

COUNCIL – 29 September 2011

1. Question by Councillor Christine Block in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“Cabinet received minutes of their meeting of July 5th which included a report on the review of Cabinet Task Groups. The minute records that, in discussing the Grants Task Group, the Leader had referred to the need for a ‘review of the criteria for capital and revenue grants’. Cabinet also considered the minutes of the 18th July Grants Task Group but these make no mention of such a review.

Can the Leader, or Cabinet member responsible, clarify the situation and confirm who will instigate the review and whether it will be driven by or only involve the Task Group members?”

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ray Herring:

The current Capital & Revenue Grants process and criteria continues (as is) for this financial year and any changes would take effect from 1st April 2012. The Cabinet Member for Customers & Communities will be reviewing the Capital & Revenue Grants scheme to ensure it supports our new Corporate Business Plan and has necessary budget to resource it. I would anticipate that the Grants Task Group would be consulted on any revised scheme we may propose.

2. Question by Councillor Christine Block in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“With reference to Cabinet papers – 6th September 2011 Item 8 Quarterly Performance and Financial Report. Leisure Usage – Spa Pavilion Audience figures are down and there have been fewer scheduled performances.

What is the level of income reduction and has this affected the Council's financial support for the theatre? What indications are there for the future? I believe a review of the theatre was taking place – are results and conclusions available?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Leisure and Economic Development, Councillor Geoff Holdcroft:

SCDC and Openwide Coastal Ltd meet quarterly to discuss both past performance and to look at ways of improving audience numbers. The focus of the contract is on increasing participation. Whilst the current attendances are disappointing Openwide Coastal Ltd are constantly striving to look at ways of diversifying the programme and improved marketing to increase attendances.

There is no commitment in the agreement between Suffolk Coastal District Council and Openwide Coastal Ltd for the detail of box-office takings to be discussed on a regular basis, although Annual Accounts, once finalised, are provided to SCDC. Openwide Coastal Ltd has previously asked for such details not to be placed in the public domain as they are commercially sensitive.

A key part of the risk transfer within this contract is that Openwide Coastal Ltd takes all the risk with income. There is a fixed figure within the management contract

which is paid to Openwide Coastal Ltd regardless of the number of tickets sold. This figure is adjusted for inflation on an annual basis. SCDC are entitled to a share of any operational profit which the theatre makes, but SCDC does not share responsibility for any operational deficit.

There is indeed a review of the Spa Theatre taking place and I reported on progress both to the last Full Council and I am reporting on the latest situation today.

I am anticipating receiving a Final Report from the consultants next week and I intend to deliver a report setting out the options to Cabinet in December.

3. Question by Councillor Christine Block in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“Shoreline Management Plan Review - It is reported that the plan is still with Defra, are we waiting for the Minister to sign off the SMP and, if so, why does there appear to be a delay? Do we have any indication of whether any such hesitation is due to further legal examination of the Statement of Case being undertaken by Defra?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning, Councillor Andy Smith:

We received a letter from Environment Agency Regional Director Paul Woodcock on 6th September confirming the EA’s approval of the Lowestoft Ness to Landguard Point SMP. This follows approval by Defra of the ‘Statement of Case’ in regard to the ‘Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest’ (IROPI). That was in regard to environmental objections to the SMP in the area of Easton Bavents (north of Southwold), the cliff there which is in part an SSSI, and legal challenges mounted in respect of those issues. I am told by EA officers that the process of examination applied by Defra staff to this and around a dozen other SMPs with IROPI issues was very robust.

We are currently hoping to be able to bring the SMP to Cabinet in November for potential adoption by the Council, in parallel with partners at Waveney and the County Council, now that it has been approved by DEFRA and the EA.

4. Question by Councillor Christine Block in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“Cabinet received minutes of their meeting of July 5th which included a report on the review of Cabinet Task Groups. In discussion of that item the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning ‘expected that, as work of the (Sizewell) Task Group evolved there may be a need to invite wider representation’. The resolution from the discussion states that ‘in the future co-option be permitted by the Task Group, but classed as non-voting.

Does this decision give the Task Group the ability to co-opt from local communities or Parish Councils if it sees the need to do so?”

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ray Herring:

The Sizewell Task Group discussed the issue of co-option on the 18th October 2010 and concluded that non - voting representation from Suffolk County Council and Waveney District Council should be approved. Both are considered Local Planning Authorities and in the case of SCC, a Statutory Consultee on Sizewell C.

The Task Group is part of the SCDC democratic and governance arrangements, enabling SCDC Members to directly advise Cabinet on Sizewell C issues. It has the option to receive representations and gather evidence from interested parties, although is not designed to form a Stakeholder Group.

The question of wider representation is currently being considered by the Cabinet Member for Planning, ahead of the formal consultation arrangements. One option is that a Sizewell C Consultation Group/s is set up over the coming months to assist with the early formulation of opportunities and impacts for the local communities and businesses.

5. Question by Councillor Christine Block in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“With reference to minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on July 5th. 2011 - Item 10 - Asset Disposal – properties at Highfield Road, Felixstowe.

