

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Tuesday 18 July 2023** at **6.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present

Councillors

Chair Cliff Waterman (Leader of the Council)

Vice Chair Victor Lukaniuk (Deputy Leader of the Council)

Donna Higgins

Diane Hind

Gerald Kelly

Richard O'Driscoll

Ian Shipp

David Taylor

Jim Thorndyke

Indy Wijenayaka

By invitation

Peter Armitage

(Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee)

Sarah Broughton

(Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

In attendance

Nick Clarke

Susan Glossop

Joe Mason

Observers

Carol Bull

Mike Chester

Roger Dicker

Andrew Smith

482. **Apologies for absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

483. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

484. **Declarations of interest**

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

(At this point, the Chair varied the order of business so that items were considered in a different sequence to that published on the agenda.)

485. **Public participation**

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

1. **Terry Charles**, a resident in the district, made a statement in connection with the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and the evidential basis upon which the Council made the declaration. In Mr Charles' view, he felt that climate emergency declarations had been made by local authorities as a result of activists stating that such an emergency existed. He requested whether evidence had been provided by the activists to substantiate their claim when the Council declared its climate emergency.

In response, Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council stated that the specific evidence requested could not be supplied. The declaration of a climate emergency had been made by West Suffolk Council under the previous administration and the current administration continued to support this position. As part of this, the Council would continue to strive towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

2. **Aaron Leeves**, a resident in the district, made a statement in connection with a number of topics which continued on from the statement he made at the last meeting of Council on 20 June 2023.

Specific reference was given at this meeting to the perceived damaging effect the lockdowns imposed during the pandemic had had on the mental health and wellbeing of society; the perceived detrimental impacts caused by taking forward the initiatives identified to support the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, such as requiring a reduction in car use; and whether the Council should support or justify freedom of movement which enabled the use of private jets, for example.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that:

- the current Westminster-led public inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic would analyse a vast range of issues, where it was expected that a number of misjudgements would be identified and learned from.
- No plans were in place for the Council to request a reduction in car use; however, the harm caused to the air quality caused by cars was aimed to be reduced. One solution was the promotion of greater electric vehicle usage.
- Greater use of public transport by all, including those with private jets, should be encouraged.

3. **Jo Owen**, a resident in the district, asked a question in connection with improving arrangements for public participation at meetings and encouraging better public consultation and engagement on important specific projects, such as the development of the West Suffolk Local Plan, the initiatives identified in the environment and climate change action plans, and the rollout of 5G masts.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that the Council's recently appointed Constitution Review Group would be reviewing the public participation and speaking arrangements at meetings, which were set down in the Council's Constitution. Written submissions from the public on potential changes would be welcomed by the group. He outlined ways in which views could be made known, such as through ward councillors or responding to scheduled public consultations. The next stage of consultation on the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan was due to take place in January 2024, details of which would be provided on the Council's website.

Councillor Waterman concluded by stating that West Suffolk Council had wide responsibilities but only in certain areas. The Council was also bound by the law, and while lobbying could be undertaken to seek a change in law, it must abide by it. The Council could therefore only make decisions on matters that fell within its responsibility and based on criteria set down by central government.

No further questions were asked. The Chair concluded this item and invited the members of the public present to remain in the meeting to observe the following agenda items should they wish to do so.

486. **Open forum**

The following non-Cabinet members spoke under this item:

1. Councillor Susan Glossop (Ward Member for Risby)

Councillor Susan Glossop addressed the Cabinet and in response to the topics raised, she was informed by the Leader of the Council that:

- The production of the West Suffolk Annual Report 2022 to 2023 was in progress.
- There was no substantive business scheduled for the Council meeting reserved for 25 July 2023. It was therefore prudent not to utilise this date for a Council meeting as it was not required. The Leader's Statement that provided an update on Council issues and was included as a standing item on Council agendas would be forthcoming for the next Council meeting on 26 September 2023.
- It was not routine practice to inform ward members of forthcoming publicity events that involved the Leader of the Council and portfolio holders, as appropriate, unless the ward member/s was specifically involved in the activity.
- There were no plans to outsource West Suffolk Council's grass cutting contract.

2. Councillor Joe Mason (Ward Member for Haverhill North)

Councillor Joe Mason addressed the Cabinet and in response to the topics raised, he was informed by the Leader of the Council (point 1) and the Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities (point 2) that:

- The review of the Council's priorities and associated policies and strategies where appropriate, was in progress.
- That all views and comments on the recent 'Parish/District/County Conference – Families and Communities Evening event' were appreciated.

