

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held on
Tuesday 25 February 2020 at 6.30 pm in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

Chair Brian Harvey
Vice Chair Margaret Marks

| | | |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Richard Alecock | Susan Glossop | Karen Richardson |
| Michael Anderson | Pat Hanlon | David Roach |
| John Augustine | Diane Hind | Richard Rout |
| Trevor Beckwith | Ian Houlder | Marion Rushbrook |
| Mick Bradshaw | Beccy Hopfensperger | Ian Shipp |
| Sarah Broughton | James Lay | Andrew Smith |
| Simon Brown | Aaron Luccarini | David Smith |
| Carol Bull | Victor Lukaniuk | John Smith |
| John Burns | Joe Mason | Karen Soons |
| Mike Chester | Elaine McManus | Clive Springett |
| Patrick Chung | Jim Meikle | Peter Stevens |
| Terry Clements | Sara Mildmay-White | Peter Thompson |
| Simon Cole | Andy Neal | Jim Thorndyke |
| Dawn Dicker | David Nettleton | Don Waldron |
| Roger Dicker | Robert Nobbs | Cliff Waterman |
| Stephen Frost | David Palmer | Ann Williamson |
| | Joanna Rayner | Phil Wittam |

By Invitation:

Richard Cooper

Chair of the West Suffolk Independent
Remuneration Panel

52. Remembrance

Before commencing business, all Members were asked to stand in order to observe a minute's silence in remembrance of former Forest Heath District Councillor, Tony Wheble, who had sadly died recently.

53. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

54. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 17 December 2019.

The Chair welcomed Aaron Macintyre and Emily Jones, Chair and Vice Chair of the Western Assembly of Youth (WAY) to the meeting. WAY was a Youth Council comprising young people appointed from the upper schools in West Suffolk. Attention was drawn to the background of WAY, and its aims and aspirations.

Together with the Council's Families and Communities Team, the Chair was delighted to announce that he would be working with WAY to create awards for under 18s in recognition of exceptional work and contributions demonstrated by young people in eight specific categories. An overall winner would also be decided and all category winners would be invited to collect their awards during a ceremony due to be held at West Suffolk House in July 2020.

The Chair then announced that HMS Vengeance would be exercising their Freedom of West Suffolk with a series of events during week commencing 2 March 2020, which would include parading in Bury St Edmunds on 4 March 2020.

Members were also encouraged to attend the Chair's Civic Dinner on 27 March 2020 in the Athenaeum, Bury St Edmunds. Councillors were reminded how to purchase tickets and to whom they should respond.

55. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Brown, Max Clarke, Jason Crooks, Andy Drummond, Mary Evans, Robert Everitt, David Gathercole, John Griffiths, Rachel Hood, Paul Hopfensperger, Lisa Ingwall-King and Frank Warby.

56. **Declarations of Interests**

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

57. **Leader's Statement (Paper No: COU/WS/20/001)**

As Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council, had given his apologies for absence for this meeting, Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Deputy Leader presented Councillor Griffiths' Statement on his behalf, as outlined in Paper No: COU/WS/20/001.

In her introductory remarks, Councillor Mildmay-White drew attention to the following, that:

- a. Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) was expected to commence in West Suffolk (and parts of Mid Suffolk) from 1 April 2020.

- b. Together with partners, she had attended a Delivery Infrastructure meeting at Westminster on behalf of the Leader. This principally had provided the opportunity for West Suffolk Council and its partners to lobby for better rail and road infrastructure in the East of England and the vital contributions the East had made in supporting the prosperity of the UK as a whole.
- c. Ground works had started on Barley Homes' Westfield site in Haverhill.
- d. The Council was continuing to invest in property and businesses within West Suffolk's town centres, such as the 17-18 Cornhill in Bury St Edmunds; AXA insurance in Haverhill and Omar Homes in Brandon; however it was acknowledged that the vitality of the town centres and high streets had been affected in recent years which was largely due to a fundamental change in people's shopping habits. Councillor Mildmay-White's announcement at the Cabinet meeting held on 11 February 2020 regarding the Council's intention to hold a Town Centre Summit was reiterated. The aim was to gather local business representatives together to ascertain what collectively could be done to improve and enhance West Suffolk's town centres.
- e. Council would be considering under Agenda Item 10, its proposed budget and council tax for 2020/2021 and its Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2020 - 2024. Specific areas had been proposed for future investment, including developing the health and well-being agenda; increased support to rough sleepers; and supporting new businesses.