In considering freehold disposal of these properties the outcome would appear to be a reduction in available, affordable housing stock in the Felixstowe area. With this in mind, and noting the Performance Indicators report which tells us that we now have households in temporary accommodation, how are we going to make up any shortfall in affordable accommodation in the Colneis area?

If Flagship no longer felt able to manage these properties were they offered to an alternative Housing Association – perhaps Orbit – to ensure the retention of affordable housing required to meet need?

Prior to consideration to sell these properties were they offered for rent and, if so, how many expressions of interest were registered?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, Councillor Robert Whiting:

The properties at Highfield Road were let to Suffolk Heritage Housing Association (now Flagship) for use as temporary accommodation.

Last year Flagship surrendered the leases, as the houses required major investment to bring them up to the Decent Homes Standard and this was not economically viable for them. As the amount of improvement work required made investment unviable they would not be attractive to any other Housing Association.

The Council does have a handful of properties in the District that are used to provide short-term accommodation for households who are Homeless, whilst their applications are being determined. On average, at any given time, there are four or five such households accommodated and there is a sufficient number of properties to meet the demand and so no further Temporary Accommodation is required.

As these properties had been vacant for some while, they required extensive improvement before being suitable for rental and so have been sold at the affordable end of the market.

6. Question by Councillor Barry Slater in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“What is the current number of applicants on the Housing register and is it safe to assume that increased provision of affordable housing in the District remains one of the Council’s highest priorities?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, Councillor Mary Neale:

The total number of active applications on the Housing Register as at mid August is 2,372. However, the main priority bands are as follows:

Band	A	-	80
Band	B	-	185
Band	C	-	348

The Council remains committed to increasing the number of affordable homes in the District, notwithstanding the very real pressures that now face Housing Associations and Developers alike.

7. Question by Councillor Christine Block in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“Cabinet received minutes of the Policy Development Task Group (12th July 2011) which included an item on the review of the Corporate Strategy. The minute refers to the suggestion of a workshop or seminar, open to all members, possibly in September to look at – I assumed, ways of developing strategy. I now understand that this has become the Briefing planned for October.6th which will give guidance to members on a survey of on pledges / commitments for inclusion in a Business Plan. While I fully support a focussed approach to corporate strategy - a ‘working document with clear commitments’ the progression – for an ordinary member - from initial Policy Task Group discussion of Corporate Strategy to ranking priorities for a Business Plan is a step change that would have benefited from further notice. Can the Leader expand on this move to a business plan process and format and clarify when the decision was taken?”

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ray Herring:

The Council is currently developing a revised Business Case to replace the current Corporate Plan. This Business Plan will not seek to 're-invent the wheel' but is instead intended to enable the Council to become more professional and business focussed in its approach. This is designed to enable the Council to be even more effective in its own performance management but importantly be even more transparent - enabling the public to more effectively both hold the Council to account and influence decision making.

To support this approach the Business Case will more closely align the Council's priorities with its finances. With this in mind the budgets are being re-cast against each Portfolio. Each Portfolio will also be supported by a range of specific key outcomes, and meeting these four year commitments will help us towards achieving our longer-term ambitions. The key outcomes will also allow our residents and partners to judge whether our policies and reforms are having the effect they want. We will continue to let people know how we are performing against their priorities, including on our website which has been redesigned to enable our communities and residents to engage with us and tell us what they think about our services.

We cannot achieve all of these commitments however on our own. It requires a three-way partnership between the citizens that make up our area, the public and voluntary sectors, and the District Council. We will therefore work closely with our partners in local government particularly in Town and Parish Councils and at Suffolk County Council, but also in Health, Education, the Police and the voluntary, community and business sectors.

All Councillors are now being asked to contribute to the development of the Business Case initially through an online survey. The current Corporate Plan and other existing documents such as the Sustainable Community Strategy have been used to collate draft 'key outcomes' for each Portfolio. You are therefore asked to view these draft outcomes for each Portfolio and highlight those that you believe are the most important to the district, our residents & businesses, and for the public in judging the future success of the Council over the next 4 years. If you feel in relation to any Portfolio that a critical key outcome is missing or require improvement, your suggestions will be welcome before Policy Development Task Group considers the draft Business Plan in more detail.

8. Question by Councillor Marian Andrews in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

"In April 2008 this Council agreed "to strive for a plastic bag free district". Council further resolved to "work proactively with towns and parishes, local businesses and the public with the aim of making real and demonstrable progress towards this end over the next two years.

What proactive efforts have since been undertaken and what real and demonstrable progress towards a plastic bag free district has been made?"

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Green Environment, Councillor Andrew Nunn:

It is reasonable to expect retailers and consumers to take responsibility and cut down on the use of plastic bags. To encourage this, work has been carried out by the Council since 2007 as part of the Suffolk Waste Partnerships 'excess packaging' campaign. The campaign aimed to engage retailers and shoppers and encourage alternative shopping practices to reduce excess packaging including the single use of plastic carrier bags.

