

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Tuesday 29 June 2021** at **6.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

Chair John Griffiths (Leader of the Council)

Sarah Broughton
Carol Bull
Andy Drummond
Robert Everitt

Susan Glossop
Jo Rayner
David Roach
Peter Stevens

By invitation

Ian Houlder

(Chair of the Performance and Audit
Scrutiny Committee)

Ian Shipp

(Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny
Committee)

245. **Welcome and introduction**

Councillor Griffiths, Chair and Leader of the Council, opened the meeting and welcomed all persons present. For the benefit of members of the public that might have been watching the livestream, Councillor Griffiths explained the rationale behind holding the meeting in person with COVID-19 restrictions in place rather than virtually. Due to the expiry of special legislation on 7 May 2021 which allowed Council meetings to be held virtually, and despite an unsuccessful High Court challenge, the law required that publicly accessible decision making meetings were to be held in person at a specific geographical location.

To be able to have meetings in person, the Council also needed to consider the Government guidance in relation to the safe use of council buildings and carefully consider the capacity of its venues to host meetings. The Council's Conference Chamber provided suitable accommodation which allowed all Cabinet members to partake in the debate and decision making process seated two metres apart from each other.

246. Remembrance

Before commencing business, all members were asked to join the Chair for a moment's silence in remembrance of Councillor John Smith, who had sadly died the previous day.

247. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sara Mildmay-White.

248. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The notes from the non-decision making virtual meeting held on 25 May 2021 were received.

249. Declarations of interest

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

250. Open forum

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

251. Public participation

There were no members of the public in attendance in person on this occasion.

252. Report of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 27 May 2021 (Report number: CAB/WS/21/024)

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items discussed by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee at its non-decision making virtual meeting held on 27 May 2021:

1. Ernst and Young – External Audit Plan and Fees (2020 to 2021)
2. Internal Audit Annual Audit Report (2020 to 2021)
3. Outline Internal Audit Plan (2021 to 2022)
4. 2020 to 2021 Performance Report (Quarter 4)
5. Health and Safety Summary Report 2020 to 2021
6. Annual Appointments to the Financial Resilience Sub-Committee and the Health and Safety Sub-Committee
7. Work Programme Update

Councillor Ian Houlder, Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet.

**253. Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 10 June 2021
(Report number: CAB/WS/21/025)**

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its non-decision making virtual meeting held on 10 June 2021:

1. Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Monitoring Report (April 2020 to March 2021)
2. Collection of Council Tax and Business Rates
3. Website Working Party Findings
4. Review of Council Markets – Terms of Reference
5. Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022
6. Work programmes update and Councillor Call for Action Submission

Councillor Ian Shipp, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet.

254. Public access to West Suffolk Council offices (Report number: CAB/WS/21/026)

The Cabinet considered this report, which sought approval for several recommendations relating to ways in which public access would be provided to West Suffolk Council offices in the future.

For a number of years as part of its programme of transformation and customer service improvement, as set out in its Customer Access Strategy, the Council had expanded and invested in its online access to services, with the focus being to enable public access online 24/7. This had been supported by the Customer Contact Centre so that assistance could be provided over the telephone to those who were unable to access online services. As a result, over the past few years customer access had changed with a reduction in face-to-face and telephone contact, to online contact.

The report detailed the service provided to customers prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, including how it was already evolving with increasing numbers of customers moving online. As more customers were encouraged to use online services, this was seeing a reduction in the need for customers to visit the Council offices.

Councillor Robert Everitt, Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including providing detail of the proposed changes to its customer service provision at each of West Suffolk Council's offices across the district.

Since the onset of the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, the Council had provided all its customer services either online, over the telephone or through video conferencing. With the exception of a very small number, all Council services could be provided without the need for customers to visit Council offices. Given the experience of the past 15 months, the already significant shift in customer contact to online and telephone, and the need to continue to reduce unnecessary in person contact in light of COVID, the Council had reviewed its approach to public access.

The Cabinet noted the rationale behind the proposals and supported the approach. It was however expressed, that whilst the past few years had seen a steady increase in the number of services provided online, it was recognised that some customers may not have online access or may prefer to speak to a member of staff. Members noted that provision of increased online services, supplemented with telephone support if needed, remained the priority for the Council; however, this would not preclude the arrangement of face-to-face appointments in specific circumstances.

Detailed consultation and engagement had been carried out on the proposals, as set out in section 4 of Report number: CAB/WS/21/026, together with a detailed risk assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment, as set out in section 5 of the report. These, and the financial and other implications, as summarised in section 6, were all considered as part of the Cabinet's decision making process.

Resolved:

That:

1. It be noted, as set out in the Council's Customer Access Strategy, the continued prioritisation of online and telephone customer support to improve customer service.
2. The type and level of contact managed by the Customer Service team and the impact of COVID-19 on customer access, be noted.
3. If face to face customer contact is necessary, it be agreed that it is by appointment only.
4. The following changes to the Council's buildings and customer access be agreed, noting this formalises a number of arrangements that have been in place since March 2020 due to COVID restrictions:
 - a. **Haverhill Office** – Office to remain open for pre-booked appointments with no Council reception service. Public access to Council services provided by a phone and computers on site.
 - b. **Newmarket Guineas** – Office to remain closed to the public and used only as an office base for car park staff. The future use of the office will be kept under review and subject to further consideration.
 - c. **Mildenhall Hub** - Public access to Council services provided by a phone and computers on site or through a pre-booked appointment. A Hub Host service provided on site covering all co-located partner services.
 - d. **Mildenhall bus station** – Building to remain open as a place of shelter and access to public toilets. No Council reception services provided.

- e. **West Suffolk House** – Building to reopen with reception staff to provide a visitor management service (for access to meetings for the Council and building tenants). Public access to Council services provided by a phone and computers on site or via pre-arranged appointment.
 - f. **West Suffolk Operational Hub, Council depot** – Reception to remain open to support pre-booked workshop business and for appointment only visitor management.
 - g. **Car park office, Bury St Edmunds** - No public access to be available from this site. All services to be provided online or via telephone.
5. The financial impacts as set out in paragraph 6.1 of Report number: CAB/WS/21/026 be noted, and funding for the one-off costs from the Council's Invest to Save reserve, be approved.

255. **Decisions Plan: 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022 (Report number: CAB/WS/21/027)**

The Cabinet considered this report which was the Cabinet Decisions Plan covering the period 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022.

Members took the opportunity to review the intended forthcoming decisions of the Cabinet; however, no further information or amendments were requested on this occasion.

The meeting concluded at 6.35 pm

Signed by:

Chair