The Deputy Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. that the Council's Housing Team worked with partners, namely Suffolk County Council's social services and teams in the health and wellbeing and mental health sectors to support those in extreme need, where possible.
- b. In the context of referring to a case where he stated that temporary accommodation had been sought in Haverhill via Homelink but the persons had been referred to Brandon, Councillor John Burns asked the following:

What efforts are being made to ensure temporary accommodation provision in Haverhill matches demand and that all residents of all areas of West Suffolk receive a level playing field of provision?

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White commended the work of the Housing Team and how they worked tirelessly to accommodate persons appropriately. A written response would be provided to the above question and would be shared with all Members in due course.

Additional comments on the Leader's Statement included recognition from Councillor Victor Lukaniuk on the proposed investment in Brandon Leisure Centre and thanking those that had been instrumental in helping to bring the Havebury Housing development in Brandon forward.

Recognition was also given to the Council's achievement of being awarded more than £450,000 for 2020/2021 from the Government's Rough Sleeper Initiative. Members commended the work of the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper teams for their efforts. At the last count, eight rough sleepers were found to be across the whole of West Suffolk, compared to 36 in September 2018. Much the Council's work was on prevention and last year, 393 households were prevented from becoming homeless.

58. **Public Participation**

The following members of the public spoke under this agenda item:

1. **Andrew Appleby of Newmarket**, made a statement in connection with the car parking review that was recently undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's West Suffolk Parking Review Group. Particular reference was given to the decision making process followed to consider and approve the recommendations emanating from the review; the engagement process undertaken as part of the review; the implications of the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement in Newmarket; the rationale for the new parking charges in Newmarket; and how he welcomed the proposed forthcoming town centre summit.

Mr Appleby concluded his statement by suggesting that the Cabinet reviewed its decisions made on the car parking review.

In response, Councillor Stevens, Portfolio Holder for Operations stated that a written reply would be provided to the above statement and would be shared with all Members in due course.

No supplementary question was asked.

2. **Frank Stennett of Fornham All Saints**, asked a question in connection with the decision making process that was followed to consider and approve the recommendations emanating from the car parking review.

In response, Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Deputy Leader explained the decision making process that was followed, including that approval for the recommendations was sought from the Cabinet, as the decision expected to be taken on this matter accorded with the functions of the executive (Cabinet).

The decision taken was a treated as a 'Key Decision' which required certain procedures to be followed, as prescribed in relevant legislation and in line with the Council's Constitution.

No supplementary question was asked.

59. **Referrals Report of Recommendations from Cabinet (Report No: COU/WS/20/002)**

Council considered the Referrals Report of Recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within Report No: COU/WS/20/002.

(A) Referrals from Cabinet: 14 January 2020

1. Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget 2020-2021

This recommendation asked for specific proposals to be included in the budget. This had been undertaken, and the budget would be separately considered by Members later on the agenda. No decision was therefore required to be taken at this stage.

2. Treasury Management Report – September 2019

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Clive Springett, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Treasury Management Report (September 2019), being Report No: FRS/WS/19/004, be approved.

3. Draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-2024

The preparation of the new West Suffolk Strategic Framework had been taking place as part of a wider piece of work aimed at 'Planning for the Future', in which a joined-up approach is being taken to the Strategic Framework, West Suffolk Local Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The advent of the new council and the aligned timetables of the three documents gave a good opportunity for West Suffolk Council to develop a single, coherent narrative and approach to what councillors wished to see achieved in West Suffolk in coming years.

