

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Tuesday 7 December 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)

Vice Chair Sara Mildmay-White (Deputy Leader of the Council)

Sarah Broughton

Carol Bull

Robert Everitt

Susan Glossop

Joanna Rayner

David Roach

Peter Stevens

By invitation

Stephen Frost

(Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Ian Houlder

(Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee)

299. Welcome and introduction

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all persons present within the Conference Chamber. He explained the rationale behind the precautionary health and safety measures that remained in operation for this meeting which aimed to reduce and restrict the transmission of the Covid-19 virus.

300. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andy Drummond.

301. Minutes

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

302. Declarations of interest

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

303. Open forum

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

304. Public participation

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

**305. Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 11 November 2021
(Report number CAB/WS/21/053)**

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 11 November 2021:

1. Health – Portfolio Holder Overview
2. Air Quality and Anti-Idling Campaign Update
3. Suffolk County Council: Health Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2021
4. Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 November 2021 to 31 May 2022
5. Work Programme Update 2022

On behalf of Councillor Ian Shipp, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who was unable to attend the meeting, Councillor Stephen Frost, Vice Chair of the Committee drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet.

Discussion was held on the air quality and anti-idling campaign, and in particular, reference was given to paragraph 2.2.4 of the report and the feasibility of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) officers approaching drivers to switch off their engines if it was felt they were unnecessarily idling. This presented challenges as CPE officers had no powers to enforce anti-idling.

In response to a question, the Cabinet was informed that a written reply would be provided in respect of what the potential 'Homes for Life' work programme item, referred to under paragraph 2.5.3 of the report, entailed.

**306. Report of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 18 November 2021
(Report number CAB/WS/21/054)**

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 meeting held on 18 November 2021:

1. Formal decision making on 'minded to' decisions
2. Ernst and Young – 2020 to 2021 Annual Results Report to those Charged with Governance
3. West Suffolk Annual Governance Statement 2020 to 2021
4. 2020 to 2021 Statement of Accounts
5. Arrangements for Appointment of External Auditors
6. Internal Audit Mid-Year Progress Report 2021 to 2022
7. 2021 to 2022 Performance Report (Quarter 2)
8. Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget
9. Treasury Management Report (September 2021)
10. Work Programme Update 2022

Councillor Ian Houlder, Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including that separate reports were included on the Cabinet agenda for Items 5, 8 and 9 above.

307. Recommendation of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 18 November 2021 - Arrangements for Appointment of External Auditors

(Report number CAB/WS/21/055)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council, approval of the appointing process for external auditors from the 2023 to 2024 financial year.

In September 2016, the former Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils' Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees received papers regarding the appointment of external auditors for a period of five years from 1 April 2018. The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 brought to a close the Audit Commission and established transitional arrangements for the appointment of external auditors, and the setting of audit fees for all local government and NHS bodies in England.

At the conclusion of the transitional arrangements, West Suffolk Council had agreed to continue to use the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) (Report number: COU/SA/18/010 - Appointment of External Auditors) as its route to select its external auditors Ernst and Young for the remaining term of the five years from 1 April 2019 (ending the financial year 2022 to 2023).

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee considered the following three options available for the appointing process for external auditors from 2023 to 2024. The Council could choose one of the following options:

1. Procurement via PSAA;
2. Establish a stand-alone appointment; or
3. Set up a joint auditor panel/local joint procurement arrangements.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including the advantages and disadvantages of each of the above three options available, as set out in Report number: PAS/WS/21/021.

The Cabinet supported the recommendation of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee and agreed to recommend to full Council that the Council should continue to 'opt-in' to the sector led body (Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA)) for the independent appointment of the Council's external auditor.

Recommended to Council (14 December 2021):

That it be agreed to continue to 'opt-in' to the sector led body (Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA)) for the independent appointment of the Council's external auditor, beginning with responsibilities for the financial year 2023 to 2024.

308. Recommendations of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 18 November 2021 - Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget

(Report number CAB/WS/21/056)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council, approval of proposals for inclusion in the medium-term financial plans.

On 18 November 2021, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) considered proposals for delivering a sustainable balanced budget for 2022 to 2023 and for developing the medium term plans. This included a number of key budget assumptions proposed and the rationale behind those assumptions, as set out in section 2 and Table 1 of paragraph 3.6 of Report number: PAS/WS/21/024.

The recommendations, which subject to any changes made by Cabinet at this meeting, would be presented for subsequent approval by Council on 14 December 2021. These, together with any further recommendations emanating from PASC and Cabinet in the coming weeks, would be incorporated into the budget setting process, the composite report for which would be considered by Cabinet and Council in February 2022.

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

Having considered the process and approach to setting the Council's 2022 to 2023 budget and the principles and challenges faced in achieving this, the Cabinet supported the recommendation of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Recommended to Council (14 December 2021):

That the proposals as detailed in Section 2 and Table 1 at paragraph 3.6 of Report number: PAS/WS/21/024, be included in the medium-term financial plans to 2026.

