

Council



Title	Agenda
Date	Tuesday 19 December 2023
Time	7.00 pm
Venue	Conference Chamber West Suffolk House Western Way Bury St Edmunds
Membership	<p>All Councillors</p> <p>You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council to transact the business on the agenda set out below.</p>  <p>Ian Gallin Chief Executive 11 December 2023</p>
Interests – declaration and restriction on participation	Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any disclosable pecuniary interest, other registerable or non-registerable interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when that item is reached and, when appropriate, to leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.
Quorum	One third of the Council (22 members)
Committee administrator	Claire Skoyles Democratic Services Officer Telephone 01284 757176 Email democratic.services@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Venue	Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU
Contact information	Telephone: 01284 757176 Email: democratic.services@westsuffolk.gov.uk Website: www.westsuffolk.gov.uk
Access to agenda and reports before the meeting	<p>The agenda and reports will be available to view at least five clear days before the meeting on our website.</p> <p>It is intended that the meeting will be livestreamed. The link to join the livestream broadcast will be made available on the Council's website prior to the meeting.</p>
Attendance at meetings	<p>This meeting is being held in person in order to comply with the Local Government Act 1972. We may be required to restrict the number of members of the public able to attend in accordance with the room capacity. If you consider it is necessary for you to attend, please inform Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>As a local authority, we have a corporate and social responsibility for the safety of our staff, our councillors and visiting members of the public. We therefore request that you exercise personal responsibility and do not attend the meeting if you feel at all unwell.</p> <p>West Suffolk Council continues to promote good hygiene practices with hand sanitiser and wipes being available in the meeting room. Attendees are also able to wear face coverings, should they wish to.</p>
Public participation	<p>Members of the public who live or work in the district may put questions or make statements on items on the agenda to members of the Cabinet or any committee. A total of 30 minutes will be set aside for this with each person limited to asking one question or making one statement within a maximum time allocation of five minutes (subject to the Chair's discretion). 30 minutes will also be set aside for questions at extraordinary meetings of the Council, but must be limited to the business to be transacted at that meeting.</p> <p>The Constitution allows that a person who wishes to speak must register no later than midday on the Friday before the meeting is scheduled to take place.</p> <p>See section 6.8 of the Council Procedure Rules of the Constitution regarding the scope of questions/statements that may be asked/made.</p>

Accessibility	If you have any difficulties in accessing the meeting, the agenda and accompanying reports, including for reasons of a disability or a protected characteristic, please contact Democratic Services at the earliest opportunity using the contact details provided above in order that we may assist you.
Recording of meetings	<p>The Council may record this meeting and permits members of the public and media to record or broadcast it as well (when the media and public are not lawfully excluded).</p> <p>Any member of the public who attends a meeting and objects to being filmed should advise the Committee Administrator who will instruct that they are not included in the filming.</p>
Personal information	<p>Any personal information processed by West Suffolk Council arising from a request to speak at a public meeting under the Localism Act 2011, will be protected in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on how we do this and your rights in regards to your personal information and how to access it, visit our website: https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Data_and_information/howweuseinformation.cfm or call Customer Services: 01284 763233 and ask to speak to the Information Governance Officer.</p>

Agenda

Procedural matters

	Pages
1. Minutes	1 - 18
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023 (copy attached).	
2. Chair's announcements	19 - 22
To receive announcements (if any) from the Chair.	
A list of civic events/engagements attended by the Chair and Vice-Chair since the last ordinary meeting of Council held on 26 September 2023 are attached .	
3. Apologies for absence	
To receive announcements (if any) from the officer advising the Chair (including apologies for absence).	
4. Declarations of interests	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any disclosable pecuniary interest, other registerable or non-registerable interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when that item is reached and, when appropriate, to leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.	

Part 1 – public

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 2.3 of the Constitution, the Chair has agreed the following items will be considered in a different order to that set out in Council Procedure Rule 2.2.

5. Public participation

Council Procedure Rules Section 6. Members of the public who live or work in the district may put questions or make statements on items on the agenda to members of the Cabinet or any committee.

(Note: The maximum time to be set aside for this item is 30 minutes, but if all questions/statements are dealt with sooner, or if there are no questions/statements, the Council will proceed to the next business.)

Each person may ask **one** question or make **one** statement only. A total of **five minutes will be allowed for the question to be put and answered or the statement made**. If a question is raised, one supplementary question will be allowed provided that

it **arises directly from the reply and the overall time limit of five minutes is not exceeded** (subject to the Chair's discretion).

The member to whom the question is directed may refer it to another member or may choose to give a written response. If a statement is made, then the Chair may allow the Leader of the Council, or other member to whom they refer the matter, a right of reply.

The Constitution allows that a person who wishes to speak must register **by no later than midday Friday 15 December 2023**.

See section 6.8 of the [Council Procedure Rules](#) of the Constitution regarding the scope of questions/statements that may be asked/made.

6. Leader's statement **23 - 28**

Paper number: **COU/WS/23/018**

Council Procedure Rules 8.1 to 8.3. The Leader will submit a report (the Leader's Statement) summarising important developments and activities since the preceding meeting of the Council.

The Leader will introduce the statement and members may ask the Leader questions:

- a. On the Leader's statement
- b. On any Council matter

A total of 30 minutes will be allowed for questions and responses. There will be a limit of five minutes for each question to be asked and answered. A supplementary question arising from the reply may be asked so long as the five minute limit is not exceeded.

The Chair may use their discretion to extend or reduce the time allowed if they feel it appropriate.

7. West Suffolk Council Strategic Priorities and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 **29 - 70**

Report number: **COU/WS/23/019**

8. Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet **71 - 88**

Report number: **COU/WS/23/020**

Part One

A. Referrals from Cabinet: 14 November 2023

There are no referrals emanating from meeting of Cabinet held on 14 November 2023.

B. Referrals from Cabinet: 5 December 2023

1. Treasury Management Report - September 2023
Portfolio holder: Councillor Diane Hind
2. West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission
(Report number: COU/WS/23/021)
Portfolio holder: Councillor Jim Thorndyke

(See separate supplement packs for Appendix A which contains the proposed West Suffolk Local Plan Submission 2024 documents themselves – available to view electronically on the Council’s website [here](#). Paper copies available upon request.)

Part Two

3. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024 to 2025
Portfolio holder: Councillor Diane Hind
4. Council tax base for tax setting purposes 2024 to 2025
Portfolio holder: Councillor Diane Hind

9. Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel: Members' Allowances Scheme **89 - 122**

Report number: **COU/WS/23/022**

10. Polling district and polling place review **123 - 142**

Report number: **COU/WS/23/023**

11. Use of Chief Executive's urgency powers

Under Part 3, Section 5, Scheme of Delegation to Officers, paragraph 14 of the Council’s Constitution, it states:

‘Where, in the opinion of the Chief Executive, by reason of limitation of time or urgency, a decision is required on any matter, after such consultation as they consider necessary (or as is required by the Council’s Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the Constitution), they shall have power to make a decision provided that any such decision shall be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet, appropriate Committee or Council.....’

On 11 December 2023, the Chief Executive exercised his urgency powers to make some changes to the Council Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Constitution.

These amendments relate to the:

- Order of business on Council agendas so that public participation is considered before the Leader's statement
- procedure rules regarding public participation
- procedure rules regarding questions to the Leader on the presentation of the Leader's statement

These changes have been reflected in the Council Procedure Rules, which can be found in the Constitution [here](#)

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Council, Leader of the Council and Group Leaders were consulted on this matter prior to the decision being made, and all expressed their support for it.

Recommendation:

In accordance with the Constitution, Council is requested to **note** the use of the Chief Executive's urgency powers in respect of making the decision outlined above.

12. Any other urgent business

To consider any business, which by reason of special circumstances, should in the opinion of the Chair be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Part 2 – exempt

None

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Council



Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 26 September 2023** at **7.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present

Councillors

Chair Roger Dicker

Vice Chair Pat Hanlon

Richard Alecock	Rowena Lindberg	David Smith
Michael Anderson	Jon London	Liz Smith
Peter Armitage	Aaron Luccarini	Andrew Speed
Mick Bradshaw	Victor Lukaniuk	Karen Soons
Sarah Broughton	Charlie Lynch	Sarah Stamp
Tony Brown	Birgitte Mager	Frank Stennett
Carol Bull	Margaret Marks	David Taylor
Mike Chester	Joe Mason	Jim Thorndyke
Patrick Chung	Sara Mildmay-White	Julia Wakelam
Dawn Dicker	Lora-Jane Miller-	Don Waldron
Paul Firman	Jones	Cliff Waterman
Susan Glossop	Andy Neal	Indy Wijenayaka
John Griffiths	Richard O'Driscoll	Phil Wittam
Luke Halpin	Joanna Rayner	Kevin Yarrow
Donna Higgins	Karen Richardson	
Diane Hind	Jools Savage	
Beccy Hopfensperger	Marilyn Sayer	
Ian Houlder	Ian Shipp	
Gerald Kelly	Andrew Smith	

306. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

307. Chair's announcements

The Chair was delighted to welcome to the meeting Chris Wiley, Lynda Seldis, Simon Hobson and Tom Hagger, representatives of the Bury in Bloom team. Both Bury in Bloom and Brandon in Bloom were winners in this year's Anglia in Bloom competition; however, unfortunately members of the Brandon in Bloom team were unable to attend the meeting.

On behalf of Council, the Chair formally congratulated both team's achievements and thanked them for all their hard work in helping to aesthetically improve the towns of Brandon and Bury St Edmunds.

The Chair then reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 20 June 2023.

The Chair specifically made reference to attending Armed Forces Day in Haverhill; was delighted with the excellent attendance at his civic service in Kentford; enthused about his visit to Clare; and enjoyed attending a Civic Leaders event at RAF Lakenheath.

308. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Augustine, Nick Clarke, Andy Drummond, Rachel Hood, Janne Jarvis, Andrew Martin, Sarah Pugh, Sue Perry, Richard Rout, Marion Rushbrook and Tracy Whitehand.

309. **Declarations of interests**

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

310. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/23/013)**

Councillor Waterman, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/23/013.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Waterman:

- a. **Environment:** reported that the protection of the environment remained a key priority of the Council. The Cabinet very much welcomed the recent recommendations of the West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group and building on that initial work, which was limited to completion by September, the Leader felt it was time to pick up the pace and do more with residents and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change. It was intended that the Environment and Sustainability Working Group would continue to operate in an evolved form. The Group would consider how best to continue to embed environmental considerations into future decision-making, alongside wider social and economic factors, together with keeping the actions plan under review and identifying new opportunities to address both environmental, climate change and sustainability considerations.

Engaging with the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA), the Council was endorsing the work of the East of England Hydrogen Cluster which would ensure the East was ready to take advantage of opportunities arising from this emerging technology.

Reference was also given to the Net Zero Innovation Fund which provided grants to businesses that had innovative solutions to drive the county towards its net zero target.

- b. **Supporting business:** reported on Government funded grants to aid the growth of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in West Suffolk. The grants would be available to apply for through the New Anglia Growth Hub and were from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.
- c. **Cost of living support:** stated that the Council was from 2 October 2023, carrying out engagement with the public and stakeholders to extend for another year the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to help those eligible on low incomes by giving 100 percent discount on their council tax.
- d. **Community Chest:** reminded members that the deadline of 29 September 2023 for applications to be submitted for the 2024 to 2025 Community Chest round was fast approaching.
- e. **A Louder Voice:** stated that the Local Government Association (LGA) was beginning work on a local government white paper to be published before the next election. It was a bold ambition to develop a plan to form part of the first King's Speech after the next General Election to secure a national local partnership in which local government could work to its full potential for its people, places and planet. The work would be underpinned by the LGA's 'Make it Local' campaign which outlined how local government was key to delivering solutions to the biggest issues faced. West Suffolk intended to play a full and engaged role in this debate.

Councillor Waterman also welcomed the fact that Councillor Shipp was a full member of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board which demonstrated the Council's commitment to these areas and ensured West Suffolk had a voice nationally.

- f. **Their future:** reported that together with various organisations and businesses, the Council supported a recently held 'Skills Escalator Day' initiative. Five schools in and around Newmarket were invited to take part in this career event, which was specifically aimed at younger primary school children of six and seven years of age.
- g. **Out and about:** listed a wide range of partners and organisations that he had met with in recent weeks and several more were in the pipeline. These were all vital and valuable to strengthen relationships to help achieve common aims and goals which made things better for communities and businesses.
- h. **Ward work:** thanked all members for their sterling work undertaken in their wards. He felt members made a real and direct difference, demonstrating a shared goal as a force of good and championing the district's local communities.

The Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **Lack of gender balance in the Cabinet:** that he was not content with the gender balance within the Council in general. It was often the

case that working women, particularly those with young children and dependents found it difficult to stand for election and that was reflected in the gender of councillors at West Suffolk.

- b. **Provision of refreshments at the conclusion of Council meetings:** that it was not the Leader's decision to reintroduce refreshments at the conclusion of Council meetings, which were at very little cost in comparison to the Council's overall spending; however, he supported the provision if it meant that councillors could interact on a social footing away from politics.
- c. **Use of glyphosate:** that it had been a previous decision of the Council to cease using glyphosate for weed control as a means for protecting the environment; however, the adverse impacts caused by excessive weed growth on footpaths, verges etc as a result of not using glyphosate had been recognised. Councillor Shipp, Portfolio Holder for Leisure with the responsibility for open spaces, was leading on a working group that together with other matters, was looking into this issue and would report later in the year with its findings and potential recommendations to Cabinet.
- d. **Haverhill:** that it was recognised that there were issues of concern in Haverhill; however, the Leader expressed his enthusiasm for the town acknowledging its positive aspects. Proposals would be brought forward in due course regarding ways to improve the vibrancy of all of the district's towns where required.

311. **Public participation**

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

1. **Aaron Leeves**, a resident in the district, made a statement in connection with "net zero emissions and the supposed climate emergency". He felt that some of the issues the Council was addressing to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change should not have been implemented without public consultation, particularly as he felt there was insufficient evidence to support the declaration of a climate emergency. He continued to air his own views on the detrimental impacts to the health and well being of society of the COVID-19 lockdowns and the COVID-19 vaccine; and that in his view, he felt there was over sexualisation of children in the education system.

He continued to speak on what he considered were the responsibilities of West Suffolk Council to protect future generations.

At this point, the total five minute time allocation permitted for making a statement under this item, as set out in the Council Procedure Rules of the Constitution, had been reached. The Chair politely asked Mr Leeves to end his statement; however, this request was ignored.

The Chair asked Mr Leeves again to conclude his statement, following which the Chair was interrupted by another member of the public. The Chair asked the two members of the public causing the disturbance to leave the meeting immediately but the situation rapidly escalated with the two members of the public shouting aggressively and moving into the area in which members

were seated. At this point the Chair considered the safety of members was at risk.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 18, the Chair suspended the meeting without resolution or debate at 7.40pm, requesting that all members vacate the meeting room away from the disturbance.

The meeting resumed at 8.25pm.

The Chair determined that this item on the agenda had been concluded and no further public questions were asked, or statements made under this item.

(Councillor Karen Soons left the meeting while the meeting had been suspended and did not return.)

312. Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report number: COU/WS/23/014)

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/23/014.

A. Referrals from Cabinet: 13 June 2023 and 18 July 2023

There were no referrals emanating from the last meetings of Cabinet held on 13 June 2023 (verbally reported at the last meeting of Council) and 18 July 2023.

B. Referrals from Cabinet: 19 September 2023

Following the publication of the agenda and papers for this meeting, which took place before the Cabinet decisions were taken on 19 September 2023, the Chair confirmed that no amendments had been made by the Cabinet to the recommendations contained in the referral report.

1. Annual Treasury Management and Financial Resilience Report 2022 to 2023

Approval was sought for the Annual Treasury Management and Financial Resilience Report (2022 to 2023).

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

On the motion of Councillor Hind, seconded by Councillor Rowena Lindberg, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That the Annual Treasury Management and Financial Resilience Report 2022 to 2023, as contained in Report number: FRS/WS/23/003, be approved.

2. Treasury Management Report (June 2023)

Approval was sought for the Treasury Management Report (June 2023).

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

Councillor Julia Wakelam asked a question in connection with the ethical standards of those providing the Council's investments, particularly around their environmental impact credentials.

A written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Hind. In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, this response would be circulated to Councillor Wakelam and all members and published on the Council's website.

On the motion of Councillor Hind, seconded by Councillor Rowena Lindberg, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That the Treasury Management Report (June 2023), as contained in Report number FRS/WS/23/004, be approved.

3. Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund

On 19 September 2023, the Cabinet received the report of the West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group which confirmed the Council's commitment to addressing the Climate and Environment Emergency and to reaching net zero by 2030 in respect of Council operations. In June 2023, the Leader of the Council had also expressed the new Cabinet's wish to consider additional actions the Council could take to support and encourage West Suffolk residents, businesses and partners to address climate change.

Approval was sought to create a £1 million fund to support third parties in pursuing decarbonisation initiatives. An initial priority area for that spending had been identified which could result in a large environmental improvement for the district in keeping with the Council's adopted priorities. Namely, the upgrade of streetlighting owned by town and parish councils.