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Deputy Leader of the Council, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council on behalf of the Leader in his absence. Such issues included that section 1 of the report detailed the process that had been undertaken to produce the draft Strategic Framework, which included holding Member workshops. The first workshop sought exploration of specific questions, the feedback from which had been used to inform both the Strategic Framework and the initial scoping of the new West Suffolk Local Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy. The second workshop considered in more detail what might be the best approach to achieving growth in West Suffolk in future years.

The input from Members was then combined with the existing commitments and priorities, plus those of partner organisations, to produce a draft Strategic Framework document.

Members noted that in developing the Framework, the key points to acknowledge and as set out in further detail in the report, were:

- a. The document was not comprehensive;
- b. It was proposed that the Council's strategic priorities remained the same.
- c. West Suffolk's contribution was only part of the picture.
- d. The document included a new emphasis on the Environment and Rural issues.

On 14 November 2019, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the draft document and had made a number of comments which were set out in section 3 of the report.

Having considered the document (Appendix B), the Leader's Foreword (Appendix A) and the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet was supportive of recommending its adoption by Council. For completeness and ease of reference, the final draft was attached to Report No: COU/WS/20/002 as Appendix 1.

On the motion of Councillor Mildmay-White, seconded by Councillor Joe Mason, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That subject to the incorporation of Appendix A (Leader's Foreword), the draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-2024, as contained in Appendix B to Report No: CAB/WS/20/010 be adopted, taking account of the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(B) Referrals from Cabinet: 11 February 2020

1. Treasury Management and Strategy Statement 2020-2021 and Treasury Management Code of Practice

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice required that, prior to the start of each financial year, the Council should formally approve a Treasury Management Policy Statement and Investment Strategy which set out its treasury management policy and strategy for the forthcoming year.

In addition, CIPFA recommended that all councils adopted a Treasury Management Code of Practice based on the treasury management practices published by CIPFA and guidance issued in their Code of Practice. Adherence to the principles of the CIPFA Code should ensure that Treasury Management activities within the Council were effectively managed and adequately controlled.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that following a procurement exercise, Arlingclose Limited, had been appointed as treasury advisors to West Suffolk Council. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Code of Practice had been compiled in line with advice from Arlingclose and comprehensive details of how this was achieved were contained in Performance and Audit Scrutiny Report No: PAS/WS/20/004.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Patrick Chung, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2020-2021, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report No: PAS/WS/20/004 be approved.
2. The Treasury Management Code of Practice, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report No: PAS/WS/20/004, be approved.
3. Treasury Management Report – December 2019

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

In response to a question regarding the calculation of the 16.5% figure quoted within the final column '*% proportion of total gross revenue income budget*' of paragraph 2.6 of the Council report which related to the proportionality between borrowing and income, Members were informed that the Council received around £8 million income (gross) from its previous asset investments which represented 16.5% of the total gross revenue income budget.

In response to an additional question regarding the reason for quoting two different figures expressed for the value of the solar farm asset within tables that referred to the proportionality of Borrowing and Income, and Borrowing and Income Yields, Council was informed that a written response would be provided and circulated to all Members in due course.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Elaine McManus, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Treasury Management Report (December 2019), being Report No: PAS/WS/20/003, be approved.

3. Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget 2020-2021

and

4. Budget and Council Tax Setting 2020/2021 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2024

Similarly with the recommendation from 14 January 2020 (Referral 7(A)(1) above refers), the recommendations arising from the above two referrals had been fed into the budget setting process. The final budget report would be separately considered by Members later on the agenda at Item 10. No decision was therefore required to be taken at this stage.

60. **Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan: Referendum and Decision to 'Make' (adopt) as a West Suffolk Development Plan Document (Report No: COU/WS/20/003)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for Council to 'make' (adopt) the Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan as a West Suffolk Development Plan Document.

