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# Shadow Executive (Cabinet)

Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

**West Suffolk**  
working together

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Shadow Executive (Cabinet)** held on **Tuesday 5 February 2019** at **6.10 pm** in the **Conference Chamber West, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU**

*This was the last meeting of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) before it's dissolution on 6 May 2019. As a result, the minutes of the meeting remain as drafted following the meeting and cannot be confirmed by the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) and signed by the Chairman. This is consistent with all other dissolved committees and bodies.*

Present: **Councillors**

**Chairman** James Waters (*Leader of the Shadow Council*)

David Bowman  
Ruth Bowman J.P.  
Carol Bull  
Robert Everitt  
Susan Glossop

Ian Houlder  
Sara Mildmay-White  
Joanna Rayner  
Lance Stanbury  
Peter Stevens

**In attendance:**

Simon Cole

(Chairman of FHDC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Diane Hind

(Chairman of SEBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Andrew Speed

(SEBC Member)

## 41. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Drummond, Stephen Edwards, John Griffiths and Robin Millar.

## 42. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. **Open Forum**

No non-Cabinet Members in attendance wished to speak under this item.

44. **Public Participation**

There were no members of the public in attendance.

45. **Recommendations from the FHDC and SEBC Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees: 31 January 2019 - Annual Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2019/2020 and Treasury Management Code of Practice (Report No: EXC/SA/19/006)**

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) considered the above report, which sought approval for the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2019-2020 and the Treasury Management Code of Practice.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management required that, prior to the start of the financial year that Council formally approved an Annual Treasury Management and Investment Strategy, setting out the Council's treasury management policy and strategy statements for the forthcoming year.

The proposed Treasury Management Policy Statement and Investment Strategy 2019-2020, were attached as Appendix 1 to Report No: TMS/SE/19/002 and PAS/FH/19/007, with the Code of Practice attached as Appendix 2.

Councillor Ian Houlder, one of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Members with the responsibility for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Shadow Executive, including that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Code of Practice had been compiled in line with advice received from appointed treasury advisors to West Suffolk Council, Arlingclose Ltd.

**RECOMMENDED TO SHADOW COUNCIL: (19 February 2019)**

That:

- (1) The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2019-2020, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report Nos: TMS/SE/19/002 / PAS/FH/19/007, be approved; and
- (2) the Treasury Management Code of Practice, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report Nos: TMS/SE/19/002 / PAS/FH/19/007, be approved.

46. **Budget and Council Tax Setting: 2019/20 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2023 (Report No: EXC/SA/19/007)**

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) considered the above report, which presented the proposals for Budget and Council Tax Setting in 2019/2020 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2019-2023.

Councillor Ian Houlder, one of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Members with the responsibility for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Shadow Executive, including that Report No: EXC/SA/19/007 provided details of the new West Suffolk Council's proposed revenue and capital budgets for 2019/2020 and in the medium term, and the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) was required to consider the 2019/2020 budget for the new authority and recommend to Shadow Council the level of council tax required to help fund this budget.

In the history of local government there had been few times that had seen such a transformation in the funding of local services as the current decade. The changes were numerous and continuous, and there was little doubt that the 2020s would bring even more changes.

The report provided examples of those changes and the financial challenges facing the new West Suffolk Council. Councils could no longer traditionally just deliver services if they were to meet the financial challenges and be able to continue to serve their communities. West Suffolk Council recognised and would take a proactive investment role, not only to meet the challenges brought by funding for councils, but also importantly to manage growth and ensure prosperity for its communities. The new Council must, therefore, maintain the income currently received by Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) and also deliver the investment projects, enable the building of homes and increase the business base so that new income streams would be delivered to replace those lost. This would enable the new Council to continue delivering the services and wider community support which people valued and made West Suffolk an attractive place to live, work and invest.

In 2019/2020, the Council's financial plans would see further reliance on delivery of its strategic projects. Some of the projects required considerable investment, both in money - including creating new funds where needed through borrowing (supported by robust business cases) - resources and time, but that investment would build a more financially resilient and self-sufficient council, with less reliance on uncertain national or other funding. That focus on income-generating projects, which may span several years before they delivered a return, meant the Council no longer looked simply to balance a budget for one year. Importantly, these economic growth projects would bring wider long term benefits to the West Suffolk areas than purely financially robust councils, such as jobs, better health outcomes and investment in working with communities and place based initiatives.

Members considered the report in detail, which included the following issues for securing a balanced budget for 2019/2020 and in the medium term to 2022/2023, together with corresponding detailed appendices:

Section 1.2: Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement 2019/2020  
Section 1.3: Council tax referendum requirements 2019/2020  
Section 1.4: Setting the budget – 2019/2020 and across the medium term to 2022/2023  
Section 1.5: Capital programme 2019-2023  
Section 1.6: Disposal of assets  
Section 1.7: Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)  
Section 1.8: General Fund Balance  
Section 1.9: Earmarked reserves  
Section 1.10: Strategic priorities and MTFS Reserve  
Section 1.11: Adequacy of reserves  
Section 1.12: Proposed council tax discount for car leavers  
Section 1.13: Legal implications

Particular attention was given to the FHDC and SEBC Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees' consideration and recommendation of budget proposals for achieving a balanced budget, as presented to them in November 2018 and January 2019, as set out in Section 1.4.

