
Informal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

**Notes of the Informal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Discussions held
on Thursday 12 March 2015 at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber,
District Offices, College Heath Road, Mildenhall**

PRESENT: St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC)

Councillor Ian Houlder
(Chairman of the informal discussions)

Councillors Patrick Chung, Diane Hind, Paul Hopfensperger, Stefan Oliver, Joanna Rayner, Jim Thorndyke, Frank Warby and Patricia Warby

Forest Heath District Council (FHDC)

Councillors David Bimson, Rachel Hood, Tim Huggan, Michael Jefferys, and Tony Simmons.

IN ATTENDANCE: SEBC Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council
FHDC Councillor James Waters, Leader of the Council
FHDC Councillor Robin Millar, Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities

REMEMBRANCE:

The Committee observed a one minute silence in remembrance of the late Councillor Geoffrey Jaggard, a former Member of the District Council and Vice-Chairman of Forest Heath's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Prior to the formal meeting, at 5.00pm informal discussions took place on the following three items:

- (1) Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-15;
- (2) Monitoring the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership; and
- (3) Overview and Update of Planning Enforcement Service

All Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Audit Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend the District Offices, Mildenhall to enable joint informal discussions on the above reports to take place between the two authorities.

The Chairman of Forest Heath's Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed all those present to the District Offices, Mildenhall and advised on the format of the proceedings for the informal joint discussions and subsequent separate meetings of each authority, prior to handing over to the Chairman of St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who would be chairing the informal joint discussions.

SEBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that under its Constitution, FHDC permitted public participation at its Overview and Scrutiny meetings. Therefore, for the purpose of facilitating this Constitutional requirement, it was proposed that public speaking should be permitted prior to the start of the informal discussions to enable any questions/statements to be considered by both Overview and Scrutiny Committees. On this occasion however, there were no questions/statements from members of the public.

Each report was then considered in the order listed on each authorities agenda.

1. **Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-2015**

The St Edmundsbury Leader, together with the Forest Heath Leader, outlined the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report (2014-2015), which had been written as a joint West Suffolk document and was before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments. This was the second joint annual report which Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils, working together as West Suffolk, had produced and it reflected a very busy year. For the first time, both councils shared a West Suffolk Strategic Plan which sets out the priorities to drive the way the councils worked and allocated resources from 2014-2016.

The covering report highlighted the key activities and developments which had been achieved over the financial year 2014-2015, with regard to the priorities set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-2016. The draft report contained a number of case studies and examples from West Suffolk to illustrate the achievements described. The final version of the report would be designed and would include photographs to help illustrate the progress during the year.

Both Leaders highlighted relevant issues for the attention of the Committee, in particular economic growth which was a key area across West Suffolk.

Members examined the document in detail and asked a number of questions of both Leaders and officers, to which comprehensive responses were provided. In particular, discussions were held on the following:-

- (1) Improving educational attainment – members noted that West Suffolk College had recently secured £7m from the Local Enterprise Partnership for their Engineering Unit for skills in young people. Reference to this funding to be included in the final version of the document.
- (2) Closure of RAF Mildenhall and expansion of RAF Lakenheath – this should be seen as an opportunity, and members noted the work that was taking place.

- (3) Local community initiatives – include a selection of projects and initiatives which had taken place during the year across West Suffolk.
- (4) Community centre transfers – officers agreed to expand on the wording referencing Newbury Community Centre.
- (5) Stanton – officers agreed to revisit the wording.
- (6) Include reference of the merger of the two leisure trusts, Abbeycroft Leisure and Anglia Community Leisure in April 2015.
- (7) Locality budgets – officers agreed to check the wording relating to the examples of the type of projects funded by locality budgets.
- (8) Parks and green spaces – officers agreed to include reference to Brandon Country Park.
- (9) Developing West Suffolk’s planning policies – Amend second paragraph, last sentence to read ...development will *or will not* take place
- (10) Infrastructure and delivery – officers agreed to revisit the wording in the first sentence to include the words “seeking and demanding”.
- (11) Case study: Affordable homes in Barton Mills – it was highlighted that the Parish Council was the primary driving for the project along with the District Council and Community Action Suffolk. Final version of the document to be amended accordingly.
- (12) Councillor learning and development – the committees considered what could be done to encourage members to attend training and development sessions.

The Leaders wished to thank both Overview and Scrutiny Committees for their comments on the draft Annual Report. They also wished to thank officers and councillors from both authorities working together across West Suffolk.

On behalf of the Joint Informal Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Chairman thanked the Leaders for their presentation of the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-2015 and all officers on writing the report.

2. **Monitoring the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Robin Millar, Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities outlined the report, which updated Members on the progress of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) from April 2014 to February 2015. In 2014-2015 the Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that Community Safety Partnerships would no longer be the commissioning bodies for the

community safety funding as this role was awarded to the Suffolk Community Foundation. In light of no funding being awarded to the WSCSP, the partnership ceased operating as a commissioning body and undertook a review of its role.