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. Their aim was to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, and subsequent revisions in 2018 and 2019.

Legislation required a neighbourhood to meet a set of basic conditions, as summarised in the report. In addition, in order for a Neighbourhood Plan to become part of the development plan it must follow a statutory process involving public consultation at each formal stage including the designated of the plan's area, pre-submission, submission, examination and finally by referendum.

Section 3 of the report summarised the above process that had been followed, which culminated in a referendum being held on 30 January 2020. The referendum asked the question *"Do you want West Suffolk Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Newmarket to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"* The Neighbourhood Plan was successful at the referendum with a clear majority of 1,361 people voting 'Yes' and 263 'No' from a turnout of 13.85%.

Councillor David Roach, Portfolio Holder for Local Plan Development and Delivery, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council including that the Council had a duty to support communities who were preparing Neighbourhood Plans and the Council's responsibilities in respect of providing this support were clearly set out in the relevant Regulations. The Plan had been independently examined and agreed by West Suffolk Council to meet the Basic Conditions; it had been endorsed by the community having been subject to a referendum and had otherwise complied with all the legal requirements of plan production. It was considered that the Plan met European legislation and was compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998 and Council

was therefore urged to 'make' the Plan to become part of the development plan for West Suffolk.

During the debate, Newmarket Town Council, and in particular the designated Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, were commended for the exceptional efforts that had been made to develop an appropriate and acceptable Neighbourhood Plan. Through positive engagement between stakeholders and residents, it was considered that this Plan provided a workable template for the ongoing prosperity of Newmarket. Further ongoing positive engagement was encouraged to achieve appropriate delivery of the Plan's policies and proposals.

On the motion of Councillor Roach, seconded by Councillor Robert Nobbs, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That:

1. the Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan (Referendum version) be 'made' (adopted), so that it becomes part of the statutory development plan, and a material consideration for determining planning applications in the Newmarket Neighbourhood Area; and
2. delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director (Growth) and the Service Manager (Strategic Planning), to make minor non-material consequential changes to the Plan, as necessary, and exercise all of the Council's functions and responsibilities in relation to making the Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan.

61. **Review of Members' Allowances and Expenses (Report No: COU/WS/20/004)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for the Members' Allowance Scheme and associated matters, following an interim review undertaken by the West Suffolk Independent Remuneration Panel.

In May 2019, the Council ratified the Scheme of Members' Allowances that had been recommended to it by the West Suffolk Shadow Council. At that time, it was recognised that the scheme had been developed whilst the Council was forming and it was not fully clear how the Council may evolve. With this in mind, Council had requested that a further review be undertaken *"within the financial year to evaluate whether the scheme is working as intended or requires further amendment."*

Richard Cooper, Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) was in attendance and was duly invited to present the report of the Panel. He explained that the IRP reformed in October 2019 and had received evidence from Councillors, through a survey and interviews; reviewed relevant guidance and legislation, and had also considered evidence from comparative authorities (which included the review of East Suffolk Council, which concluded in February 2020).

The IRP's report was attached at Appendix 1. In summary, the IRP were satisfied that the Scheme of Allowances was working as intended, and thus did not require further substantive revision. However, at the time of their previous review, the IRP had highlighted two specific areas which required further assessment before an allowance rate could be established, namely Cabinet support posts and minority group leaders.

As set out in their report, the IRP considered that at this stage, an allowance should not be provided to Cabinet support posts. However, taking into account the Members' Remuneration Regulations 2003 which legally required the payment of an allowance to minority group leaders, and other evidence and expectations in respect of the role, the IRP recommended an allowance should be provided for minority group leaders at the following rates:

| Size of minority group | Recommended allowance | Rationale |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 21-32 Councillors | £2,106 | Equivalent to Tier 7 rate of allowance |
| 11-20 Councillors | £1,404 | Being 2/3 of the Tier 7 rate of allowance |
| 3-10 Councillors | £702 | Being 1/3 of the Tier 7 rate of allowance |

The IRP had also recommended a number of minor amendments to the scheme criteria, as set out in Appendix B to their report. Appendix C contained the full Members' Allowances Scheme, approval of which was required.