The Cabinet report (CAB/WS/23/040) provided background to the ownership of the majority of streetlights in the district, including the agreed actions emanating from the audit undertaken in 2022. The proposals for Council's consideration were set out in section 2 of the Cabinet report, which was attached in full to the referrals report.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

In response to questions, Councillor Kelly informed Council that Cabinet wanted to establish the principle of the fund, and set it up flexibly for future use, linking it to the wider climate change action plan.

Other than the grant to upgrade the streetlights owned by town and parish councils' schemes, no other schemes had been considered for its use at this stage. No comparative exercise had been undertaken regarding how different schemes might compare in terms of decarbonisation per pound spent and this would be extremely complex to do at this stage as West Suffolk Council (WSC) did not own the streetlights in question.

Given the issues town and parish councils were having in respect of funding the conversion of their lights to LED which had already been acknowledged as part of the audit and that the upgrade would create a large impact on decarbonising a public asset quickly and efficiently, Cabinet considered this was an appropriate scheme to allocate an initial tranche of funding.

The evolved Environment and Sustainability Working Group would consider proposals for future use of the Fund and make recommendations to Cabinet, as appropriate.

Other members expressed their support for this Fund recognising the benefits of supporting third parties in pursuing decarbonisation initiatives which in turn, supported the Council's wider commitment for encouraging a reduction in carbon emissions and tackling climate change throughout the district.

Recognition was also given to the potential impact on Abbeycroft Leisure's energy costs should the decision be taken not to pursue the previously approved Western Way project (see item 4. below).

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor David Taylor, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 50 for the motion, none against and one abstention, it was

Resolved:

1. A Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund of £1 million be created, funded by the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve.
2. The first call on that fund be a grant scheme for the upgrade of streetlights owned by town and parish councils to light-emitting diode (LED) lanterns on the basis outlined in Report number CAB/WS/23/040.
3. Cabinet be authorised, if applicable, to agree the use of any remaining balance in the Fund for additional decarbonisation initiatives.
4. The Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's prudential indicators.

4. Western Way Project

Approval was sought for a number of recommendations emanating from a review undertaken on the future of the Western Way project.

Phase 1 of the current Western Way (WW) project in Bury St Edmunds was approved in principle by Council in December 2022, and its final target budget was approved by Cabinet in March 2023 (approximately £61 million including land acquisition costs). However, approval to sign a contract and deliver the first stage of the project was subject to financial tests being met after the final stage of tendering with the preferred contractor, Morgan Sindall, in summer 2023. A business case for phase 2 of the project had not yet been considered by councillors, but a further budget of up to £10 million had been approved to address the remainder of the site in the meantime.

When the new Cabinet was appointed in May 2023, it announced its intention to review the future of the WW project in the light of changed economic circumstances. Report number: CAB/WS/23/041 was the outcome of those deliberations by the Cabinet and was attached in full to the referrals report.

The report explained that, as things stood, second stage tenders from sub-contractors had been received for the phase 1 scheme and were still being evaluated and value-engineered by the contractor and project team to reduce their cost to a viable level. There was also considerable pressure on the revenue side of the project, for example increased interest rates, which would have to be explored and mitigated if Council decided that the project would still go ahead.

Cabinet felt that work to further adapt the scheme to meet the viability tests would delay not only certainty on the future of leisure services but also improvements to the current leisure facilities themselves (either as a newbuild or refurbishment). Certainty over the other elements of the project (a pre-school, archive and health facility) would also be affected.

Ultimately though, even if the viability test could be met, this would still be a very large capital investment in excess of £50 million for West Suffolk Council (WSC). The project also relied on achieving significant new income streams at a time of great economic uncertainty.

Cabinet had therefore concluded that a project at this scale (with further project costs and time required to both confirm and then maintain its possible viability), carried significant risk to the authority and taxpayers at a time of major financial pressure on local authorities and household budgets. Pressure which had worsened since December 2022. The risk of this financial investment was therefore felt by Cabinet to currently outweigh the potential outcomes of the WW scheme.

Cabinet proposed instead to carry out essential maintenance for the existing leisure centre within existing budgets and explore alternative options for the Olding Road site. In relation to the leisure centre, this approach replaced the risks of a very large and complex capital project, and the revenue risks of it being underwritten by new savings and income, with those of a smaller and simpler capital project, which would be funded entirely within existing revenue budget commitments so as not to put further pressure on the Council's budget. While, at the same time, keeping all options for the future of the Olding Road site open.

More rationale for the proposal was contained in the press statement released by Cabinet on 8 September 2023, which was attached as Appendix 1 to Report number CAB/WS/23/041.

The remainder of Report number CAB/WS/23/041 set out the practical implications and risks of this new proposal and sought new authorities to take the project forward accordingly. This was divided into the various different elements of the project.

In addition, a summary of the identified opportunities, risks and financial implications contained in an addendum to Report number CAB/WS/23/041, was attached for Council's consideration. This analysis had been undertaken by the Council's statutory officers and was circulated to Cabinet prior to its meeting on 19 September 2023 for consideration in conjunction with the full report.

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council. He reiterated the key factors that had been considered and the earlier rationale which had led to the proposal for progressing the WW project in its current form. He and his Cabinet felt that in the present economic climate and the financial risks associated with that, and given how the scheme for a variety of reasons had already evolved from a very different ambition to a much smaller project, the decision to revise the project further was deemed to be the most sensible and pragmatic way forward.

Councillor Waterman was confident that a refurbishment of the existing Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre within already available budgets for the centre would provide very good quality leisure facilities moving forward. He enthused about the possibilities and potential uses for the existing Olding Road site, options for which would be provided in an initial business case early in 2024.

Councillor Waterman moved the motion to accept the recommendations set out in the report, which was duly seconded by Councillor Ian Shipp.

The debate ensued on the substantive motion, which commenced with Councillor Andrew Smith, deputy leader of the Conservative Group, expressing concern that the proposal to cancel the WW project in its current form was premature. Similar concerns regarding the financial risks were shared; however, it was felt these could be satisfactorily mitigated. He expressed his disappointment that the ambition to provide a new, fit-for-purpose leisure centre coupled with the delivery of other services by trusted partners which was considered to enhance the vibrancy of Bury St Edmunds and surrounding communities would not be met. A period of reflection to further consider the implications of the proposals was urged to be sought.

Councillor Joanna Rayner, former Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Community Hubs, who under the previous administration had been the lead member for the Western Way project, felt there was a lack of clarity regarding the proposed budget for the revised scheme with no clear commitment on what would be spent including how the future of the leisure centre would be secured. She subsequently moved an amendment to the substantive motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Andrew Speed.

The amendment was as follows, with the relevant changes shown in bold text and strike-through:

That:

1. **A decision on** the delivery of the Western Way project in Bury St Edmunds be **paused** ~~revised as set out in this report~~ and in accordance with the following resolutions;
2. ~~Officers be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Leisure and Resources,~~ **to bring back to Council a detailed plan to** deliver a refurbishment of the existing Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre **and details of the spend committed to deliver these works;** ~~provided that the total cost of these works is fully met by the Council's already available budgets for the centre and any new third party funding that can be obtained, as set out in section 3 of this report;~~
3. A budget of £75,000, funded from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve, be approved to develop an initial business case for alternative options for the Olding Road site **and an options appraisal brought back to Council alongside recommendation 2;**
4. The existing allocation of up to £1 million from the original West Suffolk Operational Hub project towards remediation of the former council depot be retained on an invest-to-save basis in the Council's Capital Programme to cover the cost of any immediate works to the existing Olding Road site which will add value to this asset and/or reduce holding costs irrespective of which future option for its use is adopted; any expenditure from this allocation to be approved by the Council's section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources;
5. ~~A provision of up to £2.4 million from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve is approved to fund any abortive costs arising from the new approach to the Western Way project;~~
6. The current Section 73 planning application to allow phasing of the original planning consent for Western Way remain on hold until a new decision is reached by Council on the future of the Olding Road site;
7. ~~Officers be authorised to appoint a new external project team and contractor(s) to progress the new approach, within the new spending~~
8. authorities set out above and in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules; and the Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's prudential indicators.

The debate ensued on the amendment to the substantive motion.

Several members of the Conservative Group spoke in support of the amendment which included the following comments:

- That there was insufficient information and detail in the report to make an informed decision on the new proposals. It was therefore felt

appropriate to pause the existing project while the full implications of the revisions were properly worked through.

- The potential impact on the renewable energy income stream that formed part of the current scheme, including the immediate impact on the Council's carbon footprint.
- A lack of clarity regarding a longer term commitment for the delivery of leisure services in Bury St Edmunds.
- Recognition and a shared concern regarding the potential financial risks; however, it was felt that greater consideration should be given to the mitigation measures and the longer term benefits. Examples of other significant projects were given with the difficulties that had been experienced and overcome to enable them to come to fruition.
- That it was difficult to provide details of the proposed revisions to the scheme with residents as the plans had not been shared within the report. It was felt that given the significance of the project and the financial spend involved, the detailed plans to deliver a refurbishment of the leisure centre should come back to Council for a decision and not delegated to officers, in consultation with portfolio holders.

Other members spoke on the amendment to the substantive motion, which included:

- Other costs were likely to be incurred if the present scheme was paused and these may rise in the current economic climate.
- Detailed plans for the revised scheme were available, which included costings for delivery.
- The principle of the amendment was understood; however, the majority of members felt that should the present scheme be paused, this would create further uncertainty for residents, particularly for those that used the leisure facilities.

Following Councillor Waterman's right of reply on the amendment, the amendment to the substantive motion was put to the vote and with the vote being 18 for the motion, 33 against and one abstention, the amendment was lost.

The debate returned to the substantive motion. The rationale for the proposals were reiterated, including highlighting the financial risks in the present economic climate which were considered to be too significant to outweigh the continuation of the current scheme. The importance and benefits of delivering quality leisure provision was recognised and plans would be progressed to work with Abbeycroft Leisure to meet this provision across the district within budget. Longer term budget provision would be made for all West Suffolk leisure centres to address ongoing maintenance needs which in turn should prolong their longevity.

Potential alternative options for generating income from renewable energy throughout the district by alternative methods to those proposed in the current scheme were also highlighted, together with the initial impact the build of a new leisure centre would have on the district's carbon emissions.

Other members expressed their concerns should the decision be taken as proposed in the substantive motion. These included:

- reiterating the rationale and benefits for replacing the Bury St Edmunds leisure centre.
- The perceived lack of detail and evidence in the report to make an informed decision.
- The potential impact on the reputation of the Council.
- The perceived adverse impact on West Suffolk's residents, users of the leisure facilities and the potential other service providers and commercial opportunities proposed in the current scheme.
- The proposals for the revised scheme potentially intimated that West Suffolk Council was not forward thinking, visionary, aspirational or ambitious and that the district was not worthy of investment.
- Whilst the difficulties faced in the current economic climate were recognised, it was felt that payback of the borrowing over the long term would still be satisfactorily achievable at an affordable rate of interest.

A request was made for a recorded vote, which was duly supported by more than the Constitutionally required ten members.

Following Councillor Waterman's right of reply, the substantive motion was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors Alecock, Armitage, Anderson, Bradshaw, Brown, Dawn Dicker, Roger Dicker, Firman, Halpin, Hanlon, Higgins, Hind, Kelly, Lindberg, London, Luccarini, Lukaniuk, Miller-Jones, Neal, O'Driscoll, Savage, Sayer, Shipp, David Smith, Liz Smith, Stennett, Taylor, Thorndyke, Wakelam, Waldron, Waterman, Wijenayaka, Wittam and Yarrow.

Against the motion:

Councillors Broughton, Bull, Chester, Chung, Glossop, Griffiths, Hopfensperger, Houlder, Lynch, Mager, Marks, Mason, Mildmay-White, Rayner, Richardson, Andrew Smith, Speed and Stamp.

Abstentions:

None

It was therefore

Resolved: That

1. The delivery of the Western Way project in Bury St Edmunds be revised as set out in this report and in accordance with the following resolutions.
2. Officers be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Leisure and Resources, to deliver a refurbishment of the existing Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre provided that the total cost of these works is fully met by the Council's already available budgets for the centre and any new third-party funding that can be obtained, as set out in section 3 of this report.

3. A budget of £75,000, funded from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve, be approved to develop an initial business case for alternative options for the Olding Road site.
4. The existing allocation of up to £1 million from the original West Suffolk Operational Hub project towards remediation of the former council depot be retained on an invest-to-save basis in the Council's Capital Programme to cover the cost of any immediate works to the existing Olding Road site which will add value to this asset and/or reduce holding costs irrespective of which future option for its use is adopted; any expenditure from this allocation to be approved by the Council's section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.
5. A provision of up to £2.4 million from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve is approved to fund any abortive costs arising from the new approach to the Western Way project.
6. The current Section 73 planning application to allow phasing of the original planning consent for Western Way remain on hold until a new decision is reached by Council on the future of the Olding Road site.
7. Officers be authorised to appoint a new external project team and contractor(s) to progress the new approach, within the new spending authorities set out above and in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules.
8. The Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's prudential indicators.

(At this point, the Chair adjourned the meeting for a short comfort break during which Councillors Bradshaw, Firman, Glossop, Griffiths, Luccarini, Mager, Marks, Mason, Rayner, Richardson and Stamp left the meeting and did not return. The meeting resumed at 10.32 pm).

313. Appointment of Independent Remuneration Panel (Report number: COU/WS/23/015)

Council considered this report, which sought approval for appointing members to the Independent Remuneration Panel.

West Suffolk Council's Members' Allowances Scheme was required to be reviewed in full by a newly appointed independent remuneration panel. The panel would make recommendations to Council on the level of remuneration, allowances and expenses for councillors. These recommendations must be considered by Council, although the Council may wish to agree alternative proposals proposed by its own members. A new scheme must be adopted by December 2023 before the current scheme expired in February 2024. The scheme would then be subject to annual review.

On 20 June 2023, Council agreed the process for appointing a minimum of three members to the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), together with an advisor to the panel, for a period of up to four years. The appointment process included forming a selection panel that would interview shortlisted applicants and would make recommendations to the Council on whom to appoint, as summarised in paragraph 1.5 of the report.

Section 2 of the report provided details of the interview process and the rationale behind the selection panel's consideration of whom to appoint to the IRP. Short biographies of each of the recommended four individuals were contained in Appendix A.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including the reasons for not recommending the appointment of an advisor to the Panel, as set out in section 2.3 of the report.

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

Resolved: That

1. the four individuals listed in Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/015 be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel for a term of up to four years.
2. No appointment be made to the role of advisor to the Independent Remuneration Panel for the reasons set out in section 2.3 of Report number: COU/WS/23/015.

314. **Review of polling districts and polling places (Report number: COU/WS/23/016)**

Council considered this report which sought approval for the compulsory polling district and places review to commence from 2 October 2023, together with the proposed approach and timetable for the review.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years. The next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

As a result of this and other matters explained in paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4 of the report, it was important that the polling district and places review was carried out as early as possible so that the Council had agreed polling districts and polling places to be used for the next parliamentary election, which must take place before 28 January 2025, as well as the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner elections which would be held in May 2024.

Set out in section 2 of the report was the proposed approach to the review, together with an outline timetable setting out each stage. Attached at Appendix A was the draft schedule of polling districts and polling places,

including electorate and recent polling station turnout figures and comments regarding potential changes and/or areas to be considered as part of the review.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the review was expected to be completed in January 2024, prior to which on 19 December 2023, Council would be asked to consider and approve the revised polling districts and polling places.

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Phil Wittam, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved: That

1. The compulsory polling district and places review be approved to commence on Monday 2 October 2023.
2. The outline timetable and approach to the review as set out in Report number: COU/WS/23/016 and at Appendix A, be approved.

315. **Mildenhall Parish - change of name (Report number: COU/WS/23/017)**

Council considered this report which sought approval to formalise a change in name of the Mildenhall parish area so that the parish would be known as Mildenhall High.

Changing the name of a parish area could be achieved through a Community Governance Review process in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. However, such a change may also be progressed under section 75 of the Local Government Act 1972 at the request of the relevant Parish or Town Council.

Section 1.2 of the report explained the process that must be followed to a make a change in name, which started with a decision being required by the Council approving the proposed change.

A request had been received from Mildenhall Town Council to formalise a change in the name of the parish area so that the parish would be known as Mildenhall High. The Town Council had advised that the Town had historically been known as Mildenhall High and the Town Council had, since May 2019, operated informally under the name of Mildenhall High Town Council. However, no order had been made to formalise the change of name of the parish area from Mildenhall to Mildenhall High.

With the agreement of the Chair and the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, Councillor Richard Alecock, ward member for Mildenhall Great Heath, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council and subsequently moved the motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Andy Neal, ward member for Mildenhall Queensway.

On the motion of Councillor Alecock, seconded by Councillor Neal, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved: That

1. The request from Mildenhall Town Council to change the name of the parish of Mildenhall, be noted.
2. The name of Mildenhall Parish be changed to Mildenhall High Parish.
3. The Director (HR, Governance and Regulatory) be authorised to make the necessary legal order to enact the change to the parish name.