Feedback was particularly welcomed from parish and town councils, including suggestions for shaping the event in the future.

3. Councillor Nick Clarke (Ward Member for Clare, Hundon and Kedington and Leader of the Conservative Group)

Councillor Nick Clarke addressed the Cabinet and in response to the topics raised, he was informed by the Leader of the Council that:

- The review of grass cutting arrangements was already underway as part of the wider review of the grounds maintenance contract. Unusual climate conditions had unfortunately impacted on grass cutting schedules this year. Effective communication on this topic with ward members, town and parish councils and residents was highlighted.
- There was no substantive business scheduled for the Council meeting reserved for 25 July 2023. This meeting was not cancelled; it was however, identified not to utilise this date for a Council meeting as it was not required.
- While extremely impressed with the services provided at the Mildenhall Hub, the proposed Western Way development was a very different project to the Hub. The financial position relating to the Western Way approved scheme was being looked into.
- The Constitution Review Group was to review public participation and speaking arrangements (see minute 485. above regarding this matter).

No further questions were asked or statements made under this item.

487. 2022/2023 West Suffolk Environmental Statement (Report number: CAB/WS/23/031)

The Cabinet considered this report, which sought approval for the West Suffolk Environmental Statement covering the 2022 to 2023 year.

Each year the Council published its Environmental Statement that provided a summary of the environmental impact from the activities the Council undertook to manage and reduce its carbon emissions. Report number: CAB/WS/23/031 covered the period year ending 31 March 2023. There was also a significant amount of work which contributed to improving the environment across the district which was not covered in the statement. This work was carried out both by the Council directly and in conjunction with partners.

Section 3.1 of Report number: CAB/WS/23/031 summarised the notable changes since last reported for the 2021 to 2022 year with the full report attached as Appendix A.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including that the Environmental Statement for 2022 to 2023, together with other documentation and evidence, would inform the work of Cabinet's recently established West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group. Its recommendations for future action were expected to be presented to Cabinet in autumn 2023.

The Cabinet supported approval of the Environmental Statement for the Council's 2022 to 2023 performance.

Resolved:

That the Environmental Statement for the Council's 2022 to 2023 performance, included as Appendix A to Report number: CAB/WS/23/031, be approved.

488. Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 15 June 2023 (Report number: CAB/WS/23/028)

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 June 2023:

1. Suffolk County Council (SCC) Health Scrutiny – 19 April 2023
2. Appointments to outside scrutiny body
3. Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024
4. Work programme update 2023

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet including placing her thanks on record to Councillor Margaret Marks, the Council's former representative on SCC's Health Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Marks had presented her final report to West Suffolk's O&S Committee on 15 June 2023 to which the Committee were extremely grateful for her tireless efforts in ensuring West Suffolk was appropriately represented on the Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader also commended Councillor Marks for her outstanding commitment to the role and went on to thank, on behalf of the Cabinet, Councillor Broughton for the work of her committee.

489. Report of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 22 June 2023 (Report number: CAB/WS/23/029)

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items considered by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee on 22 June 2023:

1. 2022 to 2023 performance report (Quarter 4)
2. Internal audit annual report (2022 to 2023) including results of external assessment of internal audit.
3. Outline internal audit plan (2023 to 2024)
4. Annual report from the Health and Safety Sub-Committee
5. Annual appointments to the Financial Resilience Sub-Committee and the Health and Safety Sub-Committee (2023 to 2024)
6. Work programme update 2023 to 2024

Councillor Peter Armitage, Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader thanked Councillor Armitage for the work of his committee.

490. **Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 13 June 2023 (Report number: CAB/WS/23/030)**

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items considered by the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) Joint Committee on 13 June 2023:

1. ARP actual performance report: 2022 to 2023
2. ARP actual financial performance report: 2022 to 2023
3. ARP service plan and risk register
4. Welfare reform update
5. ARP health and safety policy statement
6. Forthcoming issues

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet, including placing her thanks on record to the staff of ARP for their sterling work and the particular support given to residents, where required.

491. **Decisions Plan: 1 July 2023 to 31 May 2024**

The Cabinet considered this report which was the Cabinet Decisions Plan covering the period 1 July 2023 to 31 May 2024.

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 6.53 pm

Signed by:

Chair
