

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 10 June 2015** at **4.00 pm** at the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Diane Hind
Vice Chairman Jeremy Farthing

Simon Brown
Terry Buckle
Patrick Chung
Susan Glossop
Tim Marks
Richard Rout

Angela Rushen
Andrew Speed
Clive Springett
Jim Thorndyke
Frank Warby

Substitutes attending:

Tony Brown

By Invitation:

Alaric Pugh, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth

20. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Burns and Paul Hopfensperger.

Councillor Wayne Hailstone was also unable to attend.

21. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Tony Brown for Councillor Tony Burns.

22. **Public Participation**

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

23. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. **Joint Anglia Revenues Partnership Debt Management and Recovery Policy**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/15/006, which reminded Members that at its meeting held in September 2014, as part of reviewing the Cabinet's then Decisions Plan, Members queried the process of writing-off outstanding debts; why it took several years for a debt to be accumulated and what was the critical point in triggering a write-off. At the time this was raised with Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP), and taking into account the planned timing for the development of an ARP debt management policy, it was agreed with the then Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the draft policy be added to a future meeting of the Committee, instead of a stand-alone report.

Jo Andrews (Strategic Revenues Manager) from ARP presented the report. Attached at Appendix A was the ARP draft policy, which had been shared recently with all other ARP partners for their comments and scrutiny. The draft policy set out the billing; collection and recovery of Council Tax; Non-Domestic Rates and Housing Benefits Overpayments across West Suffolk and the wider ARP. This draft policy replaced previous policies of the ARP and updated the content to reflect changes introduced by recent changes to enforcement legislation. However, it excluded the activities relating to sundry debt of the Council, which was subject of a separate policy.

The Committees comments and recommendations were sought and would be forwarded to a future meeting of the Cabinet for their consideration. All comments would then be referred back to the ARP Joint Committee for consideration.

The Committee scrutinised the report in detail and asked a number of questions to which the Strategic Revenues Manager (ARP) and the Head of Resources and Performance duly responded.

The Committee noted that customers were encouraged to contact ARP as soon as possible if they had difficulties making payments, but felt that under paragraph 4.4 of Appendix A, reference should be made at the earliest opportunity to offer debt advice and counselling. It was suggested that this information should be sent out with the first reminder for non-payment of Council Tax and non-domestic rates.

With the vote being unanimous it was:

RECOMMENDED:

That the Joint ARP Debt Management and Recovery Policy as set out in Appendix A to Report No: OAS/SE/15/006 be approved, subject to reference being included on how to access debt advice and counselling

when sending out the first reminder for non-payment of Council Tax and non-domestic rates.

25. **Review of Christmas Fayre**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/15/007, which sought the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to conduct a review into the Christmas Fayre and adopt a five year operational plan.

The Christmas Fayre had developed from a small event with a small amount of resources to an event which attracted over 120,000 visitors to Bury St Edmunds over a four day period. As the event was now in its twelfth year it was considered that a formal review of the event was opportune.

There was a long lead in time for each Christmas Fayre event and the 2015 Fayre would run as already planned. As such the review would be in time to influence the planning and delivery of the Christmas Fayre 2016 and form part of the five year plan.

It was proposed that a Task and Finish Group be established comprising of six Members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with two officers in support. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth informed the Committee that he would be happy to offer any help to the Task and Finish Group, if invited.

The precise terms of reference for the review group were to be agreed. However it was proposed that the review would include:

- Finance (resources needed for an event this size);
- Governance (terms of reference to be agreed by the Task and Finish Group);
- Information from the Consultation/Focus group (an independent focus group of partners be established for the long-term strategic direction of the event); and
- Operational issues (health and safety/parking/park and ride service/communications and marketing).

The Committee considered the report and asked a number of questions to which officers duly responded.

It was suggested that as part of the review whether "lessons learnt" could be fed into Haverhill's Christmas event, to which officers agreed was a good idea.