316. Any other urgent business

On this occasion, and by reason of special circumstances, the Chair allowed two separate items of urgent business to be considered under this item.

Tabled before each member was a paper outlining the two items of business to be considered.

1. Dispensation sought for non-attendance of Councillor Sarah Pugh at meetings for a period in excess of six consecutive months

Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 required councillors to attend at least one meeting of the Council or act as an appointed representative of the Council every six month period, unless the failure to attend was due to a reason pre-approved by the authority.

Councillor Sarah Pugh last attended a meeting of Council on 23 May 2023. She was planning on attending this meeting; however, due to unforeseen personal circumstances was unable to attend and had given her apologies for absence.

If the 'reserve' Council meeting was not convened on 21 November 2023, Councillor Pugh may face automatic removal from office due to failing to attend a council meeting within six consecutive months. She was not appointed to any other statutory committees and it was not known whether she would be required to attend a meeting of the outside body she had been appointed to within this timeframe.

On the motion of Councillor Roger Dicker, Chair of the Council seconded by Councillor Pat Hanlon, Vice Chair of the Council, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, a dispensation for the non-attendance of Councillor Sarah Pugh at meetings for a period in excess of six consecutive months by reason

of unforeseen personal circumstances be approved and that the situation be reviewed at the next ordinary meeting of Council, as necessary.

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee**

As required by the Constitution, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) were appointed at the Annual Meeting of Council for the ensuing year.

On 23 May 2023, Councillor Andy Neal was elected Vice-Chair of PASC for the 2023 to 2024 municipal year. Whilst he would remain a full member of the Committee, Councillor Neal had within the last few days before the Council meeting decided to resign from the role of Vice-Chair.

Under Part 4d, paragraph 5.3 of the PASC section of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules within the Constitution, the Council was required to fill the vacancy at the next ordinary meeting of Council. Nominations were therefore sought at this meeting to appoint a new Vice-Chair of PASC.

The Chair called upon Councillor Victor Lukaniuk, Deputy Leader and Leader of the Independents Group to make his nomination for the appointment of Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Lukaniuk duly nominated Councillor Frank Stennett. The Chair sought further nominations and Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger nominated Councillor Ian Houlder.

There being no further nominations, a vote was taken on each nomination. With the votes being 31 votes for Councillor Frank Stennett and 9 votes for Councillor Ian Houlder, with no abstentions, the Chair

Declared:

That Councillor Frank Stennett be elected Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2023 to 2024 municipal year.

The meeting concluded at 10.38 pm

Signed by:

Chair

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Civic communication for Council

26 September to 19 December 2023

Event	Venue	Date	Time	Attending
West Suffolk Council Meeting	Council Chamber, West Suffolk House	Tuesday 26 September 2023	7pm to 9pm	Chair and Vice Chair of Council
Suffolk Harvest Festival Service	St Edmundsbury Cathedral	Sunday 1 October 2023	2pm to 3pm	Vice Chair of Council
Stowmarket Mayor's Civic Service	St Peter and St Mary's Parish Church, Station Road West, Stowmarket	Sunday 1 October 2023	2pm to 5pm	Chair of Council
Brandon Town Council meeting	Old School House, Market Hill, Brandon	Monday 9 Oct 2023	7 to 9pm	Chair of Council
Trafalgar Day Parade	Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds	Sunday 15 October 2023	1pm to 5pm	Vice Chair of Council
Meeting with East Cambs Chair, Cllr Mark Goldsack	Scotsdales, Fordham	Thursday 2 November 2023	12pm to 2pm	Chair of Council
West Suffolk College Remembrance Service	West Suffolk College	Wednesday 8 November 2023	10am to 12pm	Chair of Council
Royal British Legion South African and Town Cemetery Services	South African War Memorial, Cornhill and Town Cemetery	Thursday 9 November 2023	11am to 12pm	Chair of Council
Festival of Remembrance	The Apex	Friday 10 November 2023	7pm to 9pm	Chair of Council

Bury St Edmunds Remembrance Service	War Memorial Angel Hill	Saturday 11 November 2023	10.45 to 11.45am	Chair of Council
Rose Garden Memorials Remembrance Services	Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds	Saturday 11 November 2023	1pm to 4.30pm	Chair of Council
Remembrance Parade and Wreath Laying Service	Angel Hill and St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds	Sunday 12 November 2023	9am to 1.30pm	Chair and Vice Chair of Council
Clare Remembrance Service	Procession forms up in Station Road (outside Clare Social Club)	Sunday 12 November 2023	2.30pm to 5pm	Chair of Council
Haverhill Remembrance Service	Join the parade at the Market Square to Haverhill Cemetery	Sunday 12 November 2023	2.30pm to 5pm	Vice Chair of Council
Great Barton Parish Council Meeting	The Community Room, Great Barton Village Hall, Bury St Edmunds	Monday 20 November 2023	7.30 to 9.30pm	Chair of Council
Ely Thanksgiving Eve Service	Ely Cathedral, Cambridgeshire	Wednesday 22 November 2023	7pm to 9pm	Chair of Council
Ipswich Mayor's Cheese and Wine Charity event	Mayoral Suite at Ipswich Town Hall and Corn Exchange, King Street, Ipswich	Sunday 26 November 2023	6pm to 8pm	Chair of Council
Yuletide Reception including tree lighting ceremony	Eagles Landing Ballroom at RAF Lakenheath	Friday 1 December 2023	4.30 to 7pm	Chair of Council
Opening of Christmas Fayre	St Mary's Church, Kentford	Saturday 2 December 2023	10.30 am to 12.30pm	Chair of Council
Brandon Christmas Lights Switch On	Old School House, Market Hill, Brandon	Saturday 2 December 2023	4pm to 8pm	Chair of Council

West Suffolk Civic Carol Service	St Edmundsbury Cathedral	Monday 4 December 2023	6pm to 9pm	Chair and Vice Chair of Council
Haverhill Carol Service	St Mary's Church, Haverhill	Wednesday 6 December 2023	7pm to 9pm	Chair of Council
Thetford Mayor's Carol Service	St Cuthbert's Church, Well Street, Thetford	Friday 8 December 2023	7pm to 9pm	Chair of Council
Royal Anglian Regiment Carol Service	St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds	Saturday 9 December 2023	10.30am to 12pm	Vice Chair of Council
Emergency Services Carol Service	St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds	Monday 11 December 2023	7pm to 9pm	Chair of Council
A Festive Night at Christchurch Mansion with the Mayor of Ipswich	Christchurch Mansion, Soane Street, Ipswich	Thursday 14 December 2023	6pm to 8.30 pm	Chair of Council
Opening night performance of Dick Whittington Pantomime	Haverhill Arts Centre	Friday 15 December 2023	6pm to 9 pm	Chair of Council
The Bishop's Christmas Drinks Party	The Bishop's House, 4 Park Road, Ipswich	Friday 15 December 2023	6.30pm to 8.30pm	Vice Chair of Council
Active Suffolk Awards	West Suffolk House	Monday 18 December 2023	6pm to 8 pm	Chair and Leader of the Council
West Suffolk Council Meeting	Council Chamber, West Suffolk House	Tuesday 19 December 2023	7pm to 10pm	Chair and Vice Chair of Council

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Leader’s statement

Report number:	COU/WS/23/018	
Report to and date:	Council	19 December 2023
Documents attached:	None	

Leader’s Statement

1. It’s December and our thoughts are turning to Christmas and the New Year. This is a magical time for many but for others it is very challenging. I know each and every one of you have been working hard this year to champion your communities to help meet those challenges and represent our area. Indeed, recently our staff were out in the early hours checking on those sleeping rough in freezing temperatures and helping them find support. I will touch later on in this statement of how we are working as a council to tackle these issues, especially poignant at a time when people are sleeping out in freezing temperatures.

Strategic Priorities and Vision

2. A New Year often brings changes and tonight we will be looking at agreeing ambitious aims for the Council through the new draft Strategic Priorities.

The draft vision:

Working across West Suffolk, we will support the district to flourish by focusing on the delivery of:

- affordable, available and decent homes
- environmental resilience
- sustainable growth
- thriving communities

3. The strategic priorities and vision we are setting for the Council, if agreed, will bring clear focus and direction on what we are delivering. The vision and priorities, outlined in the document, are designed to make sure West Suffolk Council continues to address the needs of local communities and of future generations.
4. Importantly, the document also highlights how, through strengthened engagement, there will be a step change in how the voices of local people will be at the heart of shaping what the Council does. This puts councillors

squarely in the centre of talking to residents, businesses and partners bringing everyone closer to understanding issues and informing the solutions.

5. Central to the new priorities is also a commitment to make sure essential services that communities and businesses rely on continue to be delivered well. Local communities rely on us delivering high quality and value for money services consistently.
6. Using this living document as our guide we will now, together, engage with our communities and partners as well as lobby decision makers to achieve our priorities.

Budget – Medium Term Financial Strategy

7. We will soon be setting our budgets next year and as part of that at our meeting we will be agreeing the principles that underpin what we are trying to achieve. We end this year with a broadly break even position through good budgeting and prudent financial management.
8. West Suffolk Council's response to the financial challenges and opportunities are based on six key themes. These themes have been further developed for this council and they represent an appropriate response to the ongoing financial situation.
 1. Aligning resources to the West Suffolk strategic priorities and the delivery of essential services.
 2. Sharing services and innovation in service delivery.
 3. Behave commercially, delivering a return to our communities.
 4. Considering new funding models.
 5. Supporting online access to council services.
 6. Taking advantage of new forms of local government finance.
9. There are challenges ahead for all local authorities and public services around funding and we must continue to make robust financial decisions to make sure we continue to deliver for our communities. This budget and its themes will drive our strategic priorities and will be the financial engine to deliver our vision.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

10. We also will be talking at Council about continuing the 100 per cent Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024 to 2025.
11. If agreed families in West Suffolk on low incomes, including those in work, suffering from the cost-of-living crisis would benefit for another year from a 100 per cent discount in Council Tax.
12. It is part of a range of ways the Council is supporting communities including those with the highest risk of financial hardship as a result of the current cost of living crisis.

13. Last year saw public and stakeholder support West Suffolk Council temporarily changing the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for one year. This year the consultation also shows support.
14. The average working age recipient of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) receive up to an additional £174 discount on their Council Tax for the single year.
15. The proposal is highly targeted to reach those who are already on means-tested benefits, many of whom are working, and has a low administrative cost. This could benefit around 4,700 residents and represents a one year only £500,000 investment by organisations that set Council Tax precepts in supporting those most in need that meet the criteria.
16. The cost to the Council would be worked through the 2024 to 2025 budget setting process.
17. By providing additional support to residents the aim is to help avoid crisis situations, for example, homelessness, which I have already shown is on the rise, and fewer applications for Exceptional Hardship Payments from those in receipt of Council Tax support.
18. This is a short-term measure and if agreed the West Suffolk Council's LCTRS would revert to the current minimum 8.5 per cent contribution rate from April 2025.

Local Plan

19. Our meeting includes some of the fundamental building blocks crucial for the continued prosperity and ambitions of our communities and businesses. One of these is the West Suffolk Local Plan which has seen some of the highest engagement of any such plan that the council has developed. As such the proposals are based on evidence and hundreds of views expressed by residents, companies, partners, organisations and councillors. Now we need to go out once more and engage with our communities on the submissions stage draft. I will not debate it here in my statement, but I want to highlight how vital the plan is and put the spotlight on some of the proposals as well as thanking all of you who have been part of this long but vital work.
20. The West Suffolk Local Plan will guide how and where new homes and employment will be built to the year 2040. Policies to deliver more affordable homes and sustainable housing through measures including solar panels on roofs wherever practically possible, feature in the latest draft plan. If adopted, the local plan will also require new homes to be more accessible, so that they can be adapted to people's changing health needs. That in turn will mean people can stay longer in their own homes which is better for them and their families, as well as reducing the impact on health and social care.
21. Once adopted, the local plan will ensure funding from developers is secured to pay for infrastructure such as money toward education provision, highways, footpaths and cycleways.

22. The West Suffolk Local Plan will allocate new sites for 5,211 new homes alongside 9,075 that already have planning permission. While the total number it needs to deliver over the plan period is 13,702, the local plan deliberately and sensibly over allocates to allow for flexibility over the plan period.
23. The local plan also makes provision of 86 hectares for employment growth including 47.9 hectares which are new allocations.
24. By allocating land for much needed housing and employment for West Suffolk's growing communities, the local plan also protects other areas such as the countryside from harmful, speculative development, and it ensures that residents and elected councillors, continue to have a public voice and a say on planning applications submitted to the Council.
25. This is so much more than lines on a map or statistics about housing numbers and employment. This is about the success of our district and the future lives of generations to come.

Rough Sleeping

26. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis has seen an increase in the number of people and families needing help in West Suffolk after finding themselves at risk of homelessness. Later in my statement you will see some of the actions and investments we are making in this area to help the most vulnerable and lead to many having a better New Year.
27. Helping those rough sleeping and at danger of becoming homeless is one of our key responsibilities and I have no doubt it is one of the most complex tasks we face.
28. I want to thank our staff who do a brilliant job in a challenging area and were out in the early hours across West Suffolk doing the regular count and checking on those rough sleeping.
29. The Council has geared up for the winter to help those in need and keep people off the streets. We have also been running campaigns to explain what we are doing to reduce the number of people sleeping rough and crucially prevent people becoming homeless.
30. As part of this campaign we have encouraged those who have faced these issues to tell their stories. These are powerful and give an insight into the challenges and issues people face that bring them into contact with our services. We will be sharing them on our website and social media.
31. I would urge you to follow the link and to hear Dave's story (not his real name). He tells how he has turned his life around with the help of our teams and partners. See Dave's story on [YouTube](#).
32. Dave is one of many rough sleepers who have been helped by West Suffolk Council. The Council has invested in accommodation and support over the years and established a Rough Sleeper Service. While the number of people rough sleeping can fluctuate daily as people are accommodated or become

homeless, the number of people rough sleeping in West Suffolk on 1 November 2023 was four. It's still four too many and we are doing all we can to encourage those who are rough sleeping to take up the support and accommodation available to them.

33. Over the past 12 months, West Suffolk Council has invested more than £1.2 million to improve existing temporary accommodation and increase the overall amount it can access. In the six months from 1 April to 30 September this year, the housing team at West Suffolk Council has intervened to prevent 77 households from becoming homeless. Another 90 households who became homeless have since been re-housed.
34. The Council is continuing to work with and help another 148 households including some who are currently living in temporary or emergency accommodation.
35. Numbers have increased compared to the same six months last year when the council helped prevent 47 households from becoming homeless, "relieved" 90 households out of homelessness and were continuing to work with and help another 141 households.
36. Anyone can end up facing homelessness, and none of us can assume we will never need help. In a fair and just society, surely we should expect that when the worst happens there will be support which will help set us back on course.

Provincial House

37. I am pleased Cabinet has backed a plan to invest up to £2 million into Haverhill town centre to attract more businesses, support current traders and boost adult skills and education.
38. This will help relocate the town's Personal and Professional Learning Centre run by the Eastern Education Group back into the heart of the town centre at Provincial House. The proposals include remodelling the building to attract more businesses while bringing an income to the council to help invest in services.
39. It will very much help us meet the new priorities of sustainable growth and thriving communities.
40. Many of you will know the Council bought Provincial House in 2019, to help retain a major employer, AXA in the town, as well as identify an opportunity to use the building's prominent location on the High Street to encourage footfall and support local businesses.
41. Since then, phased works have been going on to bring the building up to the required standards, such as being accessible. Investigations have also been carried out to find what is the best use of the property to re-purpose the vacant space creatively, create jobs, deliver wider public benefits, and drive people to use the town centre.
42. Following those investigations, the Council is partnering with the Eastern Education Group (West Suffolk College) as part of the One Public Estate

initiative to explore the potential to re-locate the Learning Centre back into the heart of the town and centre of the community.

43. The £2 million is coming from the Investing in our Growth Agenda fund (supported by external borrowing) and will help fund the investment needed in the remaining vacant floors including the work required to relocate the college.
44. Works would also include new landlord circulation space - essential to maintain safety and comply with current building regulations. It would also help create smaller, modern and flexible business spaces tailored to suit the needs of new start-up/business incubation spaces and also attract existing businesses that might be tempted to relocate elsewhere.

Flooding

45. This has been the first time we have come together since the storms last month and the flooding that effected the UK and East Anglia.
46. I want to thank our staff and councillors who were helping their communities as well as working alongside partners during the storms themselves and the recovery period.
47. Following the Government announcement of grants and council tax reductions through the Flood Recovery Framework, councils in Suffolk received more than 750 reports of internal flooding to homes or businesses.
48. Suffolk councils have been working together, with Suffolk County Council collecting information and assessing the reports, and the district and borough councils distributing the funding to eligible property owners.

And finally...