The Council has also assessed its own use of plastic bags and where possible has chosen affordable alternatives such as the replacement of plastic bags with paper envelopes for the circulation of Coastline. Also almost all (bar 512 out of a total of 58,011 which have no space for wheeled bins, or a conventional refuse collection

vehicle with a bin lift cannot access the property to service them) domestic properties now have their residual and dry recyclate waste collected via wheeled bins, and do not have any form of plastic sack provided to them by SCS. Based on the weight of empty black bags and the number of households, it is estimated that this will have reduced the weight of residual waste sent to landfill by 84 tonnes per annum.

Since the 2008 resolution the following additional steps have been undertaken to encourage local and national action:

- 1) I have sent two letters to Downing Street urging further appropriate national action to reduce the use of plastic bags. These can be found on the Council's website www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk/yourdistrict/greenissues/greenprint/forum under the 4 July Forum and in a reply received on the 12 September Defra have committed to review current progress and will consider introducing legislation if results do not improve:

"We expect retailers to take responsibility and cut down on the number of single-user carrier bags they hand out. But the ability to take action also lies with consumers who can decline to accept them in favour of reusable alternative. We are investigating a number of different options, including legislation, which we'd look at bringing in if results do not improve."

- 2) The Parish Newsletter, Press Releases, and the Greenprint Forum have been used to raise awareness of the issue and encourage action by consumers and Parish Councils. The Council's Greenprint Forum has hosted a training event on how to reduce plastic bag use and has shared best practice from the Woodbridge experience. At its meeting in January 2011 the Green Issues Task Group received a report on progress and it was agreed at the meeting that the Greenprint Forum would also host an event for local retailers to share best practice and encourage further action. This event was held on 4 July 2011 and 72 local retailers were invited. The response was very poor but the event did provide an opportunity for the Co-operative Society to share its success in reducing plastic bag use. Following the meeting a letter was sent to all of the retailers who had been invited to the meeting urging them to take action.
- 3) SCS has conducted a thorough review of all plastic bags used as part of its various functions. Whilst plastic bags are still the most appropriate material for current uses this will be continuously reviewed as part of its Environmental Management System alongside opportunities for minimising the amount of plastic used, and increasing the proportion from recycled sources.

9. Question by Councillor Diana Ball in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

"The Interests of Waveney Councillors are published on the Waveney Website; in the interests of openness and consistency with Waveney shouldn't our interests be published on our website?"

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ray Herring:

Whilst both Waveney and Suffolk Coastal endeavour to put in place similar processes across the two Councils, there will be areas where our approach is a little different.

Our current arrangement is for the Register of Interests to be freely available on request at the Melton Hill Reception and this reflected members' views when it was previously considered.

I have no reason to believe that SCDC Members are unhappy with that arrangement, but if Cllr Mrs Ball would like the matter reconsidered, then she should ask the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to place an item on the next agenda of the Standards Committee.

10. Question by Councillor Barry Slater in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“Given the difficulty Housing Associations find in disposing of shared equity properties, is it appropriate for the affordable element required in a private housing development to be offered by the developer as shared equity, and if so what should be the entry level percentage share?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, Councillor Mary Neale:

There have been problems in the past few years with the Shared Ownership product and this has affected many parts of the country. One of the main reasons for sluggish sales is lack of suitable mortgage products.

However, Shared Equity schemes are growing in popularity and are welcomed by Building Societies as they are much more straightforward to administer. Typically, a household can buy an 80% share of a property, with the Council retaining the other 20% share in perpetuity. The Council's 20% share is gifted at nil cost. This ensures that the home remains available for re-sale at an affordable rate.

11. Question by Councillor Diana Ball in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution:

“Please could Council members be given an update on how the Council is progressing the formation of action plans for reducing the Council's energy consumption and increasing its supply of energy from renewable sources?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Green Environment, Councillor Andrew Nunn:

Officers have been working closely with Norfolk Property Services and solar panel providers to establish typical payback periods for solar PV systems, taking advantage of current feed in tariffs. This information was presented to Cabinet at its briefing on 27 September.

The options to invest in solar PV with a loan or through a hire purchase agreement were considered and both offered payback periods of around 14 years with a return on the investment being seen in years 15 to 25, under the current government scheme which guarantees feed in tariffs for a 25 year period.

The options were given careful consideration by Cabinet Members but it was not felt appropriate to invest in solar PV at this point in time as the life expectancy and future ownership of the Council buildings identified in the report could not be guaranteed over such a long period of time.

Cabinet have agreed to keep the situation under review and should future improvements in solar panel technology reduce costs and improve efficiency Cabinet will revisit the business case for investment in solar PV.

We are continuing to work on other options for reducing the Council's energy consumption such as improvements in the IT infrastructure and linking in our footway lighting to Suffolk County Council's Telensa Intelligent Lighting System. This would enable our 1,737 lighting units to be switched off during the hours of darkness, but as each light is individually controlled from a central location, selected lights can be kept on for safety / security reasons.