309. Recommendations of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 18 November 2021 - Treasury Management Report (September 2021)

(Report number CAB/WS/21/057)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council, approval of the Treasury Management Report for the first half of the 2021 financial year. An additional recommendation from the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) was also presented to Cabinet for consideration,

which related to consideration of the Council's position regarding external borrowing.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including that the total amount invested at 30 September 2021 was £52 million. Interest achieved in the first half of the financial year amounted to £34,122 against a budget for the period of £22,500.

The 2021 to 2022 Annual Treasury Management and Investment Strategy set out the Council's projections for the current financial year. The budget for investment income in 2021 to 2022 was £45,000 which was based on a 0.25 per cent target average interest rate of return on investments.

Members also noted from the report, a summary of the capital borrowing budget 2020 to 2021; borrowing and income – proportionality; borrowing and asset yields; borrowing and temporary loans and other market considerations.

External borrowing as of 30 September 2021 remained at £4 million with the Council's level of internal borrowing increasing slightly to £48,039,000 as at 30 September 2021. Overall borrowing, both external and internal was expected to increase over the full financial year, but not by as much as was originally budgeted for. Borrowing costs (interest payable and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)) for the year were forecast to be £965,804 against an approved budget of £3,135,850, although this could change if more external borrowing was undertaken than was currently forecast.

Together with other matters, Report number: FRS/WS/21/005 had also included a summary of the borrowing activity during the period; borrowing strategy and sources of borrowing; borrowing and capital costs – affordability; borrowing and income – proportionality; and borrowing and asset yields. This had led to a discussion by PASC on external borrowing and what the Council's trigger point was in borrowing externally, as inflation was on the rise and interest rates remained historically low. The Committee had suggested the Council needed to achieve interest rate certainty as soon as practicable and should be looking to lock in the low borrowing rates, externalising the Council's underlying need to borrow.

This approach was supported by the Cabinet, with members recognising the benefits of greater certainty, removing exposure to the level of risk internal borrowing created, and enabling the budget for appropriate projects to be set with actual costs.

Recommended to Council (14 December 2021):

That the Treasury Management Report (September 2021), as contained in Report number: FRS/WS/21/005, be approved.

Resolved:

That the externalisation of our underlying need to borrow in order to manage the Council's interest rate risk exposure, be agreed.

(Councillor Stephen Frost left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

310. **West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS): 2022 to 2023**

(Report number CAB/WS/21/058)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council approval of proposed changes to the West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Each year the Council was required to review its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). The report provided an annual review of the 2021 to 2022 scheme and proposed to make changes to the scheme for 2022 to 2023, having been subject to preceptor, stakeholder and public consultation, as required by the relevant regulations when amendments to the scheme were proposed.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including that the proposed changes to take effect from 1 April 2022, were as follows:

If implemented, these changes would affect:

1. the threshold for how much capital a customer could own (for example, savings) and still be entitled to a council tax reduction
2. the impact that living with non-dependent adult friends or family members had on the council tax reduction that a customer received
3. the relationship between the application processes for Universal Credit and for Local Council Tax Reduction
4. the way in which fluctuations in a customer's earnings were taken into account in the LCTRS

Each of the proposed changes were detailed in turn within section 2 of the report.

Having considered the proposals, their potential impact and the outcomes of the consultation, the Cabinet was supportive of the amended scheme and agreed it should be recommended to Council for approval.

Recommended to Council (14 December 2021):

That:

1. the Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTRS) Scheme for 2022 to 2023, as outlined in Report number: CAB/WS/21/058, be reviewed.

2. The changes to the scheme outlined in section 2 of Report number: CAB/WS/21/058, and as detailed in Appendix C, be agreed.

(Councillor Ian Houlder left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

311. **Housing Priorities: Progress Update**

(Report number CAB/WS/21/059)

The Cabinet considered this report, which provided a progress update on the Council's Housing Priorities, as set out in the Strategic Framework 2020 to 2024, in relation to the following strategic documents. Approval was sought on the proposed revisions:

Appendix A: Addendum to the Housing Strategy 2018 to 2023

Appendix B: Housing Strategy Implementation Plan

Appendix C: Housing Delivery Action Plan (progress required to be noted only)

Appendix D: Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan (progress required to be noted only)

Members noted that a mid term review of the Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan had been undertaken this year. Its purpose was to:

- Ensure the priorities and actions remained relevant, fit for purpose and were aligned with the Council's future housing needs across West Suffolk; and
- Review progress made against achieving the Council's priorities.

