

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 21 February 2023** at **7.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present

**Councillors**

**Chair** Mike Chester

**Vice Chair** John Augustine

Richard Alecock  
Sarah Broughton  
Simon Brown  
Tony Brown  
Carol Bull  
John Burns  
Patrick Chung  
Nick Clarke  
Simon Cole  
Jason Crooks  
Dawn Dicker  
Roger Dicker  
Andy Drummond  
Robert Everitt  
Stephen Frost  
Susan Glossop  
John Griffiths

Pat Hanlon  
Brian Harvey  
Diane Hind  
Ian Houlder  
Paul Hopfensperger  
Beccy Hopfensperger  
James Lay  
Aaron Luccarini  
Victor Lukaniuk  
Birgitte Mager  
Margaret Marks  
Joe Mason  
Sara Mildmay-White  
Andy Neal  
Robert Nobbs  
Colin Noble  
David Palmer  
Sarah Pugh

Joanna Rayner  
Karen Richardson  
David Roach  
Richard Rout  
Marion Rushbrook  
Ian Shipp  
Andrew Smith  
David Smith  
Karen Soons  
Clive Springett  
Sarah Stamp  
Lance Stanbury  
Peter Stevens  
Peter Thompson  
Jim Thorndyke  
Julia Wakelam  
Don Waldron  
Phil Wittam

264. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

265. **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 13 December 2022.

Attention was drawn to a number of events, as outlined in the paper attached to the agenda.

266. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Anderson, Trevor Beckwith, Mick Bradshaw, Max Clarke, Rachel Hood, David Nettleton and Cliff Waterman.

267. **Declarations of interests**

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

268. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/23/001)**

Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/23/001. On this occasion, an additional document 'West Suffolk – The story so far' was circulated to members separately by email and published alongside the Leader's Statement prior to the meeting.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Griffiths:

- a. **Tributes:** acknowledged the tragedies caused to the people of Turkey and Syria following the impact of the devastating earthquakes in these countries. Recognition was also given to the fact that on 24 February 2023, this would mark the first anniversary of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. West Suffolk would continue to play its part in helping people that were fleeing from this war torn country.
- b. **West Suffolk – 'The story so far':** made reference to the additional document that accompanied the written Leader's Statement and outlined a number of the achievements made over the last four years since West Suffolk Council came into existence.
- c. **Suffolk Public Sector Leaders:** reported that a £1.5 million Supported Food Network initiative had been agreed to support people across the county with the cost-of-living challenges. Working with new and existing food outlets, including food banks, more stock would be provided to ensure a range of enhanced support was available to meet local needs. In addition, £175,000 funding had been agreed to support vital initiatives to tackle and prevent rough sleeping across Suffolk.
- d. **Improving housing and supply:** reported on two new initiatives to improve private housing conditions as well as increasing the number of affordable homes across Suffolk. Suffolk's district and borough councils had secured £2.2 million of Government Private Rented Sector Pathfinder Programme funding over two years, which would be used to improve the standard of private rented homes in the county. To complement this work, the Suffolk Housing Board had been awarded £20,000 from the Local Government Association Housing Advisor Programme.
- e. **Screen Suffolk:** reported that all local councils had signed a new five year contract with Screen Suffolk. It was estimated that the positive

economic impact for Suffolk was £14.5 million since the company began its service in the county in 2016.

- f. **Market Thoroughfare:** was pleased to announce that the vastly improved, Market Thoroughfare in Bury St Edmunds was due to open on 22 February 2023. This scheme was part of the town centre masterplan to deliver a wider pedestrian link while keeping the frontage of The Old Post Office.

The Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **Emergency planning:** that he was not aware of apparent proposals by the US Government to return NATO nuclear weapons to RAF Lakenheath, and as such he had not received any recent guidance from Government ministers or the Ministry of Defence as to the actions this Council should take in the event of incidences involving NATO weapons. The US Government was not obliged to consult with the Council regarding its potential plans; however, should any information relating to this matter be forthcoming, it would be analysed and shared on a cross-party basis, as appropriate.
- b. **North West Haverhill Relief Road:** the Council shared Councillor Joe Mason's and other Haverhill ward members concerns and frustrations regarding the lack of progress made so far in the delivery of this road to the previously agreed timescale. Councillor Griffiths deferred the matter to Councillor Roach, Portfolio Holder for Planning, for a more detailed response. The planning condition required for the relief road was to be delivered by the end of March 2023 at the latest. Due to the complexities regarding the position of gas and water mains, the developer, Persimmon explained that there would be a significant delay to the delivery of the road and a revised completion date of April 2024 had been given. Discussions were being held with Persimmon and Suffolk County Council (SCC) as to whether the road could be completed before this suggested revised timeframe. The Council would continue to monitor whether enforcement action should be taken. SCC had stated that in principle, this could be considered; however, it was unlikely that this would lead to the road being completed any sooner. Councillor John Burns raised a similar question, having first highlighted the bond with SCC regarding the delivery of the road, and some of the impacts being experienced in the town without the relief road being in place. Councillor Griffiths acknowledged the bond with SCC and again, shared the frustrations of the road not being delivered in accordance with Persimmon's planning consent. Recognition was given to the ongoing discussions being held to pursue this matter and holding the developer to account.
- c. **Outline planning application for 1,300 on Land to the west of Mildenhall:** Should permission be granted for this application and recognising the implications for Mildenhall town centre should the necessary road infrastructure not be delivered within the required timescale, lessons would be learned from the issues currently being

experienced in Haverhill, as referred to in b. above. The necessary safeguards would be put in place, as appropriate.

- d. **Empty homes:** Councillor Brian Harvey firstly applauded the Families and Communities team for their work with those in need in the rural communities, to which Councillor Griffiths highlighted the additional funding from the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group which would help provide additional support (see c. above). Councillor Brian Harvey then made reference to the penultimate paragraph on page 15 of the attachment to the Leader's Statement, 'West Suffolk – the story so far'. This referred to 370 empty homes being brought back into use since 2019 with 181 of those being achieved last year. Councillor Harvey asked the Leader whether there was an ongoing programme in place for addressing this issue and how many empty homes were expected to be brought back into use within the coming months/years. A written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Griffiths and the relevant portfolio holder. In accordance with the Constitution, this response would be circulated to all members and published on the Council's website.

## 269. **Public participation**

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

1. **Richard O'Driscoll**, a resident of the district, asked a question in connection with the £300,000 one-off allocation to Abbeycroft Leisure (subject to approval of the budget for 2023/2024) to assist them through their current financial pressures; however, he felt that this would still result in job losses and rising prices. He stated that it could cost £27 for a family of four to swim and asked whether it was now time for the Council to restore a regular annual grant to provide long term security and to 'make sport for all' a reality by bringing the cost of leisure down.

In response, Councillor Joanna Rayner, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Community Hubs, stated that the 'regular grant' or management fee the Council had paid to Abbeycroft had reduced to zero from next year. This was as a result of the multi-million pound investment the Council had put into its leisure estate over the last six years. Councillor Rayner provided details of the benefits achieved across the district as a result of the investment.

As a valuable partner, Councillor Rayner reiterated the support the Council had provided to Abbeycroft during the pandemic and the current challenges it now faced; however, it also expected them to be an efficient well run business (as they are) so the Council could be confident that tax payers money was put to good use. As a social enterprise, any profit made must support their community objectives.

Before concluding her reply by explaining other beneficial services provided by Abbeycroft to support those on low incomes; the impact of the significant increase in costs to run leisure centres with swimming pools; and the health and well-being benefits that leisure facilities provided, Councillor Rayner informed Mr O'Driscoll and those present that:

- a. The Council's intervention had averted job losses. If the Council had not stepped in with financial support significant job losses would have potentially been a possibility as pools would have had to close (albeit temporarily).
- b. A family swim at Bury St Edmunds costed £18.50, not £27 and for those residents who had a loyalty card (that costed £4 for a year) that cost reduced to £17.50. Councillor Rayner reiterated that there were not many activities you could do as a family for less than £20.

2. **Nigel Wolstenholme**, Chairman of the Bury St Edmunds branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL) highlighted an event on 5 May 2023 that the RBL was hosting to commemorate King Charles III Coronation. He was pleased to report that support had been offered by Councillor Robert Everitt's locality budget; however, he specifically asked how, generally, was the Council able to support community groups looking to organise events to celebrate the Coronation in May.

In response, Councillor Robert Everitt, Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities stated that many community groups would be looking to organise events themselves to celebrate the Coronation. The Council would encourage this, and communications support could be provided, where appropriate, to encourage attendance at such events. Should any members wish to provide support from their locality budgets, applications would need to be submitted before 22 March 2023.