Councillor Carol Bull, Portfolio Holder for Governance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including placing her thanks on record to the IRP for their work on the interim review. She added that it was proposed for this Scheme to be adopted until February 2024, at which stage a further review would be required. The IRP had also suggested criteria, as set out in section 9 of their report, for when an interim review should be undertaken and it was proposed the Council should adopt these criteria.

The current IRP were appointed in September 2018, until 31 May 2021. If the Council were to require an interim review to assess a minor amendment to remuneration, it would be more effective if the existing Panel could do so, given their knowledge and insight of the Council. It was therefore proposed to extend their appointment to 31 May 2023, after which the Council could determine the appointment of the Panel for the required review in 2024.

In addition, the Council had previously agreed that the Panel should consist of a minimum of four members. Originally, five members were appointed but subsequently, a member was required to resign, and the Panel had operated with four members for the current review. It was proposed to continue with the present four members for any interim reviews.

A detailed discussion was held on proposed remuneration for minority group leaders and some Members felt that a group of three was too few a number to attract an allowance and that this threshold should be raised to a minimum of five to sufficiently justify remuneration for their role.

It was subsequently proposed by Councillor Pat Hanlon that minority group leaders should only attract a Special Responsibility Allowance if their group comprised a minimum of five Members. This was duly seconded by Councillor Diane Hind.

A debate ensued on the amendment to the substantive motion. Having acknowledged that it was a statutory requirement to provide minority group leaders with an allowance, the majority of Members felt that the Panel had carefully considered appropriate thresholds and allowance rates for minority group leaders based on evidence and information it had gathered from various sources, and therefore found the IRP's proposal to be acceptable.

A vote was subsequently taken on the amendment. With 11 votes for the amendment, 32 against and 9 abstentions, the amendment to the substantive motion was lost.

The debate briefly continued on the substantive motion.

On the motion of Councillor Bull, seconded by Councillor Margaret Marks, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 43 for the motion, 5 against and 4 abstentions, it was

RESOLVED:

That:

1. the Scheme of Allowances, as contained in Appendix C to the West Suffolk Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) report (Appendix 1 to Report No: COU/WS/20/004), be agreed to February 2024;
2. the proposed review criteria for the Scheme of Allowances as stated in section 9 of the IRP's report at Appendix 1, be agreed; and
3. the proposals regarding the appointment of the IRP, as set out in section 3 of Report No: COU/WS/20/004, be agreed.

(Mr Richard Cooper, Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel, left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

62. **Budget and Council Tax Setting 2020/2021 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2024 (Report No: COU/WS/20/005)**

Council considered the above report, which presented the proposals for Budget and Council Tax Setting in 2020/2021 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2020-2024.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that Report No: COU/WS/20/005 provided details of the Council's proposed revenue and capital budgets for 2020/2021 and in the medium term. The Cabinet had previously considered the 2020/2021 budget and had recommended to

Council the level of council tax required to help fund this budget (as set out in Section 3 of the report and summarised below).

West Suffolk Council (and its predecessor councils Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils) had a good track record of not only delivering high quality services that its communities demanded and value but had a strong vision and programme to deliver, through the West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-2024, to bring greater prosperity for its communities and businesses. This followed the £5 million in annual savings made from shared services, transformation and the creation of the new single council to put the Council on a stronger financial footing. A common-sense budget meant the Council could continue delivering high quality services, invest in leisure, skills and jobs as well as the health, environment and prosperity of West Suffolk's people and area, while at the same time reduce the impact of national challenges to local government funding.

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 decade just passed. The changes were numerous and continuous, and Members noted that there was little doubt the 2020s would bring even more changes.