In addition, the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) considered and supported the proposal to adopt a Suffolk-wide policy to award 100% council tax discount to West Suffolk residents aged 16-25 who were previously under the care of Suffolk County Council and who lived alone; with other care leavers; or others who were disregarded for council tax purposes (for example, full-time students). Care leavers would also be disregarded for council tax purposes so that if they lived with a single occupier, that person would not lose their 25% discount. The cost to West Suffolk Council was likely to be a maximum of £15,000 each year.

Having acknowledged the issues highlighted above, the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) noted the position summarised in Sections 1.2 to 1.13 of the report for securing a balanced budget for 2019/2020 and over the medium term to 2022/2023, which was based on an assumption of a 0% increase in Band D council tax for 2019/20 for the predecessor area of St Edmundsbury, and a £4.95 increase in Band D council tax for the predecessor area of Forest Heath. This assumption was in line with the approved business case for a single council for West Suffolk with council tax harmonisation planned over seven years. The level of Band D council tax for 2019/2020 was therefore agreed to be recommended to be set at £182.16 for the predecessor area of St Edmundsbury and £152.28 for the predecessor area of Forest Heath; and it was noted that the level of council tax beyond 2020 would be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year.

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) commended the finance team and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees, together with staff and other Members across the authorities, for their work in securing a balanced budget for 2019/20 and for the medium term. This budget, which would be recommended to the Shadow Council for final approval, was recognised as putting the new West Suffolk Council in a strong, solid financial position from its inception in April 2019.

## **RECOMMENDED TO SHADOW COUNCIL (19 FEBRUARY 2019):**

- (1) The revenue and capital budget for 2019-2023 attached at Attachment A and as detailed in Attachment D, Appendices 1-5 Attachment E and F to Report No: EXC/SA/19/007, be approved;
- (2) having taken into account the conclusions of the Assistant Director's (Resources and Performance) report on the adequacy of reserves and the robustness of budget estimates (Attachment C) and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (Attachment D), particularly the Scenario Planning and Sensitivity Analysis (Attachment D, Appendix 5) and all other information contained in Report No: EXC/SA/19/007, the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) recommends a 0% increase in Band D council tax for 2019/20 for the predecessor area of St Edmundsbury, and a £4.95 increase in Band D council tax for the predecessor area of Forest Heath. This assumption is in line with the approved business case for a single council for West Suffolk with council tax harmonisation planned over seven years. The level of Band D council tax for 2019/2020 therefore be recommended to be set at £182.16 for the predecessor area of St Edmundsbury and £152.28 for the predecessor area of Forest Heath (Note: the level of council tax beyond 2019/20 will be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year);
- (3) the Assistant Director (Resources and Performance), in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Resources and Performance, be authorised to transfer any surplus from the 2018/2019 revenue budget to the Invest to Save Reserve as detailed in paragraph 1.8.4, and to vire funds between existing Earmarked Reserves (as set out at Attachment D, Appendix 3) as deemed appropriate throughout the year;
- (4) approval be given to the Assistant Director (HR, Legal and Democratic Services), in consultation with the relevant service Assistant Director, to determine the establishment and the employment arrangements to deliver the Council's priorities within agreed budgets and the principles of the MTFS;
- (5) approval be given to the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Attachment G; and
- (6) council tax discount be granted to care leavers in accordance with the details set out in paragraph 1.12 and Attachment H.

### **47. Recommendations from St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committees: 9 and 10 January 2019: Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022 (Report No: EXC/SA/19/008)**

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) considered the above report, which sought approval for a revised Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022. Subject to approval, the Strategy would come into effect from 1 April 2019 following the creation of West Suffolk Council.

The West Suffolk Councils adopted the Target Operating Model (TOM) (as provided in paragraph 1.2 of the report) for Customer Services in 2014, marking a fundamental change to the delivery of the Customer Services function across both Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils. The motivation at the time of the implementation was to reflect the ambition to move to a single council in structure terms and to acknowledge the requirements associated with the public sector digital transformation agenda.

The general focus at the time of the implementation was to understand which of the Councils' services could be drawn into the TOM and how best to deliver those against the backdrop of efficiency improvements aimed at releasing financial savings associated with the changes (£125,579 per annum). These financial savings were achieved.

In April 2018, a review of the initial strategy objectives was conducted. The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) noted the headline issues emanating from the post-implementation review, together with the outcome of the review of the achievement of the project objectives, as detailed in Sections 1.3 and 1.4 of the report.