The Chair concluded this item and invited Mr O'Driscoll and Mr Wolstenholme to remain in the meeting for the following agenda items should they wish to do so.

270. **Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report number: COU/WS/23/002)**

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/23/002.

**A. Referrals from Cabinet: 7 February 2023**

**1. Treasury management report (December 2022)**

Approval was sought for the Treasury Management Report for the third quarter of the 2022 to 2023 financial year.

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

In response to a question, Councillor Broughton stated that whilst she understood Councillor Julia Wakelam's concerns regarding a request that there be no potential investments in industries that were contributing to the climate emergency, the details provided in this report referred to investments placed with banks and building societies in the main.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Ian Houlder, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 50 for the motion, none against and three abstentions, it was

**Resolved:**

That the Treasury management report (December 2022), as contained in Report number: FRS/WS/23/001, be approved.

(Councillors Dawn Dicker and Roger Dicker left the meeting during the consideration of this item and did not return. They did not vote on this item.)

**2. Treasury Management Strategy 2023 to 2024 and Code of Practice**

Approval was sought for the Treasury Management Strategy 2023 to 2024 and Code of Practice.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice required that, prior to the start of the financial year, the Council should formally approve a Treasury Management Policy Statement and Investment Strategy, setting out the Council's treasury management policy and strategy for the forthcoming year.

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023 to 2024 was attached as Appendix 1 to Report number FRS/WS/23/002 and the Treasury Management Code of Practice attached as Appendix 2. The report also included additional supporting information on treasury advisors; borrowing strategy; investment strategy counterparty ratings and interest rate projections.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Ian Houlder, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 50 for the motion, none against and three abstentions, it was

**Resolved:**

That:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023 to 2024, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report number FRS/WS/23/002, be approved.
2. The Treasury Management Code of Practice, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report number FRS/WS/23/002, be approved.

**3. Budget and Council Tax setting 2023 to 2024 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023 to 2027**

The recommendations emanating from the Cabinet's consideration of this report, together with its approval of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee's recommendation contained in Report number: CAB/WS/23/005

'Delivering a sustainable medium-term budget' were incorporated within the main budget setting report, which was considered next on this agenda.

No decision was therefore required at this stage.

271. **Budget and Council Tax setting 2023 to 2024 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023 to 2027 (Report number: COU/WS/23/003)**

Council considered this report, which presented the proposals for budget and council tax setting in 2023 to 2024 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023 to 2027.

West Suffolk Council had an exemplary track record in robust financial management which had meant it continued to deliver high quality services as well as meeting the strategic vision of the authority.

This was despite a series of challenges. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic which had not only reduced income (Government policy had been that councils create income to supplement reduction in national funding) but also costs to the Council in playing its role to support communities and businesses. All UK authorities were now facing tough financial challenges caused by issues such as soaring inflation, cost of living and energy prices, the war in Ukraine and changes to the way communities spend which reduced income. National finances had been reduced significantly over the last decade for local councils and added burdens had been placed on authorities too during this time.

The 2023 to 2024 budget had been created not only to be balanced and sustainable but as an investment in the priorities of the district's residents and businesses. It was designed to make the communities of West Suffolk greener, healthier and more prosperous.

Members considered the report in detail, which included the following issues for securing a balanced budget for 2023 to 2024 and plans for the medium term from 2023 to 2027, together with corresponding detailed appendices:

Section 1: Summary: which included reference to continuing investments in a range of initiatives to meet priorities; continuing to concentrate on the Council's health and wellbeing agenda; the inclusion of an additional £240,000 investment per annum in the waste and grounds maintenance team, together with a £1.3 million (2023 to 2027) for capital investment in parks, open spaces, heritage and other attractions.

Section 2: Context: which included reference to the Council's robust financial planning and management enabling the Council to deliver both services and the strategic aims of West Suffolk despite the pressures on local government finances; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council's finances, including the role of the Council in supporting residents and businesses throughout the pandemic; the medium term budget plans (beyond April 2024) being prepared in the context of significant uncertainties around the current economic climate and Government policy; 'Investing in our Growth Agenda'; the