The outcomes of the review were noted, which had resulted in considering it appropriate to add an addendum to the Housing Strategy 2018 to 2023 (Appendix A) with a revised Implementation Plan (Appendix B). The addendum provided an update to the strategy setting out significant policy changes and events that had taken place since the Housing Strategy was first adopted and recommended that the life of the Housing Strategy be extended to 2024. Whilst the housing priorities remained relevant, some proposed changes had been made to the actions contained in the Implementation Plan.

Progress made against the Housing Delivery Action Plan (Appendix C) and the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy delivery plan (Appendix D) was also noted, including where actions had been completed and those that had created challenges.

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Health, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including providing a brief update on provision being made to support rough sleepers in the district, particularly over the winter period.

The Cabinet acknowledged the extremely hard work of the housing teams across the Council, particularly those in the Rough Sleeper team, and commended this report for approval.

Resolved:

That:

1. an addendum to the Housing Strategy 2018-2023, as set out in Appendix A of Report number: CAB/WS/21/059, be approved.
2. The life of the Housing Strategy be extended to 2024, be approved.
3. The revised Housing Strategy Implementation Plan, as set out in Appendix B of Report number: CAB/WS/21/059, be approved.
4. Progress against the Housing Delivery Action Plan (Appendix C), be noted.
5. Progress against the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan (Appendix D), be noted.

312. Decisions Plan: 1 December 2021 to 31 May 2022

(Report number CAB/WS/21/060)

The Cabinet considered this report which was the Cabinet Decisions Plan covering the period 1 December 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.

313. Revenues Collection Performance and Write Offs

(Report number: CAB/WS/21/061)

The Cabinet considered this report, which provided the collection data in respect of Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) and sought approval for the write-off of the amounts contained in the exempt appendices attached to the report.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Cabinet, including the current performance of both Council Tax and Business Rates collection, as set out in Section 2 of the report.

Members noted that reliefs introduced by central Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (many of which provided 100 percent relief for 2020 to 2021) had been extended to the end of June 2021 at which point the remainder of the year would be discounted by 66 percent. Any accounts eligible would be rebilled in July 2021 for an increased amount which would adjust the net collectable debt.

Resolved:

That the write-off of the amounts detailed in the Exempt Appendices to Report number: CAB/WS/21/061, be approved, as follows:

Exempt Appendix 1: Council Tax totalling £5,918.07

Exempt Appendix 2: Business Rates totalling £37,868.71

Exempt Appendix 3: Housing Benefit Overpayment totalling £25,257.78

314. Barley Homes: Business Plan 2021

(Report number CAB/WS/21/062)

The Cabinet considered this report, which sought approval for the Barley Homes Business Plan 2021.

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Health, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including that the Barley Homes scheme at Westmill Place (formerly Westfield), Haverhill, for the delivery of 63 homes, of which 19 were affordable had been completed during the summer of 2021 and sold with residents moving in shortly afterwards and throughout September and October 2021. Stonemill Park (formerly Castle Hill) had progressed well with homes envisaged to be available on the market in early 2022 with a potential completion of the scheme by May 2022.

The proposed business plan (Exempt Appendix A) focussed on Barley Homes' completion of the development at Stonemill Park as well as work to bring forward the site at Kingshall Street, Rougham. Progress made with the sites at School Lane, Great Barton and at College Heath Road, Mildenhall was also reported in the business plan.

A number of future sites were being explored by Barley Homes and the Council as part of the ongoing process of supplying the company with a viable development pipeline. This would enable Barley Homes to continue to utilise the agreed £14.25 million investment fund which in turn provided financial returns to the Council. The annual business planning process had not highlighted a need to revise the total investment fund. As there was no further funding required for the investment fund for Barley Homes, the approval of the 2021 business plan sat as an executive function of the Cabinet.

Members commended the work of officers involved in producing the business plan and were extremely pleased with the good progress made by Barley Homes in the last year. The provision of much needed housing, including affordable homes, as well as the returns generated for the Council, was commendable.

A discussion was also held on the composition of the Barley Homes board and its future direction.

Resolved:

That:

1. the progress update for Barley Homes and steps outlined in Report number: CAB/WS/21/062, to secure its medium term pipeline of sites, be noted.
2. The Barley Homes Business Plan 2021, attached as Exempt Appendix A to Report number: CAB/WS/21/062, be approved.

315. Exclusion of press and public

See minutes 316. and 317. below.

**316. Exempt Appendix A: Barley Homes: Business Plan 2021 (paragraph 3)
(Exempt Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/21/062)**

The Cabinet considered the exempt appendix to this report. However, no reference was made to specific detail and, therefore, this item was not held in private session.

**317. Exempt Appendices: Revenues Collection Performance and Write Offs
(paragraphs 1 and 2)**

(Exempt Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to Report number CAB/WS/21/061)

The Cabinet considered the exempt appendices to this report. However, no reference was made to specific detail and, therefore, this item was not held in private session.

The meeting concluded at 6.55 pm

Signed by:

Chair