Councillor Robert Everitt, one of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Members with the responsibility for Families and Communities, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Shadow Executive, including that the review had identified that generally speaking, face-to-face contact had diminished considerably over the recorded period, with a general decline in the number of calls being made to the Customer Services team. Website use, having initially increased in the period between March 2016 - July 2017, was now settling into a more consistent level of attracting between 30,000-40,000 web users per month (having peaked at almost 50,000 in March 2017).

The work carried out to review the 2015-2018 Customer Access Strategy had considered technology as a key element of the future provision of customer access for West Suffolk Council customers. In producing the 2019-2022 Strategy, which had been attached as Appendix A to Report No: OAS/SE/19/003 and OAS/FH/19/002, a focus had been placed on ensuring that the approach was flexible enough to deliver against the ambition and any emerging priorities of the new Council.

Alongside the strategy document, staff had reviewed the existing Service Standards document and also updated the existing Complaints Policy which now also included a section on the management of vexatious and persistent complainants. An action plan also accompanied the Strategy, which set out the specific activities associated with the document.

Both Overview and Scrutiny Committees had scrutinised the report and asked a number of questions to which officers had duly responded. In particular, discussions had been held on the excellent percentage rate of 98% of the 479 persons that had responded to a survey had been satisfied with the customer service they had received (as reported on a quarterly basis to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees); the navigation of the website; the establishment of the new West Suffolk Council's Twitter Feed; and ensuring the Council continued to liaise with other public services to ensure

that work to digitise services did not result in customers contacting other service providers about Council activities and services.

Whilst recognising and reinforcing that face-to-face contact must be maintained for those in need or who could not access digital services, the Committees had considered the new Strategy satisfactorily addressed the issues of improving the customer experience and using new technology to make things easier and better for all. The Strategy demonstrated an understanding about demand and expectation as well as appreciating how technology could be used to integrate services within the Council and their partners.

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) supported the comments and recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees accordingly.

As part of this item, as it had been raised during the same meeting of St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the Customer Access Strategy had been considered, a minor amendment had been made to the recommendations emanating from the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Overview and Scrutiny Committees' previous consideration of its appointed Task and Finish Group's final report on the Review of Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre. However, these recommendations had already been approved by the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) and therefore, for clarity and transparency, the minor amendment was required to be reported.

The minor amendment, which was shown in paragraph 3.4 of the report, had not materially affected the substance of the decision of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet), and was duly noted accordingly.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022, as contained in Appendix A to Report Nos OAS/SE/19/003 and OAS/FH/19/002, be approved.

**48. West Suffolk Taxi Policy Handbook (Report No: EXC/SA/19/009)**

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) considered the above report, which sought approval for the new West Suffolk Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Taxi Conditions Policy Handbook.

The draft Handbook, which was attached as Appendix A to the report and had been subject to public consultation, had been produced to harmonise the existing taxi policies of Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council in order to ensure this was in place following the creation of West Suffolk Council on 1 April 2019.

As some of the policy changes would be quite complex and varied to align, it was proposed that this policy handbook be approved for a transitional period to allow a more detailed review to be undertaken by West Suffolk Council within two years on the specific areas detailed in the report. During this time however, a number of common principles would be upheld, as set out in paragraph 1.2.2 of the report.

Councillor Susan Glossop, one of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Members with the responsibility for Planning and Growth, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Shadow Executive, including that it was being proposed that the two existing licensing areas (including livery for the vehicles) should presently be continued, as detailed in Section 1.3; the licensing requirements for the age of taxi vehicles were to be aligned, as set out in Section 1.4; and other initial changes proposed, as detailed in the report, should be accepted.

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) agreed to the proposed approach and looked forward to the detailed review within two years of the creation of West Suffolk Council.

**RESOLVED:**

That:

- (1) the harmonised Taxi Policy Handbook for West Suffolk Council, as contained in Appendix A to Report No: EXC/SA/19/009, be adopted, including the following key areas:
  - a. Continuing the two existing licensing areas (including livery)
  - b. Aligning licensing requirements for the age of taxi vehicles
  - c. Other proposed changes, as detailed in Report No: EXC/SA/19/009;
- (2) the Taxi Policy Handbook be reviewed by West Suffolk Council within two years to review licensing areas across West Suffolk; and
- (3) a public consultation on the revocation of hackney carriage byelaws be undertaken so that the matter can be considered at an early meeting of West Suffolk Council.

**49. Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Decisions Plan: 1 February 2019 to 6 May 2019 (Report No: EXC/SA/19/010)**

The Shadow Executive (Cabinet) considered the above report, which was the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Decisions Plan covering the period 1 February 2019 to 6 May 2019.

Members took the opportunity to review the intended forthcoming decisions of the Shadow Executive (Cabinet). However, no further information or amendments were requested on this occasion.



The meeting concluded at 6.26 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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