- Council's transformation programme; and further detail on the Council's plans to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- Section 3: Local government finance settlement: which included reference to the Revenue Support Grant; Rural Services Delivery Grant; Services Grant; the future of New Homes Bonus; the new Funding Guarantee Grant; business rates and business rates reliefs; Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief and Supporting Small Business Relief; Local Authority Housing Fund; Collection Fund deficits and council tax referendum limits.
- Section 4: Council tax for 2023 to 2024: which included reference to changes to the Long Term Empty Property Premium and Second Homes arrangements
- Section 5: Setting the budget – 2023 to 2024 and across the medium term to 2026 to 2027: which included reference to inflation assumptions assumed in the MTFS; fees and charges (as approved by Cabinet on 7 February 2023); and delivering a sustainable future beyond 2023 to 2024.
- Section 6: Capital programme 2023 to 2027: which included reference to the planned capital expenditure over four years to 2026/2027; and disposal of surplus assets.
- Section 7: Minimum revenue provision (MRP)
- Section 8: General fund balance
- Section 9: Earmarked reserves
- Section 10: Strategic priorities and MTFS reserve
- Section 11: Adequacy of reserves
- Section 12: Calculation of the council tax

Having acknowledged the issues highlighted above, Council noted that currently, council tax made up approximately one fifth of the authority's budget (exclusive of housing benefit) and therefore only contributed to a fifth of service delivery. West Suffolk Council charged around eleven percent of a local council tax payer's bill with the rest comprising precepts from the County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner as well as the relevant Parish or Town Council. It was recognised that any increase provided an extra burden on taxpayers but did mean the protection of vital services which would otherwise possibly have to be considered for reductions. Councillors were asked and expected by Government to look at local taxation levels to meet the authority's financial needs to support its communities and help future proof from financial uncertainty.

To help secure a balanced budget for 2023 to 2024, on 7 February 2023, the Cabinet recommended to Council that the level of Band D council tax for 2023 to 2024 be set at £192.06, which represented a Band D weekly increase of just under 10 pence. Noting that just over 70 percent of West Suffolk residents were in bands A to C, these would actually see a lower increase. This increase was still below the expectation from Government for a greater rise in council tax up to three percent for district councils.

Councillor Broughton drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including commending the finance team and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, together with staff and other members across the authority for their work in securing a balanced budget for 2023 to 2024 and for developing plans in the medium term. Councillor Broughton duly

summarised the extensive work that had been undertaken to reach this point and the key proposals that contributed to securing a balanced budget for 2023 to 2024 and their significance in planning for the medium term.

A detailed debate ensued which included a number of comments, observations and questions, including:

- a. **Achievement of a two year balanced budget:** by remaining with West Suffolk's council tax plans debated last year, this had avoided the need to propose a higher rise in council tax as suggested by Government.
- b. **Support for communities and businesses:** Comments highlighted included the previously agreed £500,000 investment by the Council and partners to help reduce council tax by 100 percent for a year for eligible persons; support for keeping swimming pools open where many across the country were closing; and other investments in health and wellbeing.
- c. **Western Way project:** Specific reference was given to Attachment A, 'Revenue budget summary' which presently, years three and four indicated significant budget deficits. Whilst the initial aspirations for the Western Way development had been scaled down to a project largely centred on the replacement of the leisure centre, the Labour Group remained concerned that the Council should not be spending large sums on this project in the present economic climate and national financial uncertainties. A refurbishment of the existing leisure centre remained the preferred option for the Labour Group and with a planning application submitted for a David Lloyd leisure facility at nearby Marham Park, it was anticipated that whilst such a facility, if approved, might be unaffordable for some, this may impact on the services offered by Abbeycroft Leisure. It was considered that the Western Way project remained a huge investment for one area of Bury St Edmunds and the Council should be looking to invest in health and wellbeing that covered a wider area of the district.

It was commented separately whether the proposed swimming pool for the new leisure centre was of sufficient size to support national competitions and the wider economic benefits that the holding of competitions would potentially bring to the town. It was commented that this matter might continue to be challenged as the project progressed.

During her right of reply, Councillor Broughton stated that the Western Way project review had been considered by Council on 13 December 2022 and subject to gateway reviews, safeguards and financial tests, Council had approved a number of recommendations to enable the project to proceed in accordance with the updated business case, which set out the financial case for a new build over the refurbishment option of the existing site. It was therefore felt not appropriate to reopen the debate on this matter at this time.