49. I had the pleasure of thanking our staff for all their hard work this year and I want to do the same to each and every one of you. Representing your communities is rewarding but hard work. I think it shows dedication and a care for your communities which deserves recognition. Thank you for championing West Suffolk and I hope you have a good Christmas and New Year.

Councillor Cliff Waterman
Leader of West Suffolk Council

West Suffolk Council Strategic Priorities and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028

Report number:	COU/WS/23/019	
Report to and date:	Council	19 December 2023
Cabinet members:	<p>Councillor Cliff Waterman Leader of the Council Tel: 07974 092289 Email: cliff.waterman@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Councillor Diane Hind Portfolio Holder for Resources Email: diane.hind@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p>	
Lead officers:	<p>Ian Gallin Chief Executive Tel: 01284 757001 Email: ian.gallin@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Rachael Mann Director (Resources and Property) Tel: 01638 719245 Email: Rachael.mann@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p>	

Decisions Plan: **This item is being considered directly by Council for a decision and has not been referred by Cabinet.**

Wards impacted: **All wards**

Recommendation: **Council is invited to adopt the:**

- 1. West Suffolk Strategic Priorities, as set out in Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/019.**

- 2. Themes of the West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy, as the strategic financial framework to apply from 1 April 2024, as set out in Appendix B to Report number: COU/WS/23/019.**

- 3. Delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive and the Director (Resources and Property), in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Resources to make any minor typographical, grammatical, factual or contextual changes to the documents, provided they do not materially affect the meaning or substance of the documents.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 This report seeks Council’s approval of the West Suffolk Strategic Priorities for 2024 to 2028 and the West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy. The former is intended to succeed the Strategic Framework 2020 to 2024 and the latter the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020 to 2024.
- 1.2 The Strategic Priorities document forms part of the Council’s Policy Framework, as set out in the Constitution. The Medium Term Financial Strategy will direct the resources available to West Suffolk to underpin delivery of the council’s services and priorities as part of the annual budget setting process. Together, the two documents set the high-level parameters governing the Council’s overall direction.
- 1.3 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets the context against which the 2024 to 2025 budget and medium term financial plans (2024 to 2028) are proposed to be developed between now and the formal Budget and Council Tax adoption meeting of the Council in February 2024.

Strategic Priorities document

- 1.4 The Strategic Priorities document sets out the high-level ambitions of West Suffolk Council over the next four years. The vision, priorities and values in the document have been developed over a period of months by the Cabinet, in consultation with West Suffolk Working Partnership. The document sets the strategic direction for the Council, as well as providing a framework within which future decisions will be made, and setting the priorities that will govern the Council’s performance management system.
- 1.5 A key feature of the Council’s approach, as outlined at the start of the document, is a focus on listening to, and engaging with all councillors and with West Suffolk’s communities as the more detailed plans are developed that will implement the Council’s vision. The document describes how this will be done, including some new forms of engagement.
- 1.6 The priorities have also been developed drawing on evidence and insight about the issues and challenges facing West Suffolk, a number of which are summarised in the infographics included in the document.
- 1.7 The aim of the Strategic Priorities document is to provide councillors, staff, partners and interested members of the public with an overview of the Council’s strategic direction and its distinctive ways of working, as opposed to a complete description of the activities the Council will

be carrying out. The content is therefore necessarily high-level and focused on areas that are changing, with the detail and business as usual activities being fleshed out in individual plans, strategies and service-specific business plans.

- 1.8 The document also explains that West Suffolk’s contribution is only part of the picture. West Suffolk’s role is not to directly deliver everything referred to in the document but also to play a role in influencing, partnering with and working alongside other partners, not least residents and communities.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 1.9 The West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028, assesses and evaluates the financial resources the council expects to have and the expenditure in order to deliver the strategic priorities.

- 1.10 West Suffolk’s strategy is based on six key themes, representing our response to the ongoing financial challenges and opportunities surrounding local government. In summary, these six themes are:

1. Aligning resources to the West Suffolk strategic priorities and the delivery of essential services.
2. Sharing services and innovation in service delivery.
3. Behave commercially, delivering a return to our communities.
4. Considering new funding models.
5. Supporting online access to council services.
6. Taking advantage of new forms of local government finance.

- 1.11 As part of good financial planning (councils are also required to prepare for, as a minimum, a three year financial planning period), West Suffolk Council in February 2024 will be asked to set a balanced budget for 2024 to 2025 (its statutory obligation), alongside a medium term financial plan for the period 2024 to 2028. Certain sections of the strategy document will need updating or in some case completing as part of the 2024 to 2025 budget process – for example the revenue and capital sections.

- 1.12 A final and complete version of the document (alongside the West Suffolk Capital Strategy) will be presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2024 alongside the main budget and council tax setting report.

2. Alternative options that have been considered

- 2.1 It is not statutory requirement for councils to have strategic priority document in place. However, this can result in a lack of strategic direction and agreement on the vision and purpose of the

organisation, or the outcomes that councillors and staff are working towards.

3. Consultation and engagement undertaken

3.1 The strategic priorities have been developed by the Cabinet, in consultation with the wider West Suffolk Working Partnership and drawing on the priorities that were set out ahead of the local elections in May 2023.

3.2 A key feature of the Council’s strategic approach is the focus on consultation and engagement. This is set out in the section of the draft document “A shared way forward– making our plans together” and includes the establishment of councillor advisory panels.

4. Risks associated with the proposals

4.1

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
	Low/Medium/ High*		Low/Medium/ High*
Lack of funding to support full set of projects listed in draft document.	Medium	Finance team involvement in business planning to fully assess value for money of detailed proposals Business case approach will assess financial implications and opportunities of projects	Low
Future changes in the wider economic environment affect the delivery of economic development and housing objectives	Medium	Ongoing monitoring of local economic conditions. Wider changes in model of service delivery to allow prioritisation of economic and housing priorities	Low
Unable to meet public’s expectations of what the councils will deliver	Medium	Effective communications to educate residents about new ways of working	Low

5. Implications arising from the proposals

- 5.1 Financial - The draft strategic framework document is aligned with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process for 2024 to 2028.
- 5.2 Equalities - The Council’s draft equality objective for 2024 to 2028 is set out in the values section of the Strategic Priorities document, namely:

“To continuously improve access to our services for all members of our community, by learning from best practice and listening to feedback.”

Where appropriate, individual policies and projects referred to in the draft Strategic Framework document have already undergone, or will undergo, an Equality Impact Assessment.

6. Appendices referenced in this report

- 6.1 Appendix A – Draft West Suffolk Strategic Framework document 2024 to 2028
Appendix B – Draft West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028

7. Background documents associated with this report

- 7.1 West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020 to 2024
www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/strategicframework

West Suffolk MTFS 2022 to 2026
[Budget and Council Tax Setting - 2022 to 2023 and MTFS 2022 to 2026](#)

West Suffolk Council's Strategic Priorities 2024-28

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Foreword from the Leader and Deputy Leader

Our ambitious vision and priorities, outlined in this document, are designed to make sure West Suffolk Council continues to address the needs of our communities and of future generations, and that the voices of local people are at the heart of shaping what we do.

We are proud to represent and champion West Suffolk and share a strong commitment to serving all residents, communities and businesses, addressing common challenges and improving prospects and quality of life for all.

Our vision is that:

Working across West Suffolk, we will support the district to flourish by focusing on the delivery of:

- **affordable, available and decent homes**
- **environmental resilience**
- **sustainable growth**
- **thriving communities**

Our plans will enable more people to find the right home in the right place in West Suffolk, with opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing. Through our work with partners, residents will be able to gain the education, skills and jobs they need to succeed. Our work will also help grow a sustainable economy that supports existing and new businesses. At the same time, we want to preserve what we currently have that is good – stunning countryside areas and parks, and communities who support one another.

We are committed to listening to people from towns and villages across West Suffolk, and from all backgrounds, to make sure our decisions are shaped by their knowledge and experience. Over the coming months and years, we want to hear about the needs and aspirations of local communities, and to work together on shared solutions that make a real difference. More about our plans for engaging are set out later in this document.

We also recognise that communities rely on us getting the essentials right. It is vital that we carry on delivering, in ever-challenging financial times, high-quality services that residents and communities rely on every day. Which is why this also forms an essential part of the council's strategic priorities and how we ensure a fair, thriving and sustainable future for West Suffolk.



Cllr Cliff Waterman
Leader of West Suffolk Council

Cllr Victor Lukaniuk
Deputy Leader of West Suffolk Council

A shared way forward

– making our plans together

In this document, we set out the vision, priorities and values that drive everything we do. But it will be the voices of our ward councillors, residents, businesses, communities, partners and other stakeholders that will shape the detail of what is delivered over the next four years.

It is vital that local residents' insights, perspectives and experiences of life in West Suffolk are at the heart of our development work, feeding into our all of our policies and plans.

We will gather this insight through surveys, meetings, drop-ins and other engagement – both digital and face to face - and we will work together to design solutions to local issues and seize opportunities for improvements.

We will be establishing councillor-led advisory panels during 2024, building on the success of the Environment and Climate Change Reference Group and with the aim of ensuring broad input to policy-making from across the council. These groups will cover:

- environment and sustainability
- towns and high streets
- health
- the horse-racing industry
- transport

These advisory panels of councillors will be led by the relevant Cabinet member, and will engage with residents and stakeholders, as well as taking account of the best-available evidence.

Our wider engagement activity over the coming months will also include:

- developing our strategy for housing
- engaging with stakeholders on our Local Plan which sets out the location and nature of future development in the district
- families and communities – locality-based initiatives
- reviewing our working relationships with towns, parishes and other community groups
- our policy on street trading
- future policy on taxi licensing
- the five yearly review of our gambling policy
- plans for improving our town and village high streets and town centres, including markets
- a range of strategic growth projects
- how to provide support for the most vulnerable to pay Council Tax

We will act on the insights we gather through this engagement and report back on how this has shaped our decision-making. The council will also take the issues raised and ensure West Suffolk's needs and ambitions are heard at the regional and national level.

About West Suffolk: current challenges and opportunities

The priorities in this document are focused on responding to the issues and challenges we face, while building on the strengths of our local area.

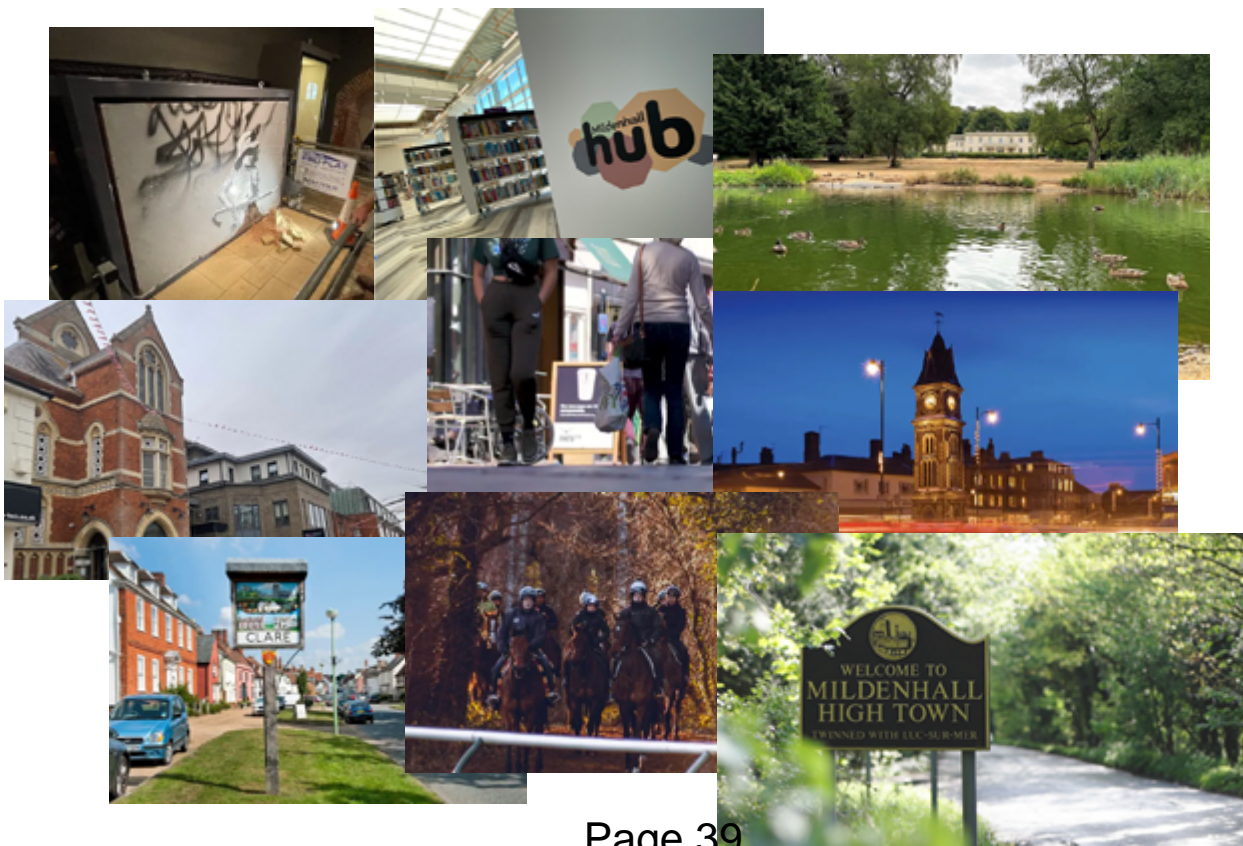
West Suffolk is a large district in the East of England with six market towns and strong rural communities. It has a diverse economy, currently dominated by manufacturing, retail and services, but with the potential to capitalise on its agricultural heritage and strong local businesses in order to grow further in areas such as agri-tech, food and health.

The international home of horseracing industry in and around Newmarket, the two major US air force bases and significant heritage assets are also distinctive features of the district.

West Suffolk is part of the Cambridge sub-region and Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor – both national economic engines. The district's two major roads are the A11 and A14 which are international trade routes and connect the district with Cambridge, London, the Midlands, Freeport East and the rest of the country. The strategically important M11 and A12 are also close by.

While the district as a whole is comparatively safe and prosperous, there are significant numbers of neighbourhoods where residents face deprivation and barriers to accessing opportunities. The infographics on the following pages illustrate some of the key challenges and opportunities facing West Suffolk.

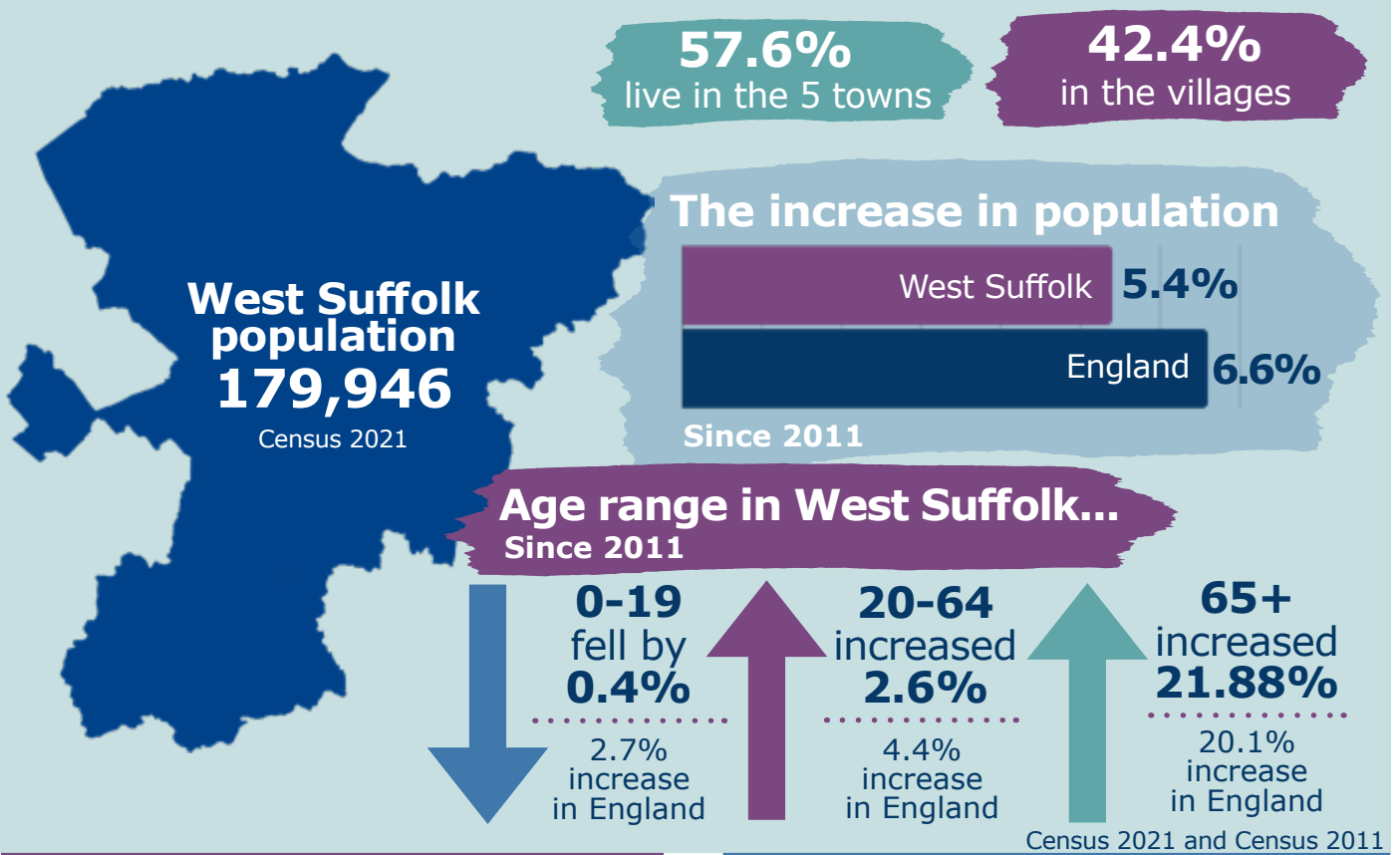
More detail about West Suffolk and the issues and challenges faced can be found at [Suffolk Observatory](#) and in West Suffolk Council's [Ward reports](#).