The report provided examples of those changes and the financial challenges facing the 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. The Council recognised and already took 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 Council must, therefore, maintain and where appropriate grow the local income it currently received 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 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 2020/2021, the Council's medium term 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 2020/2021 and in the medium term to 2023/2024, together with corresponding detailed appendices:

- Section 2: Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, which included reference to the future of New Homes Bonus and business rates relief. Members were specifically asked to support the additional business rate reliefs proposed by the Government to facilitate delivery of the Council's ambition to support its town centres and high streets in West Suffolk, as set out in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.10.
- Section 3: Council tax for 2020/2021
- Section 4: Setting the budget – 2020/2021 and across the medium term to 2023/2024
- Section 5: Capital programme 2020-2024 (including disposal of surplus assets)
- Section 6: Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)
- Section 7: General Fund Balance
- Section 8: Earmarked reserves
- Section 9: Strategic priorities and MTFS Reserve
- Section 10: Adequacy of reserves
- Section 11: Calculation of the council tax
- Section 12: Legal implications

Particular attention was given to the Budget Challenge workshops held between August and December 2019 and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee's consideration and recommendation of budget proposals for achieving a balanced budget, as presented to them in November 2019 and January 2020 and as set out in Section 4. These in turn had been supported by the Cabinet (see Referrals Report of Recommendations from Cabinet Report No: COU/WS//20/002).

Having acknowledged the issues highlighted above, the Council noted the position summarised in Sections 1. to 12. of the report for securing a balanced budget for 2020/2021 and over the medium term to 2023/2024. This was based on the option to harmonise the two predecessor areas (St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath) using the average Band D rate across both predecessor areas, harmonising the council tax bills by 2022/2023 whilst maximising its council tax receipts to protect services and to support its investment plans. For 2020/2021 this represented an average Band D monthly increase of 97p and 14p for the predecessor areas of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury respectively. Members noted that just over 70% of West Suffolk Council's residents were located in Bands A to C so would actually see a lower increase. Members also noted that the level of council tax beyond 2021 would be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year.

Councillor Broughton commended the finance team and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees, together with staff and other Members across the authority for their work in securing a balanced budget for 2020/2021 and for the medium term.

Councillor Broughton then moved the recommendations, as set out in Report No: COU/WS/20/005, and the motion was duly seconded by Councillor Sara Mildmay-White.

A detailed debate ensued with several Members acknowledging that despite the financial challenges being faced, the Council had made, and were continuing to make, successful investments in services; growth and health and well-being projects; together with creating efficiencies, resilience and ensuring the effective management of resources, all of which and more had enabled West Suffolk Council to secure a balanced budget for 2020/2021.

As referred to above, in respect of the Government's announcement that additional business rates measures would apply from 1 April 2020, which would:

- a. increase the current retail discount and extend that discount to cinemas and music venues;
- b. extend the duration of the local newspapers office space discount; and
- c. introduce an additional discount for public houses;

these were supported by the majority of Members.

Some Members wished to ascertain a greater understanding of the proposal to harmonise council tax of the predecessor authorities by 2022/2023 when it had originally been modelled for harmonisation to take place over seven years, particularly as these Members felt this could cause some confusion and angst for residents of the former Forest Heath area. In response, Council was informed that the Order which had enabled the creation of West Suffolk Council from 1 April 2019 allowed harmonisation to take place over seven years; however, it was now the decision of the new Council to determine whether harmonisation should take place sooner. In considering securing a balanced budget and for enabling the Council to be in a better financial position in the medium to longer term, it was now considered prudent to harmonise council tax by 2022/2023.

Other issues raised included future environmental impact considerations; car parking charges; ways in which to communicate to the public which council was responsible for which service and how their council tax was broken down between the various precepting authorities; the cost and benefits of, and the appetite for borrowing; the status of the Western Way Development and Mildenhall hubs which were not meant to be commercial enterprises and generate an income but were designed to break even; and the breakdown of the Council's reserves.