- d. **Protecting the vulnerable:** it was commented that this budget was of sound financial base to enable the Council to help those in need with particular reference given to the provision of additional temporary accommodation and more affordable homes in the district.
- e. **Supporting economic growth and prosperity:** it was commented that this budget demonstrated that West Suffolk remained attractive for businesses to invest, which included a pioneering, innovative vertical farm project in Newmarket which had received financial support from private investors and a loan from the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership. Other examples included the Council's support to providing the incubation units on Suffolk Business Park, Bury St Edmunds; the ongoing progress of the Council's housing company, Barley Homes; support towards raising skills and opportunities; the Council-owned solar farm and the successful 'solar for business scheme'.
- f. **West Suffolk Council:** reference was given to the positive achievements since the creation of West Suffolk Council as a result of prudent financial budgeting and planning. Examples included successful investments made; support for the vulnerable and those in need; commercial efficiencies made; as well as continuing to deliver vital services.
- g. **Parks, leisure and energy saving solutions:** Support was given to the proposed £1.3 million (2023 to 2027) for the capital investment in open spaces, parks, museums and other leisure attractions, and the continuation of the £9 million investment in measures to support the Council in reaching carbon net zero by 2030. However, disappointment was expressed that no investment had been made specifically to better insulate homes or, noting that a commuted sum was anticipated to emanate from the Tayfen Road development in due course, to upgrade the play area provision in the Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds.

During her right of reply, Councillor Broughton stated that eligible residents could apply for separate Government funding to better insulate their homes; and refurbishment of the play area in Abbey Gardens would be forthcoming soon.

It was separately commented that this budget continued to enable free leisure facilities to be provided in local wards such as Moreton Hall. The provision of the recent splash play park in this ward was mentioned. In addition, it was separately commented that provision of leisure facilities, whether free or not, should be promoted and encouraged in local areas if they were to help improve the health and wellbeing of the community.

- h. **Brandon and specifically, street lighting:** Members sympathised with the frustrations regarding the environmental challenges that had historically restricted housing development in the locality and extensive work was being undertaken to try and overcome these obstacles. Further concerns were expressed regarding the provision of £40 million to replace Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre when it was felt it could be

refurbished. It was felt by some members that the proposed budget did not make provision to address a perceived disparity between funding of street lighting by town, parish, district and county councils in the areas of the former Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils was reiterated.

During her right of reply, Councillor Broughton stated that it would cost approximately £25 million to refurbish the leisure centre and this would only extend its life by about 20 years at which point the costs to rebuild would have escalated considerably. The existing pool would also need to be closed for up to two years whilst work took place. On street lights, as previously explained, West Suffolk Council was working with Suffolk County Council, as the authority with the responsibility for the majority of street lighting provision, and town and parish councils, to examine this complex historic issue in more detail, in accordance with the recent decision of Cabinet.

- i. **Families and Communities:** This area remained a strategic priority of the Council and recognition was given to the work undertaken with partners, town and parish councils, and other key stakeholders to help improve the lives of residents in the community. Examples were provided, including that it was being proposed that the 2023 to 2024 budget should continue to include significant allocations for the provision of Community Chest and councillor locality budget funding for granting to organisations and groups striving to make a difference in their communities.
- j. **Working with partners:** it was commented that this budget would enable the Council to continue to work with partners such as Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Public Sector Leaders to achieve ambitious projects, make sound investments and support the vulnerable and those in need.
- k. **Operations service:** Recognition was given to the waste and street scene service, the Civil Parking Enforcement team and how this budget would enable £440,000 to be allocated towards making improvements to car parks located in Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and new provision in Clare.
- l. **Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC):** Recognition was given to the significant work of PASC in considering and scrutinising numerous documents before making its recommendations to Cabinet as part of the budget setting process.
- m. **Leisure Asset Management Breakdown:** Councillor Burns referred to page 99 of the agenda report pack, which was Attachment D Appendix 2b, '2023 to 2024 Capital Programme – Leisure Asset Management Plan Breakdown'. He firstly asked whether reference to Motts Field, Haverhill Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) should be removed and the play area refurbished as it was presently stated the other way round. He then requested whether an indication could be given on the document regarding what leisure/sport/play area improvements had been funded by Section 106 contributions.

A written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Broughton and Councillor Joanna Rayner, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Community Hubs. In accordance with the Constitution, this response would be circulated to all members and published on the Council's website.

In summary, the majority of members acknowledged that despite the significant financial challenges being faced, the Council had made, and were continuing to make, successful investments in services; growth; greener; and health and well-being projects; together with creating efficiencies, resilience and ensuring the effective management of resources, all of which and more would enable West Suffolk Council to secure a balanced budget for 2023 to 2024.