Population

West Suffolk has an ageing population, but also significant local variations in the make up of the population, driven by rural-urban differences and local employment patterns.



Future population change

↑ 86% increase

= 10,500 people

is predicted in the population aged 85+ in West Suffolk between 2020 and 2040 (70% in England)

The age group 65+ is the only age group projected to increase over the next 20 years.

The proportion of people of working age is projected to decline.



Office for National Statistics (ONS), Sub-national population projections - 2018 based

Local variations

The proportion of the population aged under 16 varies considerably across the Wards of West Suffolk.



Similarly with the proportion of the population aged over 65 years.





Housing

Many West Suffolk residents face difficulties in affording homes to rent or buy, given high average prices and low local wages levels. We have also seen an increase in homelessness in recent years in the district, as in other parts of the country. This is in spite of ongoing work to increase housing delivery and to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Need for more homes

Between 2011 and 2021, the number of households in West Suffolk increased by

10.60%,
compared to
an increase of
6.20%
in England.



Census 2011 and 2021

Cost of renting a home

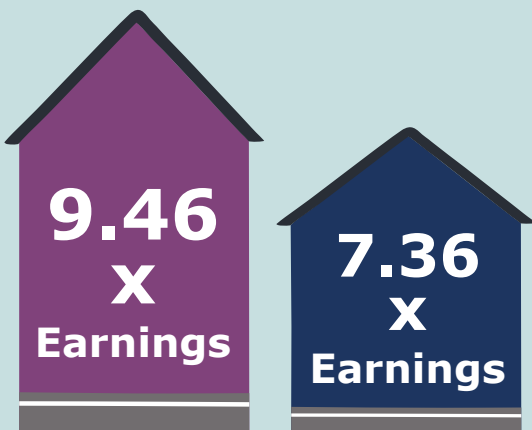
The average (mean) cost of renting a 3 bedroomed home per month in West Suffolk in 2022-23 was **£1,171** in West Suffolk, compared to **£1,039** in England as a whole.

Office for National Statistics private rental market summary April 22 – March 23



Affordability of housing

The ratio of lower quartile earnings to lower quartile house prices in West Suffolk in September 2022 was **9.46** times compared to **7.36** times in England.



Office for National Statistics – ratio of house price to resident based earnings

Rates of homelessness

7.49
households

1000
in West Suffolk
were
assessed as
homeless

(relief duty owed)
between April 2021 and
March 2022, compared
to 6.06 in England.



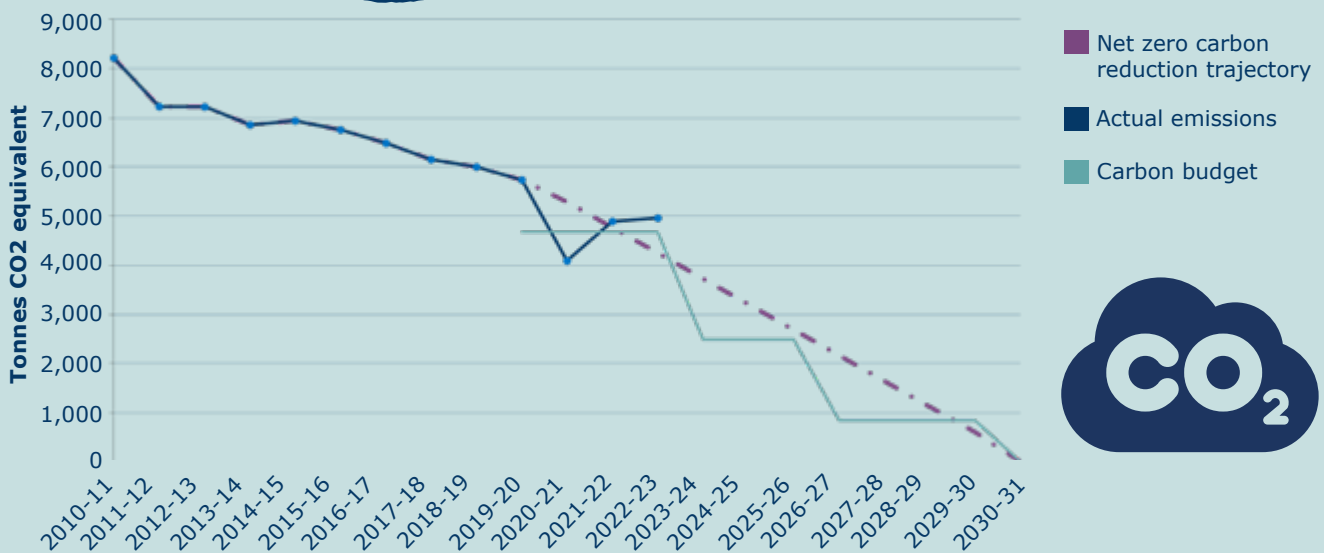
DLUHC data



Sustainability

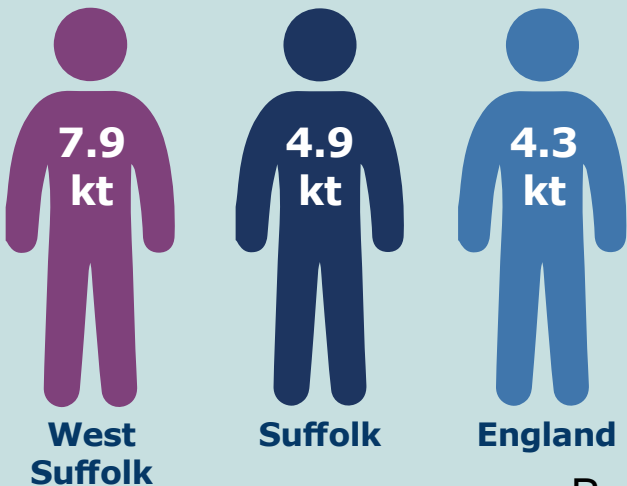
West Suffolk Council declared an environment and biodiversity emergency in 2019 and is working to reduce its own negative environmental impacts and emissions as well as encouraging partners and stakeholders across the district to reduce theirs.

Emissions from council operations



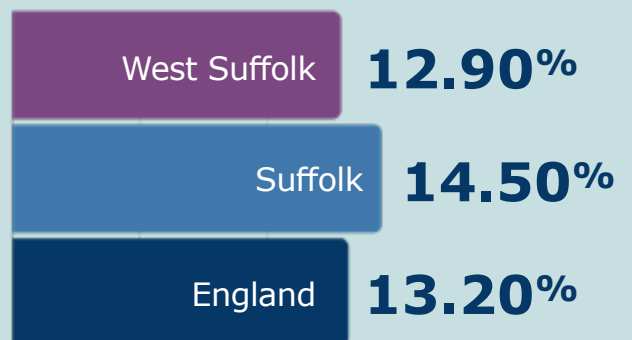
CO2 emissions per person

Total CO2 emissions per person (kilotonnes)



Fuel poverty

Percentage of households in fuel poverty - Low Income/Low energy Efficiency (LILEE) (2020)

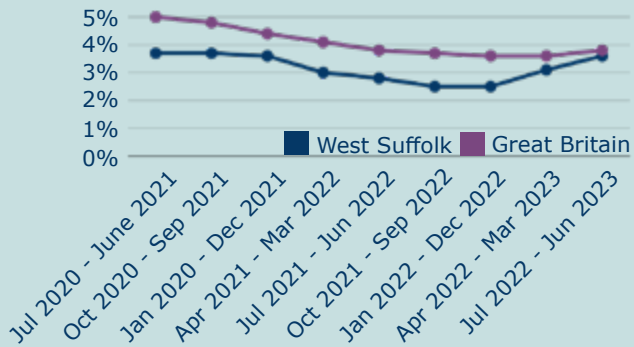


Growth

West Suffolk has relatively high employment and benefits from a diverse economy. The main sectors are business administration and support services, health and manufacturing. West Suffolk also hosts specialist sectors such as horse racing. Meanwhile, average wages and qualification levels are below the national average.

Unemployment

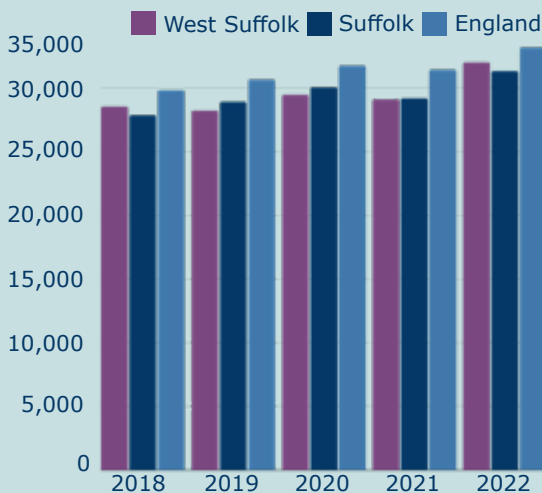
Unemployment levels are lower in West Suffolk than Great Britain.



Note: numbers and percentage are for those aged 16 and over. Percentage is a proportion of economically active. (Source: ONS Annual Population Survey)

Wages

Average wages in West Suffolk are below those for England.



Annual survey of hours and earnings-resident analysis. Full time workers. Median annual gross pay 2018-2022

Skills

Percentage of residents aged over 16 with at least NVQ Level 1 or equivalent qualifications.

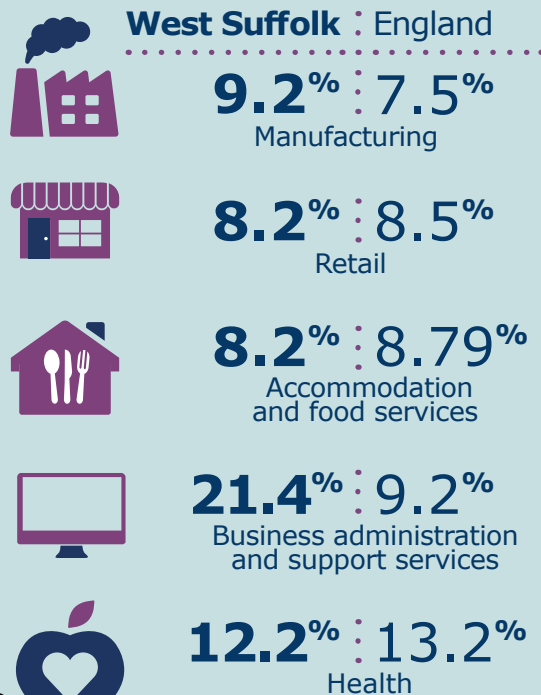
83.1% West Suffolk : **87.7%** England

Nomis Annual Population Survey (APS) Jan-Dec 2021

Employment sectors

West Suffolk's main industrial sectors are business administration & support services, health and manufacturing.

Percentage of employees working in





Thriving communities

There are big disparities in the health, wellbeing and deprivation of different communities and neighbourhoods within West Suffolk. These can sometimes be hidden when data for the whole of the district are used.

Health

Percentage of people who considered themselves to be in very good health.

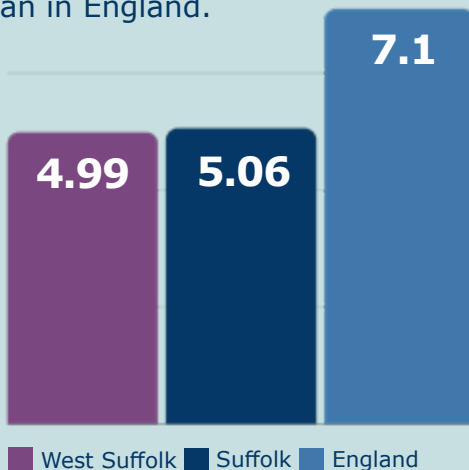


47.7% West Suffolk : **48.5%** England

Census 2021

Crime

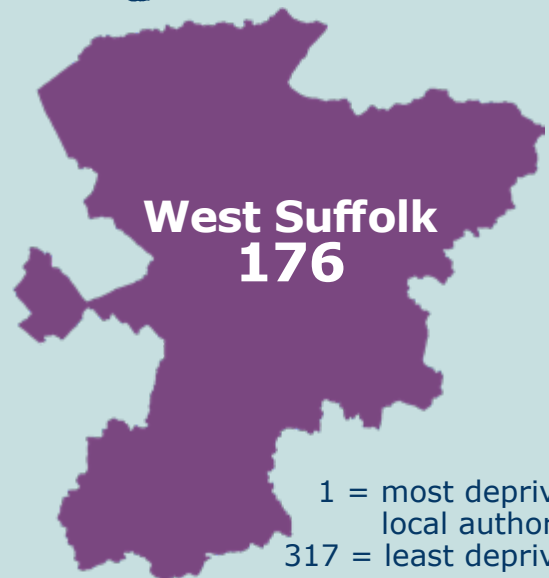
The crime rate (per 1,000 people) is consistently lower in West Suffolk than in England.



West Suffolk Suffolk England

Crime - LTLA | West Suffolk | Report Builder for ArcGIS - Suffolk Observatory

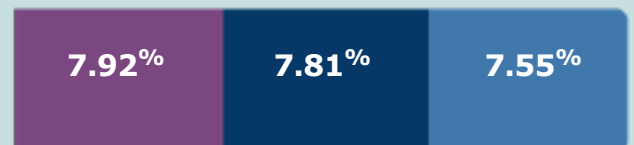
English deprivation rankings



English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK

Mental health and wellbeing

Responses to: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'".



"Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious'".



West Suffolk Suffolk England

Personal well-being in the UK: April 2021 to March 2022

West Suffolk Council's values

These values will be at the core of everything West Suffolk does.

Collaborative

Both within the council and across West Suffolk's communities, we will work in a collaborative way, recognising the different strengths and roles of ourselves as councillors and our partners in tackling common issues. This involves listening, being clear about our respective priorities, and taking an active role in delivering for West Suffolk residents.

Fair and inclusive

In everything we do, we will promote equality and diversity by seeking to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different groups of people through all aspects of our work across West Suffolk.

Our equality objective for 2024-28 is:
To continuously improve access to our services for all members of our community, by learning from best practice and listening to feedback.

Championing local places

West Suffolk is made up of a large number of diverse communities across our villages, towns and rural areas. Our plans, policies and investments will respect these local differences, opportunities and needs. We will reflect on what is unique about each of our localities, ensuring fairness in the outcomes achieved for each place.

Innovative

In order to address the complex challenges we face in West Suffolk, we will not shy away from finding innovative solutions, in order to ensure we secure the best possible future for our residents.

Practical

As a local authority, West Suffolk's priority is to deliver 'change on the ground' for local businesses, communities and residents. This means being practical, getting the right people and resources together and pressing ahead with local delivery.

Financially astute decision making

In the context of an increasingly challenging financial environment for councils and residents alike, we will ensure that our decision making is financially astute and makes the best use of public money. For example, we will make investment decisions that both secure better outcomes for communities but also a financial return that can be reinvested into our services.

Strategic priorities

Over the next four years, our focus will be on delivering against our vision by taking action in the following four priority areas



Affordable, available and decent homes

- Use planning powers to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in West Suffolk, particularly for social rent, and explore other options for increasing provision.
- Investigate options to address the specific market conditions in West Suffolk that make it challenging for local people to afford to buy or rent.
- Use the council's planning, regulatory and other powers to ensure all housing is of good quality and sustainably built and has minimal environmental impacts, including noise.
- Work with communities to ensure all housing is supported by the right infrastructure.

Environmental resilience

- Bring about environmental improvements that support progress to net zero, including by working in partnership with businesses, residents and others.
- Work together to implement actions to adapt to climate change in West Suffolk, in line with the third National Adaptation Programme.
- Promote improved public and active travel opportunities in West Suffolk and work to reduce the impact of heavy goods vehicles in communities.