The WSCSP remained a statutory body and was required to complete an annual strategic assessment, produce a partnership plan and an action plan. In addition, it had a responsibility to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews as required. A review workshop took place in April 2014, to enable partners to consider a new way of working. Attached as Appendix A to the report, was the WSCSP Plan, which reflected its new focus and identified a number of key actions. Also attached at Appendix B, was the Project Plan for community identified priorities. Over the next two years the WSCSP would continue to review its role in light of changing needs and demands and amend its role as appropriate.

Members scrutinised the report and asked a number of questions to which the Portfolio Holder and officers provided comprehensive responses. Discussions were held on the partnership's new way of working and the priorities identified in the strategic review. In particular understanding emerging issues and ensuring that the WSCSP identified its role within supporting this; for example, domestic abuse and human trafficking.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their presentation of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Report.

(Councillor Jim Thorndyke left the meeting at 6.19pm during the consideration of this item).

3. **Overview and Update of Planning Enforcement Service**

The Head of Planning and Growth presented the report, which updated members on the newly formed Shared Planning Enforcement Team, including caseloads and forward work programme.

The Enforcement Team in 2015 would be consulting on producing a Local Enforcement Plan. The Plan would be in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, and gives Councils the opportunity to state what work they would do, how they would do it and what would be given priority.

One area of consideration was the attention to issues within Conservation Areas where additional resources or monitoring might be appropriate. A declaration of intent within a published plan would go some way to providing clarity to all parties concerned. Work was also being undertaken on making the Enforcement Registers available online and also on producing a periodic update to ward members and parishes so that they knew what enforcement cases were being looked at in their area.

Members scrutinised the report and asked questions to which the Head of Planning and Growth provided comprehensive responses. Members expressed their delight that a West Suffolk Enforcement Team had been established and that the team would especially be looking at enforcement issues within conservation areas.

On the conclusion of the informal joint discussions at 6.28pm, the Chairman formally opened the meeting of the Forest Heath District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee at 6.35pm, in the Council Chamber.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 12 March 2015** at **6.35pm** at the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Tony Simmons

David Bimson
Rachel Hood

Tim Huggan
Michael Jefferys

12. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Anderson, Chris Barker, John McGhee and Tony Wheble.

13. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

14. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

15. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2014 were accepted by the Committee as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

16. **Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-15**

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting on the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-2015, with Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Committee formally considered Report No: OAS/FH/15/001, which sought approval of the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-2015. Subject to the comments made during the informal joint discussions, with the vote being unanimous, it was:

RECOMMENDED

That the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-2015, as contained in Appendix A to Report No: OAS/FH/15/001 be approved, subject to comments made during the informal discussions.

17. **Monitoring the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership**

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting on the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Monitoring report, with Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Committee formally considered Report No: OAS/FH/15/002.

Members had scrutinised the report in detail and had asked a number of questions to which responses were duly provided.

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

18. **Overview and Update of Planning Enforcement Service**

Further to the joint informal discussions held prior to the meeting on the Planning Enforcement Service overview and update report, with Members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Committee formally considered Report No: OAS/FH/15/003.

Members had scrutinised the report in detail and had asked a number of questions to which responses were duly provided.

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

19. **Revisions to Locality Budget Guidance and Locality Budget Application Form**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/15/004, which updated the Committee on revisions made to the Locality Budget Scheme Guidance for Councillors and Application Form for 2015-2016. Since the scheme was introduced in June 2012, it had continued to operate well across the district. Between April 2014 and January 2015, 112 projects had been supported with a total of £37,100 allocated across the district. Taking into account the learning from the scheme over the past two years, revised guidance had been produced to assist Councillors develop the scheme further and ensure that funding was supporting community matters.

Attached at Appendix A to the report was the amended guidance and attached at Appendix B was the revised application form.

The revised application form had been designed to make it easier for Councillors to consider the merits of a community project or activity with some explanatory notes to accompany the form. There would also be the introduction of an online form which could be submitted electronically to the assigned Families and Communities Officer.

The views of the Committee were sought on the revised guidance for the locality budget scheme. Following the Committee's discussions, the revised guidance would come into effect after the Elections, providing newly elected members a foundation for their work in the community.

Members scrutinised the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities duly responded. In particular, members suggested that paragraph 1.3 of the guidance be reworded as it was felt to be too prescriptive to only being able to fund projects within a Councillor's own ward.

There being no decision required, the Committee **noted** the contents of the report, subject to paragraph 1.3 of the guidance being reworded.

20. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of Urgent Business raised.

The Meeting concluded at 6.44pm

Signed by:

Chairman