The motion was then put to the statutorily required recorded vote. With 53 members present, the votes recorded were 45 votes for the motion, 8 against, and no abstentions; the names of those members voting for and against, being recorded as follows:

**For the motion:**

Councillors Alecock, Augustine, Broughton, Simon Brown, Tony Brown, Bull, Burns, Chester, Chung, Nick Clarke, Cole, Drummond, Everitt, Frost, Glossop, Griffiths, Harvey, Beccy Hopfensperger, Paul Hopfensperger, Houlder, Lay, Luccarini, Mager, Marks, Mason, Mildmay-White, Nobbs, Noble, Palmer, Pugh, Rayner, Richardson, Roach, Rout, Rushbrook, Shipp, Andrew Smith, Soons, Springett, Stamp, Stanbury, Stevens, Thompson, Thorndyke and Wakelam.

**Against the motion:**

Councillors Crooks, Hanlon, Hind, Lukaniuk, Neal, David Smith, Waldron and Wittam.

**Abstentions:**

None

It was therefore

**Resolved:**

1. Having taken into account the information received by Cabinet on 7 February 2023 (Report number: CAB/WS/23/008) including the report by the Director (Resources and Property) (Section 151 Officer) set out in Attachment C, together with the up to date information and advice contained in Report number: COU/WS/23/003, the level of West Suffolk Council's band D council tax for 2023 to 2024 be set at £192.06 (the level of council tax beyond 2023 to 2024 will be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year).
2. Subject to recommendation 1. above, the following formal council tax resolutions be adopted:

- a. the revenue and capital budget for 2023 to 2027, attached at Attachment A to Report number: COU/WS/23/003, and as detailed in Attachment D (Appendices 1 to 6), Attachment E and Attachment F be approved.
  - b. A general fund balance of £5 million be agreed to be maintained, as detailed in paragraph 8.2.
  - 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 Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk precepts issued to West Suffolk Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and outlined at paragraphs 12.6 and 12.7 below, be noted.
  - 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 2023 to 2024 for each of the categories of dwellings shown.
3. The Director (Resources and Property), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, be authorised 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 delegate authority to the Director (Resources and Property) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property to formulate and implement in full, Government grant, discount or relief schemes (examples include but not limited to those set out in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.19 and 4.7 to 4.9), so long as they are as a minimum, revenue cost neutral to the Council.
  5. Approval be given to the change to the Long Term Empty Property Premium set out in paragraphs 4.10 to 4.13, and to the further class of property not attracting the premium set out in paragraph 4.12.
  6. Endorsement be given to Cabinet's approval of the fees and charges price increases (as set out in Attachment D appendix 6a).
  7. Approval be given to the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy (as set out in Attachment F).

272. **Calendar of meetings 2023 to 2024 (Report number: COU/WS/23/004)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for the proposed calendar of meetings for West Suffolk Council in 2023 to 2024.

Councillor Carol Bull, Portfolio Holder for Governance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that in 2022/2023, the frequency of some meeting dates had been adjusted to help avoid cancellations that had been evident in the previous year. Some additional reserve dates for Council and Cabinet had been included in the calendar and these were used where required. This saw less meetings being cancelled where there were no items requiring a decision. This same approach was adopted for the 2023/2024 calendar.

Under current legislation, where some meetings were able to be operated entirely virtually (for example, Staff Consultative Panel, Financial Resilience Sub-Committee) it was envisaged that this practice would continue and would be at the discretion of the Chair of the relevant body.

It was also important to note that a corporate hybrid meetings/audio visual equipment project was currently still ongoing and the outcome of this may influence future meeting operation. The venues for holding meetings would therefore be reviewed throughout the year.

In view of the district council elections being held on 4 May 2023 and the Annual Meeting of Council arranged for 23 May 2023, it was proposed that the first post-election Cabinet meeting should be held on 13 June 2023. Therefore, the Cabinet meeting which was scheduled on 30 May 2023 as part of the 2022/2023 calendar was to be removed and members were asked to note this change.

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

**Resolved:**

That the Calendar of Meetings 2023 to 2024, as attached at Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/004, be approved.

(Councillors Simon Cole and Don Waldron left the meeting during the consideration of this item and did not return. They did not vote on the item.)

273. **Any other urgent business**

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

The meeting concluded at 8.55 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chair**

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