RESOLVED

That Councillors Terry Buckle, Patrick Chung, Jeremy Farthing, Richard Rout, Clive Springett and Frank Warby be nominated to sit on the Christmas Fayre Task and Finish Group to review the Christmas Fayre and adopt a five year operational plan.

26. **Decisions Plan: June 2015 to May 2016**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/15/008, which requested that Members peruse the Cabinet Decisions Plan for the period June 2015 to May 2016, for which it would like further information on or which might benefit from the Committee's involvement.

The Committee considered the Decisions Plan in detail and asked a number of questions. In particular the Committee discussed the Review of Cabinet Working Parties; Temporary Accommodation Provision; Hopton Development Brief; Street Vending Policy; and Definitions and Provisions made for Political Parties and Pressure Groups in Revised Market Licence Regulations, to which comprehensive responses were duly provided by officers and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth.

Discussions were also held on the West Suffolk Operational Hub and the Local Housing Investment Options. Members felt that both projects might benefit from joint involvement by pre-scrutinising the two projects with Forest Heath District Council prior to any final decisions being made by Cabinet.

The North West and North East Haverhill Relief Road and the Haverhill Town Centre Master Plan were also discussed and officers agreed to provide an update to a future meeting of the Committee.

Finally, the Committee discussed the "Animal Boarding, Dog Breeding Establishments and Pet Shops – Licensing Conditions" and questioned whether the Council was also looking at the requirement for all dogs to be micro-chipped by April 2016, to which it was agreed a written response would be provided.

With the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the following items from the Decisions Plan be considered jointly with Forest Heath District Councils Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to being considered by Cabinet:
 - i) West Suffolk Operational Hub
 - ii) Local Housing Investment Options
- 2) That an update on the North-West and North-East Haverhill Relief Road, be provided at a future meeting of the Committee.

27. **Work Programme Update**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/SE/15/009, which updated Members on the current status of its rolling work programme of items for scrutiny during 2015-2016 (Appendix 1).

The report also sought nominations to the New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group with Forest Heath District Council and also the

Borough Council's nominated representative on the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee.

Members were also reminded to complete the Work Programme Suggestion Form when submitting future items for potential scrutiny (Appendix 2). This enabled suggestions received to be considered by the Committee at each meeting.

As in previous years, Suffolk County Council wished a representative to be appointed to its Health Scrutiny Committee from each of the County's District and Borough Councils. It was recommended that the Member should ideally be from the Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, although it was not essential as the necessary training would be provided by the County.

The Committee considered the report and nominated Councillor Tim Marks as the Borough Council's nominated representative on the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee for 2015-2016.

The Committee then made the following re-appointment/appoints to the existing Task and Finish Group for 2015-2016:

- (a) **New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group:**
Councillors Jim Thorndyke, Diane Hind and Angela Rushen.

Finally the Committee considered the items currently expected to be presented to the Committee during 2015-2016. The Chairman raised the issue of Dog Fouling and suggested the Committee might wish to receive an initial report at its July 2015 meeting to find out why it was difficult to fine offenders; initiatives; changes in legislation such as the requirement for dogs to be micro-chipped by April 2016; to consider what was currently being done in an effort to combat dog fouling to then see what the Committee or a Joint Task and Finish Group with Forest Heath District Council might be able to recommend going forward.

With the vote being unanimous, it was:

RECOMMENDED

That full Council be asked to confirm the appointment of Councillor Tim Marks as the Borough Council's nominated representative on the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee for 2015-2016.

RESOLVED

- 1) That for 2015-2016 Councillors Jim Thorndyke, Diane Hind and Angela Rushen be re-appointed/appointed to the New Housing Development Sites Joint Task and Finish Group.
- 2) That an initial report be included on the Committee's Work Programme for 22 July 2015 to consider the general issue of dog fouling; why it was difficult to fine offenders; changes in legislation such as the requirement for dogs to be micro-chipped by April 2016;

current initiatives and options available to the Council to combat dog fouling.

- 3) That an update on the North West and North East Haverhill Relief Road, including the Haverhill Town Centre Master Plan be included as a future work programme item.

The Meeting concluded at 5.15 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