The majority of Members supported the proposed budget and level of council tax for 2020/2021 and expressed their positivity towards looking forward to the future of the new West Suffolk Council.

The motion was then put to the statutorily required recorded vote. With 52 Members present, the votes recorded were 40 votes for the motion, 12 against, and no abstentions; the names of those Members voting for and against being recorded as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors Augustine, Broughton, Simon Brown, Bull, Burns, Chester, Chung, Clements, Cole, Frost, Glossop, Hanlon, Harvey, Hind, Beccy Hopfensperger, Houlder, Lay, Luccarini, Marks, Mason, McManus, Miekle, Mildmay-White, Nettleton, Nobbs, Rayner, Richardson, Roach, Rout, Rushbrook, Shipp, Andrew Smith, David Smith, Soons, Springett, Stevens, Thompson, Thorndyke, Waterman and Williamson.

Against the motion:

Councillors Alecock, Anderson, Beckwith, Bradshaw, Dawn Dicker, Roger Dicker, Lukaniuk, Neal, Palmer, John Smith, Waldron and Wittam.

Abstentions:

None

It was therefore

RESOLVED:

That:

1. Having taken into account the information received by Cabinet on 11 February 2020 (Report No: CAB/WS/20/025 refers) including the Report by the Assistant Director (Resources and Performance) (s.151 Officer) set out in Attachment C, together with the up to date information and advice contained in this report (Report No: COU/WS/20/005), the level of Band D Council Tax for 2020/2021 be set at £163.98 for the predecessor area of Forest Heath, and £183.78 for the predecessor area of St Edmundsbury. (Note: the level of council tax beyond 2020/21 will be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year.)
2. Subject to 1. above, the following formal Council Tax resolutions be adopted:
 - a. The revenue and capital budget for 2020-2024, including authority for the s.151 Officer to approve any flexibility required to the capital budgets set out in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.8 of Report No: COU/WS/20/005, attached at Attachment A and as detailed in Attachment D (Appendices 1-5), Attachment E (Appendices 1-3) and Attachment F, be approved;
 - b. a general fund balance of £5 million be agreed to be maintained, as detailed in paragraph 7.2;
 - c. the statutory calculations under Section 30 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, attached at Attachment I, be noted;
 - d. the Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Police Authority precepts issued to West Suffolk Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and outlined at paragraphs 11.6 and 11.7 below, be noted; and

- e. in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the amounts shown in Schedule D of Attachment H be agreed as the amount of Council Tax for the year 2020/2021 for each of the categories of dwellings shown.
3. The Assistant Director (Resources and Performance), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, be authorised to transfer any surplus from the 2019/20 revenue budget to the Invest to Save Reserve, as detailed in paragraph 7.4 of Report No: COU/WS/20/005, and to vire funds between existing Earmarked Reserves (as set out at Attachment D, Appendix 3) as deemed appropriate throughout the medium term financial planning period.
4. Approval be given to the additional business rate reliefs set out in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.10 of Report No: COU/WS/20/005, in support of the business community, in particular the town centres and high streets in West Suffolk.
5. Approval be given to the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Attachment G.

63. Calendar of Meetings: 2020/2021 (Report No: COU/WS/20/006)

Council considered the above report, which sought approval for the proposed calendar of meetings for West Suffolk Council in 2020/2021.

Councillor Carol Bull, Portfolio Holder for Governance, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Council, including that other bodies not listed in the Council's Constitution and those arranged on an 'as required' basis would be scheduled throughout 2020/2021 and Members would be advised of these separately.

Members noted specific changes proposed to previous years' calendar of meetings, as set out in Section 2 of the report.

On the motion of Councillor Bull, seconded by Councillor Simon Cole, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Calendar of Meetings 2020/2021, as attached at Appendix A to Report no: COU/WS/20/006, be approved.

64. Any Other Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business considered on this occasion.

The meeting concluded at 8.26 pm

Signed by:

Chair