Sustainable growth

- Support new and existing businesses to grow, for example, through start-up support and skills development.
- Work to ensure West Suffolk is an attractive place for businesses, in order to ensure growth is supported by employment. This will have a particular focus on attracting higher-skilled enterprises to support wage growth.
- Continue to support West Suffolk's local high streets and markets as the vibrant centres of thriving local communities
- Seek to develop infrastructure that supports growth.
- Maximising what makes us distinctive.

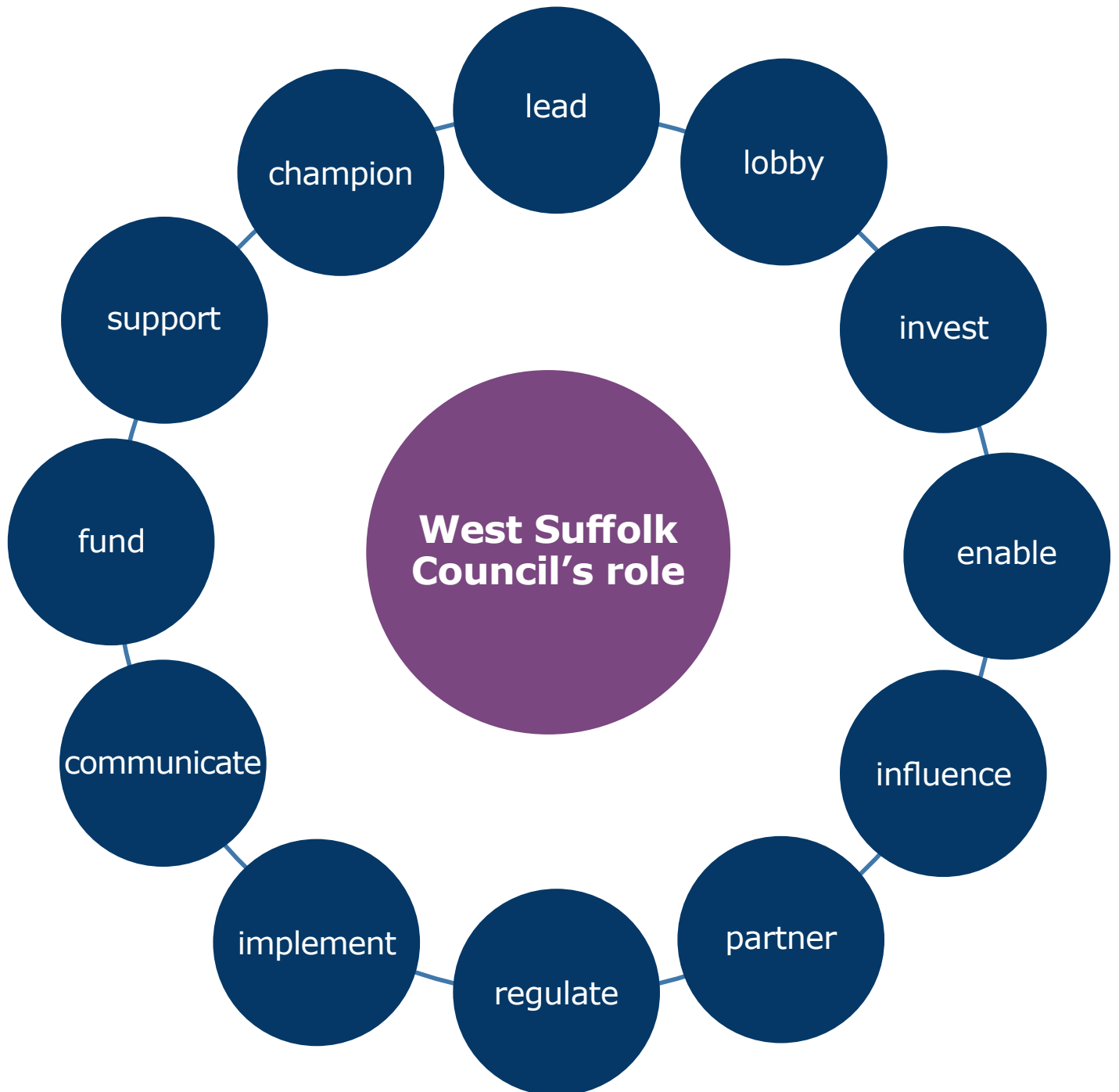
Thriving communities

- Ensure all West Suffolk residents are able to access appropriate services, benefits and support.
- Enable West Suffolk residents to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing through sport, physical and cultural activities, as well as access to health services. In particular, protect and develop parks and open spaces for the benefit of both residents and visitors.
- Work with partners to prevent and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in the district.

The council's role

West Suffolk Council is uniquely placed to make a difference because of the powers, assets, knowledge, finances and connections it holds, strengthened by the local expertise, democratic mandate and leadership role of its elected members.

When working to address the different priorities outlined in this document, the council will take a variety of different roles.



Affordable, available and decent homes

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of affordable, available and decent homes, we will:

- increase the requirement in the draft Local Plan for the amount of affordable housing that is required on new housing sites, from 30 to 40 per cent on larger greenfield sites, subject to viability
- work to understand and address the unique issues and affordability pressures facing West Suffolk residents in the local housing market
- work with partners to bring forward opportunities for regeneration on brownfield sites
- explore the role of different housing models such as custom build-to-rent, to diversify our housing and address housing need
- build on the work of the county-wide private rented sector pathway project. This project makes better use of data to improve our responses to hazards and non-compliance in poor quality housing and to enhance engagement and communications with tenants, landlords and communities
- ensure good management and standards in houses in multiple occupation through proactive inspections and licensing
- support the work underway to enable safe and warm homes and to facilitate necessary aids and adaptations to enable residents to continue to live safely and independently within their own homes
- take opportunities to build affordable homes for sale and rent, including through Barley Homes
- take further opportunities to acquire more temporary and move-on accommodation to support households
- strengthen our strategic partnership with Cambridgeshire and participate in the Suffolk Housing Board to drive forward improvements in the availability and quality of housing and associated support in the county
- increase access to good quality private rented housing including meeting the challenge of empty homes.



Environmental resilience

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of environmental resilience and our ambition to be net zero by 2030 as a council, we will:

Reduce the impact of West Suffolk Council's activities. To do this, we will:

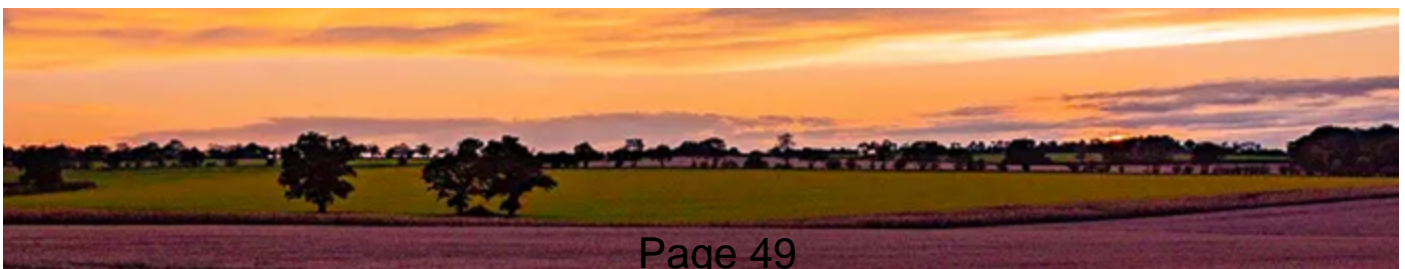
- implement the recommendations from the [Environment and Climate Change Task-force](#), in particular:
 - take action to reduce the environmental impact of our buildings, fleet and operations
 - promote the wide diversity of work that the council delivers across the energy and environment agenda to our residents, communities and businesses and use campaigns to support behaviour change.

Work in partnership with organisations to reduce West Suffolk's environmental impacts. To do this, we will:

- promote and support schemes to decarbonise existing homes and promote the highest possible environmental standards in new-build properties and housing developments
- support initiatives that reduce the carbon emissions from transport, and improve air quality, for example, the increased provision of electric vehicle charging and promoting cycling and walking
- improve the renewable energy portfolio, through solar and renewable energy sources including wind and hydrogen
- investigate instances of environmental crime, for example fly-tipping, and where possible take action against those responsible
- identify and implement greenspace and waste and streetscene improvements
- provide strategic direction and explore funding opportunities to manage planned enhancements and protections for our district's biodiversity, parks and green spaces
- make the most effective use of our drainage infrastructure and avoid increased flood risk, as well as reducing pollution and looking at opportunities to improve the quality of our water and reduce consumption.

Work in partnership with organisations to reduce Suffolk's environmental impacts. To do this, we will:

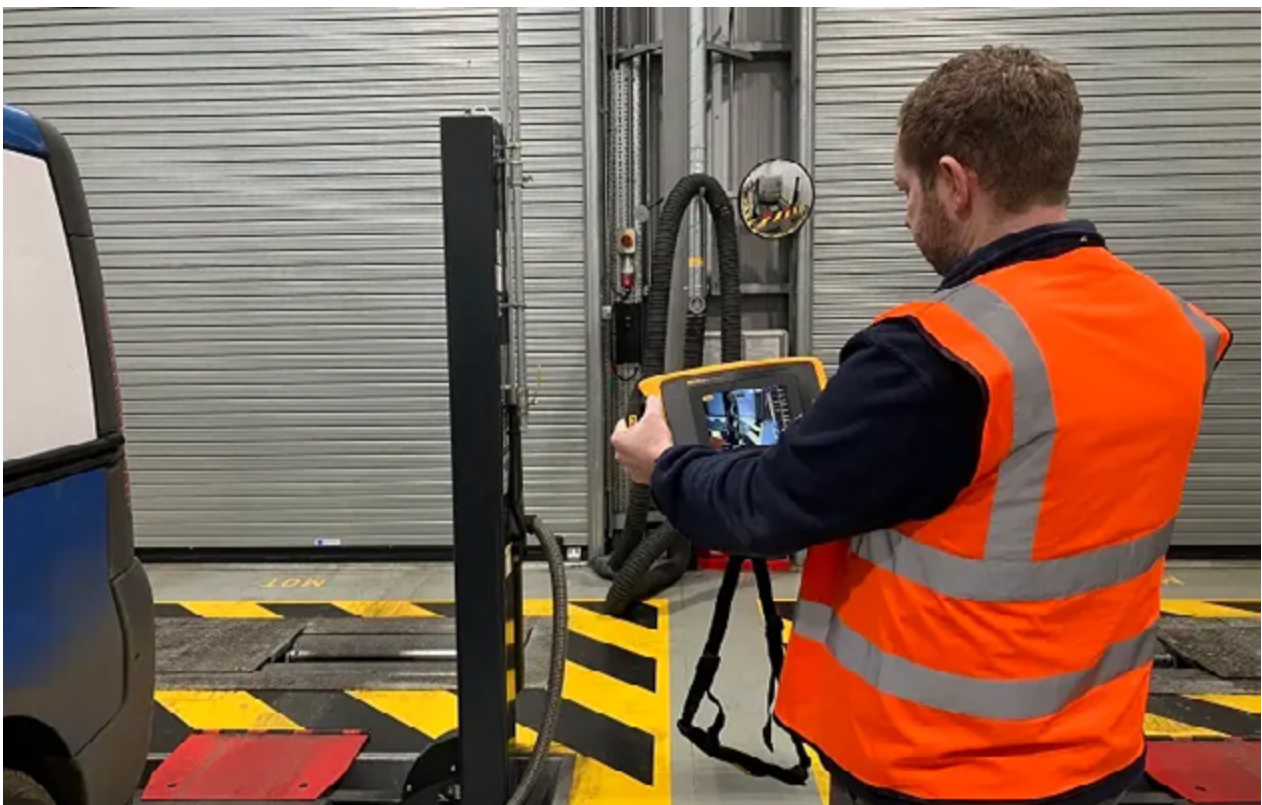
- work in partnership with local and national organisations to achieve our goals of restoration, biodiversity net gain and ecosystem services through a Suffolk-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy
- work alongside county colleagues and partners to deliver the actions within [the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan](#).
- work with colleagues through the Suffolk Waste Partnership to ensure the changes required through the Government's policy on simpler recycling work for the benefit of both Suffolk residents and the environment.



Sustainable growth

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of sustainable growth, we will:

- work with our partners to explore and deliver opportunities for sustainable economic growth
- anticipate and respond to longer-term opportunities for economic growth in the next 30 years by maximising the economic potential of the A1307, A11 and A14 corridors
- seek to maximise the benefits of West Suffolk's proximity to, and links with the Cambridge sub-region, with its high economic potential
- work with town councils and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to support the development of West Suffolk's town centres
- work with rural areas to maximise their potential
- work with our partners to increase overnight visitors to West Suffolk
- establish a commission to positively address housing growth and the future economic potential of Brandon, while recognising and protecting the unique character and biodiversity of the town
- regenerate Haverhill town centre including the High Street to maximise the town's potential
- use our influence to ensure all new development in West Suffolk is supported by the right infrastructure, including exploring how new settlements could overcome infrastructure challenges and support our growth ambitions.



Thriving communities

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of thriving communities, we will:

- develop and improve access to a programme of activities and advice for residents facing challenges as a result of the cost-of-living crisis
- develop a network of youth engagement opportunities, activities and support across the district
- build on cross-Suffolk work to ensure residents have access to food
- develop opportunities for residents to participate in health and wellbeing activities through sport, leisure, culture and community initiatives
- work alongside community and voluntary groups to build their capacity and access funding and support
- improve community safety, including working in partnership to tackle antisocial behaviour, County Lines and criminal exploitation
- build on the success of our diverse and award-winning green spaces in providing access to the natural environment, and improving physical and mental health and wellbeing
- improve access to leisure opportunities for all residents, including through the improvement and development of leisure facilities and development of sports clubs and associations
- develop the potential of events across the district, through a cultural plan, to enable all sectors of the community to experience a diverse range of educational and recreational opportunities, as with the Mutiny in Colour exhibition
- review the role of different public and voluntary sector organisations in supporting local places and communities, to ensure services are delivered at the most appropriate level.



Getting the essentials right

West Suffolk's businesses and residents rely on the council to get the essentials right every day.

We will make sure we continue to deliver to a high standard everyday services like grounds maintenance, waste and recycling collections, dealing with residents' queries, processing applications and paying invoices on time.

The council will continue to improve, by listening to feedback about how we are doing and monitoring our own performance.

One of the ways we do this is through the use of key performance indicators (KPIs), which portfolio holders from cabinet monitor regularly, and which are reported publicly to Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee whose role is to independently scrutinise them.

Every year, we also publish an annual report on our progress in delivering our priorities across the council's areas of responsibility, including a specific environment statement which sets out our progress towards net zero by 2030.

Residents and stakeholders can access information about our performance through our committee reports, which are made public, and through our website and social media channels, including our transparency and performance webpages.

Over the last year West Suffolk Council



Blue and black household bins emptied 4.3 million times



Determined 2495 planning applications



Carried out 839 food safety inspections



Assisted 236 West Suffolk households with adaptations to their homes through Disabled Facilities Grants at a cost of £1,879,394



Between March and October 2023 West Suffolk Council carried out grass cutting operations in approximately a three week cycle across 308 hectares (761 acres) of public open space. This included trialling new ways to encourage biodiversity.

West Suffolk

Council



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**Medium Term
Financial Strategy
(MTFS)
2024 to 2028**

Contents

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For more information about this document, or to request a copy in an alternative format, please email finance@westsuffolk.gov.uk or call 01638 719000

Foreword from the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property

[To be completed in February 2024 version]

Councillor Diane Hind

Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property
West Suffolk Council

Purpose of this document

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) provides a high-level assessment of the financial resources required to deliver West Suffolk's strategic priorities from 2024 to 2028 and its essential services. It considers how the council can provide these resources within the anticipated financial context.

Like all local authorities, West Suffolk Council's MTFS is influenced by national government policy, funding and spending announcements. The Government's spending plans continue to evolve. At the time of publication of the MTFS, key confirmed elements include:

- The main grant (Revenue Support Grant - RSG) to local government has been continued into 2024 to 2025. Our working assumption is that this will be rolled forward for one more year.
- The New Homes Bonus (NHB) will remain for 2024 to 2025 and we are making the assumption that it will be rolled forward into 2025 to 2026 before ceasing. The total money available for NHB has been cut partly to fund the new Funding Guarantee (see below) and will not attract any legacy payments.
- The Funding Guarantee grant that was introduced in November 2022 will continue in 2024 to 2025 and, we assume, into 2025 to 2026, but will cease thereafter. This grant ensures every authority has an increase in Core Spending Power of 3 per cent before any Council Tax increases. It is funded from the now discontinued Lower Tier Services Grant and the reduced cost of NHB.
- The Fairer Funding Review and a form of Business Rate Retention scheme resetting will take place at some point beyond April 2026.
- The Council Tax referendum level (the level at which Council Tax can be increased) will remain at 3 per cent or £5, whichever is the higher amount. In addition, local authorities with responsibility for social care (such as Suffolk County Council) may levy a precept to spend exclusively on adult social care.

