OAS/WS/24/006, presented by Councillor Mike Chester. Attached at Appendix 1 to the report was a summary of topics discussed at the Police and Crime Panel meeting held on 26 January 2024, being:

- Proposals to increase the policing precept for 2024 to 2025.
- Recent decision made by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections, May 2024 and the requirement of the Police and Crime Panel to review its Panel Arrangements and Rules of Procedure.

Councillor Mike Chester also provided a verbal report on matters which had been considered at a recent meeting held on 8 March 2024, being:

- Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) Inspection of Suffolk Constabulary.
- Police and Crime Plan Objective 2: "Provide services which effectively support victims of crime and invest in initiatives which reduce crime and disorder."
- Recent decision made by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Committee considered the reports in detail and asked questions to which responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on the proposal to increase the policing precept by 4.9%, which was regrettable, and noted the Panel did not take the decision lightly in supporting the proposal.

A member of the Committee referred to Lakenheath and Mildenhall airbases, which had a range of civilian, military and MOD police covering the same areas but there was no joined up thinking which resulted in the civilian police, of which there was only one officer being left to tackle an incident unaided and outnumbered while the MOD police sat by unable to help, and asked whether the Police and Crime Panel would consider how the police might work together to avoid this happening. In response, Councillor Mike Chester agreed to raise with the Police and Crime Panel.

In response to a question raised regarding Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls and whether there was an action plan, Councillor Mike Chester agreed to provide a written response on where the Police and Crime Commissioner was in the process of developing an Action Plan.

In response to a question raised on whether the Police and Crime Commissioner was collecting data on "Right Care, Right Person", which was introduced on 1 October 2023, Councillor Mike Chester agreed to provide a written response.

There being no decision required the Committee **noted** the contents of the report, subject to the above written responses being received.

280. **Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 March 2024 to 31 May 2024**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/24/007, which informed members on forthcoming decisions to be considered by the Cabinet for the period 1 March 2024 to 31 May 2024.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan and was disappointed to see that the "Olding Road Options Appraisal" had been deferred for consideration at a later date, with no future date being included.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the 1 March 2024 to 31 May 2024 Decisions Plan.

281. **Work programme update**

The Committee received report number: OAS/WS/24/008, which updated members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2020-2021 (Appendix 1).

The Chair of the Committee then sought the Committee's views on inviting Councillor Wijenayaka to attend its June 2024 meeting to discuss the West Suffolk Markets in relation to the increase in losses which was raised by Councillor Andy Neal under the Leaders Statement item at Full Council on 20 February 2024 and the Council's plans to address the issue.

Councillor Mager then raised the issue of potholes and flooding and suggested inviting Suffolk County Council Highways to a future meeting to provide a general overview of the issues and what was happening to rectify the issues. Councillor Waldon made further comments on flooding in Lakenheath.

The Committee considered its forward work programme and **agreed** to inviting Councillor Wijenayaka to its June 2024 meeting to discuss West Suffolk Markets and that Councillors Mager and Waldon would complete a work programme suggestion for relating to Suffolk County Council Highways issues on potholes and flooding.

The meeting concluded at 6.08 pm

Signed by:

Chair