The latest local government spending announcements can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/local-government-spending>

Changes to local government financing

Over the last decade, a number of local government financing mechanisms have become embedded in the council's overall funding framework. For example:

- a share of business rates growth is now retained locally by the council, and by a Suffolk 'pool'
- councils set Council Tax discounts locally, rather than eligible residents receiving Council Tax Benefit
- the New Homes Bonus
- the funding of Disabled Facilities Grants from the Better Care Fund.

Local government receives funding from three main taxation or finance settlement sources; Council Tax, a share of business rates income and, to a

lesser extent, government general grants as set out above. Council Tax income continues to be the main source of funding, in total value, for local authorities. Council Tax income represents around a fifth of West Suffolk's annual income (excluding Housing Benefit Subsidy) which means in practice that it only funds 20 per cent of the cost of running a service. It is worth noting that as a whole these three main funding streams only provide [TBC in 2024 to 2025 Budget] per cent of West Suffolk Council's total budget and, like the whole of Local Government, the rest has to be found from other sources such as income streams.

It is expected that each of these funding streams will continue in 2024 to 2026 however beyond this there is significant uncertainty over the basis and quantum of the business rates retention and government general grants.

The reform of the business rates retention scheme is now not expected to be any earlier than 2026 to 2027. It is assumed there will also be a full baseline reset in 2026 to 2027. For authorities who have business rate growth and are significantly above their current funding baseline, such as West Suffolk, this will have a significant impact, subject perhaps to any damping arrangements, on our existing funding levels through the business rates retention scheme. As a result our longer term financial position remain uncertain.

The Fairer Funding review, which the Government has said will look at the overarching methodology that determines how much funding each authority receives each year is also now not expected to be any earlier than 2026 to 2027, creating further uncertainty over the council's funding assessment from central government.

The changes to local government finance form part of the government's devolution agenda, by reducing local authorities' reliance on central government, and encouraging greater self-sufficiency. West Suffolk is working with other authorities in East Anglia to consider the longer-term implications of these changes for the future shape of local government and economic growth in the region.

Local context

West Suffolk Council's financial position is based on our financial circumstances, local demand and opportunities. The 'summary of our financial position' section of this document details our financial standing. The following section provides an overview of the local context in which the council operates. For more information, please see the data and statistics on our About the area webpage [About the area \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk).

West Suffolk's Strategic Priorities 2024 to 2028 [\[add link\]](#) describes the local context to the district; data and information on the challenges and opportunities; and the council's priorities for housing, environment, growth and communities.

West Suffolk Council serves a population of 182,228 (mid-year estimate 2022) across a predominantly rural area in the heart of East Anglia. This is projected to increase by 2.6 per cent to 184,523 by 2027 (sub national population projections 2018 based).

The 2021 census showed that the percentage of over 65s in West Suffolk was 20.7 per cent; this is now above the England national average of 18.4 per cent and projected to increase to 23.3 per cent by 2027.

Challenges and opportunities within the changing local government financing regime

The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, should provide more certainty on continued funding through Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus for 2024 to 2025, and hopefully an indication of the funding methodology for 2025 to 2026.

The Fair Funding and Business Rates Retention reviews, when they happen, will bring new approaches and challenges in how West Suffolk Council will fund its services. We will fully engage in these reviews and consultations to ensure our perspective is heard.

A sustainable future for West Suffolk in the face of funding cuts and spending pressures is dependent upon changing the way we think about funding local government and how we manage the system.

Responding to the financial challenges and opportunities

West Suffolk Council's response to the financial challenges and opportunities are based on six key themes. These themes have been further developed for the council and they represent an appropriate response to the ongoing financial situation:

1. Aligning resources to the West Suffolk strategic priorities and the delivery of essential services.
2. Sharing services and innovation in service delivery.
3. Behaving commercially, delivering a return to our communities
4. Considering new funding models.
5. Supporting online access to council services.
6. Taking advantage of new forms of local government finance.

1. Aligning resources to the West Suffolk strategic priorities and the delivery of essential services

At the heart of this this MTFS, is the approach of allocating resources in line with the new priorities set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Priorities 2024-2028 and with getting the essentials right. This theme helps to ensure resources are focused on the priority areas of housing, sustainability, growth and communities, and to identify areas of West Suffolk's work which could either be scaled back or done differently or. The budget-setting process focuses on these lower-priority areas, and challenges whether West Suffolk should continue with the activities either at all, or in their current form, in order to ensure they provide value for money to Council Tax payers.

2. Sharing services and innovation in service delivery

The previous shared service agenda had already delivered in excess of £4 million each year in savings for West Suffolk which is in addition to other local savings. The creation of a single West Suffolk Council added a further £850,000 per year savings and efficiencies to this success.

West Suffolk shares a number of services with neighbouring councils including Human Resources and ICT support to the Anglia Revenues Partnership and Legal and information governance support services with Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils and will explore further opportunity for sharing services where appropriate.

With demands increasing and uncertainty in local government funding beyond April 2026, it is critical that we drive change and stay ahead of the financial curve to enable us to protect valuable local services and to have the financial capacity to invest in communities.

This will mean:

- driving forward our approach to Change and Service Improvement, through which we are reviewing business processes to drive out efficiencies.
- building on our business partner model, whereby corporate or support services provide specialist support and expertise to all service areas and project teams.
- reviewing the responsibilities of the different tiers of local government in order to ensure the principles of subsidiarity are followed.
- working in a 'system-working' way with other public and voluntary sector partners in Suffolk, to maximise the benefits of integration of services.
- working with Suffolk partners on the implementation of the Suffolk 'County Deal' that was signed by the Leader of Suffolk County Council and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety on 8 December 2022.

3. Behaving commercially, delivering a return to our communities

'Behaving commercially' summarises the council's approach to delivering the outcomes that local communities need, while ensuring that through 'business-like behaviours', the council acts as efficiently as possible. This includes making sure its investment decisions both secure better outcomes for communities and also a financial return that can be reinvested into council services. Achieving this 'double bottom-line' means that the council is able to make financially astute decisions, thereby ensuring it can protect essential services in the future. As discussed earlier the funding for any local authority requires the council to achieve an income to produce a balanced budget due to the shortfall from the three main taxation or finance settlement sources Behaving commercially will therefore be a key theme running through the work needed to deliver our outcomes and a sustainable MTFS.

4. Considering new funding models

West Suffolk Council will be an 'investing authority' over the period 2024 to 2028. West Suffolk Council has had a long tradition of investing in its

communities in support of the delivery of its strategic priorities, in particular to aid economic growth across West Suffolk.

Depleting capital and revenue reserves and increased pressure on external funding mean that the council will need to consider investing away from the traditional funding models such as using its own reserves. Instead, focus is now on the optimum use of borrowing and the various options for accessing the capital that is available.

The financing of the chosen funding model itself is a challenge, with limited reserve balances available in the medium term. In order to generate new cash into the authority and to enable our ambition of being an 'investing authority' means that prudent borrowing or appropriate financing transactions, is something that West Suffolk will have to embrace in order to deliver on its ambitious capital and investment programme.

There are ample precedents which demonstrate that prudential borrowing has become a valuable tool for local government to achieve its strategic objectives. The use of unsupported borrowing (no security to a particular council asset) is both flexible and relatively straightforward however its important the council continues to support any borrowing with robust business cases and due diligence.

With this in mind, and as borrowing is required over the medium to long term for the authority, it is considered prudent to assess each investment opportunity/project on the basis of borrowing and its cost, assessing each project on an equal playing field regardless of their timings within the MTFS or the funding model used.

There are two annual costs associated with borrowing:

- servicing the debt – the interest payable on the loan; and
- repayment of the loan/capital – effectively through a minimum revenue provision (MRP) into the revenue account.

At the time of writing this plan, these costs would be in the region of seven per cent including interest (based on a Public Works Loan Board, PWLB, rate over 40 years). MRP is calculated to ensure that the capital is fully repaid over the economic life of the asset. In order to assess each project on a level playing field these costs will be included in each business case. Naturally a change in interest rate or MRP rate would change the rates used in each potential project.

The choice of funding model for each investment opportunity/project will be based on its individual merits, financial return/costs including the overall risk exposure, considered as part of each business case. Any decision to invest or borrow would be subject to full scrutiny by councillors, through the usual democratic process.

5. Supporting online access to council services

The implementation of our Customer Access Strategy is also an important part of our next phase of development and is inextricably linked to the need for commercial thinking and wider innovation. In addition residents increasingly

want to and expect to engage with the council or carry out transactions through digital and online means.

The customer support team embeds the benefits of both integrated first-point-of-contact support and promoting channel shift.

There will always be some people who cannot or do not want to access our services online – whether because they have limited access to the internet, or because they are unfamiliar with this technology. These people will always be able to reach us in the traditional way. Our goal, though, is to encourage those people who can do their business with us online to do so. The aim is to put digital first, but not digital only with support available to those who need it.

In addition to making contact easier to handle, this solution can automate many of the duplicated tasks council employees normally perform when handling contact from residents, businesses and visitors, thereby reducing call times and improving the quality of service.

6. Taking advantage of new forms of local government finance (for example business rate retention)

During the period covered by the MTFS, the new forms of local government finance will continue, in whatever guise it lands from April 2026, to be the key sources of income for councils. West Suffolk will therefore take the opportunity, through its service delivery and other MTFS themes, to grow our own funding through a strong, and growing, local economy alongside the skills, infrastructure and housing to sustain it. At the same time we will lobby Government and other influential parties for the case for better funding or means of finance to meet the challenges faced by the council and local government.

Our approach to engagement and consultation

While our strategic priorities and MTFS set the framework for the next four years, it is vital that the detail of our spending decisions is shaped by input from councillors, residents, businesses, communities and partners.

Our approach to engagement and consultation is set out in our Strategic Priorities document.

Summary of our financial position

[to be included as part of the budget setting process in February 2024]

Glossary of terms

Actuarial valuation

An independent report of the financial position of the Pension Fund that is carried out by an actuary every three years. Reviews the Pension Fund assets and liabilities as at the date of the valuation and the results of which, including recommended employer's contribution rates, the Actuary reports to the Council.

Baseline funding level

The amount of a local authority's start-up funding allocation which is provided through the local share of the estimated business rates aggregate (England) at the outset of the scheme as forecast by the Government. It forms the baseline against which tariffs and top-ups will be calculated.

Budget requirement

The Council's revenue budget on general fund services after deducting funding streams such as fees and charges and any funding from reserves. (Excluding Council Tax, Revenue Support Grant, New Homes Bonus and Business Rates).

Business rate retention scheme

The Business Rates Retention Scheme introduced by Government from April 2013 is intended to provide incentives for local authorities to drive economic growth, as the authorities will be able to retain a share of the growth that is generated in business rates revenue in their areas, as opposed to the previous system where all business rates revenues are held centrally.

Under the scheme local authorities were also allowed to form pools for the purposes of business rates retention. West Suffolk along with the other Suffolk Authorities and the County Council have been designated as a Suffolk pool from April 2013.

In 2018 the Government announced the new 100% business rate pilot schemes, the Suffolk authorities were successful in being one of those pilots during 2018 to 2019.

The planned 75 per cent business rates retention scheme and re-baselining as part of the fairer funding review will be postponed until April 2026 at the earliest.

Capital expenditure

Spending on assets that have a lasting value, for example, land, buildings and large items of equipment such as vehicles. Can also be indirect expenditure in the form of grants to other persons or bodies.

Capital Programme

Council's plan of future spending on capital projects such as buying land, buildings, vehicles and equipment.

Capital Receipts

The proceeds from the disposal of land or other assets. Capital receipts can be used to finance new capital expenditure but cannot be used to finance revenue expenditure.

CIPFA

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. One of the UK accountancy institutes. Uniquely, CIPFA specialise in the public sector. Consequently, CIPFA holds the responsibility for setting accounting standards for local government.

Collection fund

A statutory account maintained by the council recording the amounts collected from council tax and business rates and from which it pays the precept to the major precepting authorities.

Collection Fund surplus (or deficit)

If the council collects more or less than it expected at the start of the financial year, the surplus or deficit is shared with the major precepting authorities - Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Police Authority.

Contingency

Money set-aside centrally in the council's base budget to meet the cost of unforeseen items of expenditure, such as higher than expected inflation or new responsibilities.

Council Tax Base

The Council Tax Base for a council is used in the calculation of council tax and is equal to the number of Band D equivalent properties. To work this out, the council counts the number of properties in each band and works out what this equates to in terms of Band D equivalent properties. The band proportions are expressed in ninths and are specified in the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Fairer Funding Review

Central government funding for local authorities is currently based on an assessment of its relative needs and resources. The overarching methodology that determines how much funding each authority receives each year was introduced over ten years ago and has not been updated since funding baselines were set at the start of the 50 per cent business rates retention scheme in 2013 to 2014.

The government is undertaking a 'Fairer Funding Review'. This is aimed at designing a new system for allocating funding between councils, the review will:

- set new baseline funding allocations for local authorities
- deliver an up-to-date assessment of the relative needs of local authorities
- examine the relative resources of local authorities
- focus initially on the services currently funded through the local government finance settlement
- be developed through close collaboration with local government to seek views on the right approach

The Fairer Funding review is expected to come into force from April 2026.

General Fund Balance

The main unallocated reserve of the council, set aside to meet any unforeseen pressures.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

GDP is defined as the value of all goods and services produced within the overall economy.

Gross expenditure

The total cost of providing the council's services, before deducting income from Government grants, or fees and charges for services.

Individual authority business rates baseline

Derived by apportioning the billing authority business rates baseline between billing and major precepting authorities on the basis of major precepting authority shares.

Local share of business rates

This is the percentage share of locally collected business rates that will be retained by local government. This is currently set at 50 per cent. At the outset, the local share of the estimated business rates aggregate is divided between billing authorities on the basis of their proportionate shares.

Net expenditure

Gross expenditure less services income, but before deduction of government grant.

National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR)

Also known as 'business rates', Non-Domestic Rates are collected by billing authorities such as West Suffolk Council and, up until 31 March 2013, paid into a central national pool, then redistributed to authorities according to resident population. From 2013 to 2014 local authorities will retain 50 per cent of the value of any increase in business rates. The aim is to provide an incentive to help businesses set up and grow.

New Homes Bonus

Under this scheme councils receive a new homes bonus (NHB) per property for the year following completion. Payments are based on match funding the council tax raised on each property with an additional amount for affordable homes. It is paid in the form of an unringfenced grant.

Precept

The precepting authority's council tax, which billing authorities collect on behalf of the major preceptor.

Prudential Borrowing

Set of rules governing local authority borrowing for funding capital projects under a professional code of practice developed by CIPFA to ensure councils' capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable.

Referendum

Power under which the Government may limit the level of council tax increase year on year. Any shire district authority in England wanting to raise council tax by more than 3 per cent or £5 whichever is the higher amount, must consult the public in a referendum. Councils losing a referendum would have to revert to a lower increase in bills.

Revenue Expenditure

The day-to-day running expenses on services provided by the council.

Revenue Support Grant (RSG)

All authorities receive Revenue Support Grant from central government but this is expected to be phased out by April 2025.

Risk Management

We define risk as being uncertainty of outcome, whether relating to 'positive' opportunities or 'negative' threats/hazards. Our new, positive approach to risk is based on context, proportionality, judgement and evidence-based decision making that considers risk on a case by case basis and is documented at all stages. We will be joined-up in our decisions, and will draw on one another's skills and experience to take responsibility for sound and reasonable decisions about the use of public funds, avoiding a blame culture when things go wrong.

<http://westsuffolkintranet/howto/risk-management.cfm>

Section 151 officer (or Chief Financial Officer)

Legally Councils must appoint under section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 a named chief financial officer to give them financial advice, for West Suffolk Council this role is held by the post holder of Director (Resources and Property).

Specific Grants

Funding through a specific grant is provided for a specific purpose and cannot be spent on anything else, for example: Housing Benefits Subsidy.

Spending Review

The Spending Review is an internal Government process in which the Treasury negotiates budgets for each government department.

Suffolk Business Rate Pool

All district/borough councils in Suffolk, along with Suffolk County Council have created the Suffolk Business Rates Pool. The pooling of business rates across Suffolk will:

- through its governance arrangement ensure no individual council is financially any worse off for being in the Suffolk pool
- maximise the proportion of business rates that are retained in Suffolk
- benefit the wider communities within the county led by the Suffolk Leaders' collective vision for a 'Better Suffolk'
- provide incentives for councils to work together to improve outcomes for Suffolk.

Tariffs and top-ups

Calculated by comparing an individual authority business rates baseline against its baseline funding level. Tariffs and top-ups are fixed at the start of the scheme and index linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in future years. West Suffolk is a 'tariff' authority.

Treasury Management

Managing the council's cash flows, borrowing and investments to support the council's finances. Details are set out in the Treasury Management Strategy

which will be considered and approved by Cabinet and Council in February each year.

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Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet

Report number:	COU/WS/23/020 (Part one)	
Report to and date:	Council	19 December 2023
Documents attached:	Report number: COU/WS/23/021 - West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission	

A. Referrals from Cabinet: 14 November 2023

There are no referrals emanating from the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 November 2023.

B. Referrals from Cabinet: 5 December 2023

1. Treasury Management Report (September 2023)

<p>Portfolio holder: Councillor Diane Hind</p> <p>Cabinet Report number: CAB/WS/23/055</p> <p>Financial Resilience Sub-Committee Report number: FRS/WS/23/005</p>
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<p>Recommended:</p> <p>That the Treasury Management Report (September 2023), as contained in Report number FRS/WS/23/005, be approved.</p>
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- 1.1 Following the Financial Resilience Sub-Committee’s consideration of report number [FRS/WS/23/005](#) on 13 November 2023 the Committee received a verbal report on the Sub-Committee’s consideration of the report.
- 1.2 The Council held £54,500.000 of investments as of 30 September 2023. Interest receivable in the first half of the financial year amounted to £1,271,924.94 against a budget for the period of £357,500. This has created a budgetary surplus of £914,424.94 due to two main reasons:

- the Council holding higher levels of cash balances than anticipated; and
- the rising Bank of England base rate having a knock-on effect on investment returns.

- 1.3 External borrowing as of 30 September 2023 was £9,625,000 a reduction of £125,000 from 1 April 2023 which relates to the repayment plan for the recent PWLB £10 million 40-year loan), with the Council's level of internal borrowing increasing slightly to £48,028,084 as of 30 September 2023. The overall borrowing total of both external and internal is expected to increase over the full financial year.
- 1.4 The Sub-Committee scrutinised the investment activity for 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 at its meeting on 13 November 2023 and asked questions to which responses were provided.
- 1.5 The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee on 23 November 2023 scrutinised the report. Detailed discussions were held on Arlingclose, the Council's external treasury advisors. The Committee questioned the advice they provided to the Council; specifically, around what the cost of Arlingclose was to the Council; the length of the contract and whether a procurement exercise is carried out to appoint external advisors. In response the Cabinet Member for Resources would provide a written response on the length of the contract and the cost to the Council.
- 1.6 The Cabinet endorsed the recommendation of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, as reproduced above and supports its referral to Council for final approval.

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2. West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission

Portfolio holder: Councillor Jim Thorndyke

Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/23/056](#)

An updated version following its consideration by Cabinet is attached in full as Report number: **COU/WS/23/021** to this Council report. Appendix A to that report refers to the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document itself which now includes the Policies Map.

Recommended, that:

- 1. The West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document (Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/021) together with supporting documents be approved for public consultation and its subsequent submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of independent examination.**
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Director (Planning and Growth), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to make any presentational improvements or minor non-material consequential changes to the document as necessary prior to the consultation commencing.**
- 3. Delegated authority be given to the Director (Planning and Growth), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to agree and consult upon a set of proposed modifications during the examination process.**

- 2.1 On 5 December 2023, the Cabinet considered Report number: CAB/WS/23/056 'West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission'.
- 2.2 The Cabinet considers that the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document is both final and sound and that, subject to the outcome of the independent examination, it has recommended to Council that it approves the Local Plan and supporting documentation for public consultation and its subsequent submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of independent examination. The Cabinet has made a minor amendment to Recommendation (3) which removes a potential time constraint and Appendix A (the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document itself) has since been updated following the Cabinet meeting to include the Policies Map.
- 2.3 Members are therefore requested to consider Report number: COU/WS/23/021 attached to this report, which provides an updated version of the Cabinet report (CAB/WS/23/056). For clarity, this captures the amended Recommendation (3) and provides a link to the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document which now includes the Policies Map (Appendix A).

See Part Two of Report number: COU/WS/23/020 for the remaining Cabinet referrals.

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Referral from Cabinet: West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission

Report number:	COU/WS/23/021	
Report to and dates:	Cabinet	5 December 2023
	Council	19 December 2023
Cabinet member:	Jim Thorndyke Portfolio Holder for Planning Tel: 01359 250271 Email: jim.thorndyke@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Marie Smith Service Manager (Planning Strategy) Tel: 01638 719260 Email: marie.smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk	

Decisions Plan: The Cabinet decision made as a result of Cabinet Report CAB/WS/23/056 was published within 48 hours of the decision being taken. The item has been referred to Council for a final decision and was, therefore, not subject to call-in. This item was included on the Decisions Plan.

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendations: It is recommended that:

- 1. The West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document (Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/021)**

together with supporting documents be approved for public consultation and its subsequent submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of independent examination.
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Director (Planning and Growth), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to make any presentational improvements or minor non-material consequential changes to the document as necessary prior to the consultation commencing.**
- 3. Delegated authority be given to the Director (Planning and Growth), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to agree and consult upon a set of proposed modifications during the examination process.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 This report is seeking approval of the Proposed Submission Local Plan and Policies Map, so that the Local Plan can be subject to its final round of consultation (scheduled for 30 January 2024 – 12 March 2024); and seek approval, post consultation, to submit the Local Plan to the Secretary of State for the purpose of independent examination.
- 1.2 The preparation of the new West Suffolk Local Plan has involved two stages of public consultation and continues to make good progress reaching this very important stage – the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Consultation.
- 1.3 The version of the plan included at Appendix A is the plan that is proposed to be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination. Prior to this, the plan must be subject to a public consultation allowing anyone an opportunity to comment on the proposals in the plan. After this consultation all responses received will be sent, alongside the Local Plan and Policies Map and the wider evidence base to the Planning Inspectorate for its examination in public.
- 1.4 Therefore, if Council approves the attached plans, it is stating that it considers the Local Plan to be both final and sound and that, subject to the outcome of the independent examination, it intends to adopt the Local Plan as presented today.
- 1.5 This final Regulation 19 consultation will be focused on the whether it is a 'legally compliant' and 'sound' document. This is a technical consultation which will ask the public and stakeholders specific questions required by the Planning Inspectorate and requires that representations consider whether the tests of soundness have been met.

2. Proposals within this report

- 2.1 The proposed submission Local Plan has been prepared using the existing suite of adopted Local Plans as a starting point. A significant amount of evidence has been developed to ensure that the policies within the plan form a sound basis for managing development and making decisions in West Suffolk.
- 2.2 This process has been underpinned by all member workshops, informal Cabinet meetings and a robust and ongoing Local Plan Working Group of whom provided officers with a clear vision for what the plan needs to achieve for West Suffolk.

- 2.3 The plan is a direct product of this member engagement which has produced a draft local plan which is legally sound, justified and deliverable.
- 2.4 The two main stages of consultation undertaken in 2020 and 2022 have offered the opportunity for the public, the development industry, and other stakeholders to comment on and help shape the local plan, raising a number of key issues and opportunities that needed to be taken into account.
- 2.5 This is also balanced with the evidence base prepared to inform policy preparation and the legal context which the local plan sits within.
- 2.6 The Plan will ultimately replace the existing suite of local plans and includes new policies in order to respond to our community needs.
- 2.7 This Plan is allocating 5,211 homes and 84 ha of employment land.

Key policies include:

Climate Change: At the start of the document, having declared an environment and climate change emergency the Council's draft local plan includes policies requiring sustainable construction with a fabric first approach to achieve carbon reduction through energy efficiency and photovoltaic panels on all roofs where practically possible.

Health and Well Being: Land Use planning plays an important role in the health and wellbeing of our communities. A new policy linking the design and delivery of homes to health and wellbeing sets out the council's intention to deliver growth for the benefit of people.

Housing for our communities: Increasing the current requirement of 30 percent affordable homes to 40 percent affordable housing on greenfield sites to deliver much needed homes for our communities.

Environment: The draft Local Plan is protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment through protection and enhancement policies for biodiversity and landscape.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

- 3.1 The alternative option would be to not progress a new local plan or delay preparation and consultation. This would leave the Council at risk of unplanned, speculative development. As the Government requires West Suffolk to have an up-to-date plan in place, to not progress a local plan in a timely manner would be reputationally damaging and lead to Government intervention to produce a local plan for the district council and remove local decision making. See section 5 below.

- 3.2 The Preferred Options Local Plan document itself considered reasonable alternatives and provided reasons why policy and site options that were consulted on in the previous Issues and Options consultation had not been taken forward. The consultation also included a new 'call for sites' which provided alternative options for the Council to consider.
- 3.3 In assembling the proposed submission local plan, 16 West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group meetings were held. The working group reviewed comments received to the previous consultation, national guidance requirements, emerging evidence outcomes and provided a range of thoughts to prepare policy wording and identify sites for allocation and reasons for omission. These meetings were to ensure that the preparation of the councils document was led by councillors across political groups and a much as possible a balance of geographical representation. These meetings fed into the production of the final consultation document (Appendix A).

4. Consultation and engagement undertaken

- 4.1 The Local Plan has been developed with two prior stages of consultation – the Regulation 18 Issues and Options in October 2020 and the Regulation 18 Preferred Options consultation in July 2022. These consultations were held in accordance with the adopted Statement of Community Involvement and have informed the development of the plan.
- 4.2 This consultation is technical consultation with specific set questions focussing on the whether the plan is a 'legally compliant' and 'sound'. The consultation will ask the public and stakeholders specific questions required by the Planning Inspectorate and requires that representations consider whether the tests of soundness have been met and changes required to the document which would enable the document to be sound.
- 4.3 Details of the Regulation 19 consultation include:
- **Branding** - Branding, tone and style will be consistent with that of previous consultations.
 - **Virtual** - Exhibition, with display boards, an information table, video and feedback console
 - **Materials** - Alongside the virtual exhibition. Information will be available in deposit points. This will include posters and business cards to inform residents the ways in which they can respond with a QR code and weblink to virtual exhibition.

- **Targeted consultation pack** – for members and parish councils to enable proper signposting and ensure signposting and clarity.
- **In person drop-in events** – These will be focussed on signposting and advising on how to submit a representation given the stage of plan preparation.
- **Materials** - Posters available in libraries and sports centres and a range of other suitable organisations.
- **Social media and media** – media adverts running weekly. Videos, Images. Pod Casts etc.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 Failure to proceed in a timely manner with the preparation of the new Local Plan through to adoption will leave the authority with a dated local plan, leading to less control over development across the district. West Suffolk would be at high risk of speculative, unsuitable, uncontrolled development. Development and infrastructure needs would be determined on a case-by-case basis rather than a strategically planned approach.
- 5.2 The option not to progress a new local plan would also leave the Council open to reputational damage and likely Government intervention to produce a local plan for the district council. The Council may be left with no control local decision making until the Local Plan is completed.
- 5.3 Lastly, failure to progress a West Suffolk Local Plan would be contrary to the consequential orders signed in April 2019 where a clause of the agreement was for the newly formed West Suffolk to prepare and adopt a Local Plan within five years.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

6.1 Financial

The Local Plan will be progressed to this point in the process using the existing Local Plan budget.

The budget for evidence preparation has been in line with those projected at the start of the Local Plan process.

However, following a review of recent examinations and insight from other local plan examination costs we are increasing our budget for Inspector fees and legal costs for 2024/2025 by £206,000. This is an

estimate at this time with the actual cost of the examination process confirmed when the local plan is adopted.

The Local Plan itself includes policies that will require additional resource to deliver. These relate to ecology and design and further work will be undertaken to determine the scale of resource and will be included in the future budget processes.

6.2 **Legal compliance**

The West Suffolk Local Plan is a statutory development plan. Local Plans are prepared under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The Proposed Submission publication is prepared in accordance with Regulation 19.

6.3 **Personal data processing**

Planning Policies consultation system is considered to be General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant.

6.4 **Equalities**

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared and the consultation and engagement programme recognise that community engagement with all sectors of society is important if we are to prepare an inclusive and forward-thinking local plan.

6.5 **Crime and disorder**

The Suffolk Police Force and the Suffolk Police Architectural Liaison Officer were formally consulted at the Issues and Options and Preferred Options consultation. Following feedback further engagement was undertaken and policy wording has been amended as a result.

6.6 **Environment or sustainability**

The Local Plan plays a central role in terms of supporting the West Suffolk Climate and Environment Emergency themes of creating energy efficient new buildings and protecting and enhancing the natural environment. The Local Plan includes such policies with supporting evidence.

A Sustainability Appraisal has been prepared at each stage of the Local Plan process which has informed the preparation of the Proposed Submission Local Plan.

6.7 **HR or staffing**

It is a Planning Inspectorate requirement for the applicable planning authority to appoint a 'Programme Officer' to assist the examination process, and such an officer must be independent of the team of officers responsible for preparing the Plan.

The appointed Programme Officer will commence work before the plan is submitted, and costs will be met from the existing Local Plan budget.

6.8 **Changes to existing policies**

This is the final consultation in preparing a new local plan for West Suffolk. Once adopted the new plan and its policies will replace those in the existing development plan for West Suffolk.

The newly adopted local plan will form the West Suffolk Council development plan alongside any made neighbourhood plans.

6.9 **External organisations (such as businesses, community groups)**

Views and comments were submitted at both the two previous stages of the plan's preparation.

All responses to the preferred options consultation can be viewed on the planning policy online consultation portal. These helped inform the preparation of this submission draft of the plan.

7. **Appendices referenced in this report**

- 7.1 Appendix A - West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document. Due to the length of this document is not attached in printed form and is available to view on the Council's website at: [Agenda for Council on Tuesday 19 December 2023, 7.00 pm \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](#)
Paper copies are available for members upon request.

8. **Background documents associated with this report**

- 8.1 Report number: [CAB/WS/20/057](#) West Suffolk Local Plan Draft Issues and Options documents – approval for public consultation
- 8.2 Report number: [COU/WS/22/010](#) West Suffolk Local Plan: Preferred Options consultation

Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet

Report number:	COU/WS/23/020 (Part two)	
Report to and date:	Council	19 December 2023
Documents attached:	See Part One of this report	

Part Two: Report number: COU/WS/23/020 continued, following consideration of Cabinet referral B2, 'West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission'

B. Referrals from Cabinet: 5 December 2023

3. West Suffolk Council Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) 2024 to 2025

Portfolio holder: Councillor Diane Hind

Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/23/057](#)

Appendix A [WSC Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Consultation Survey](#)

Appendix B [West Suffolk LCTRS Equality Impact Assessment Form](#)

Appendix C [West Suffolk LCTRS 2024 - 2025](#)

Recommended, that:

- 1. The Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTRS) Scheme for 2023 to 2024 as outlined in Report number: CAB/WS/23/057, be reviewed.**
- 2. The changes to the Scheme outlined in section 2 of Report number: CAB/WS/23/057 and that the maximum discount change only relates to 2024 to 2025 in line with the recent consultation, be agreed.**

- 3.1 Each year the Council is required to review its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). The Cabinet report (CAB/WS/23/057) provides an annual review of the 2023 to 2024 scheme and proposes to make changes to the scheme for 2024 to 2025.

- 3.2 Section 1.4 of the Cabinet report provides details of how the West Suffolk LCTRS has developed since its inception from April 2013.
- 3.3 The current West Suffolk Working Age LCTRS provides a maximum benefit of 100 percent for working age claimants and the scheme also fully protects war pensioners (approved for 2023 to 2024). The aim in designing the scheme was to achieve a balance in charging an amount of council tax to encourage customers back into work whilst setting the amount charged at an affordable and recoverable level during the year.
- 3.4 West Suffolk Council proposes to extend the 100 percent reduction for the LCTRS for 2024 to 2025. This would be for one year only and designed to support low-income working age residents, in light of the current pressures on the cost of living. This proposal is set out further in paragraph 3.6 below.
- 3.5 A consultation on the proposals was held from 2 October to 30 October 2023. Major preceptors and stakeholders had responded and the responses received and the key points raised were covered in section 4 of Report number CAB/WS/23/057. It was noted that 90.2 percent of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the proposal to extend the maximum discount on council tax.
- 3.6 It is proposed for the West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme that the maximum reduction on Council Tax paid of 100 percent should be extended for a further 12 months. This should take effect from 1 April 2024 (and last for one year only). This would be a means tested scheme.
- 3.7 The background to the proposed changes is as follows:
1. This is part of an initiative to help those residents in financial hardship in light of the current cost of living crisis.
 2. Many councils across Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk implemented 100 percent discount schemes last year to help mitigate rising costs living costs for customers. While many councils, including East Suffolk and other ARP partners, have yet to make a decision on whether or not to extend, Norwich City Council and all three SRP councils do offer a maximum 100 percent CTRS reduction scheme.
 3. In Suffolk, the proposals would help support Suffolk County Council's Tackling Poverty Action Plan by maximising residents' financial resilience.
 4. The proposal is very well targeted as it will reach those who are already on means tested benefits and has low administrative costs.
 5. The impact on household budgets must also be considered, we would expect the impact of higher costs to affect individuals' ability to pay into the 2024 to 2025 financial year.
 6. The aim is that by providing additional support to customers it could help avoid crisis situations, for example, homelessness and lead to

fewer applications for Exceptional Hardship Payments from those in receipt of council tax support.

7. This proposal is a short-term measure, extended for the financial year 2024 to 2025. After this period West Suffolk Council's LCTRS would revert to the current 8.5 percent contribution rate as set out in the recent consultation.

3.8 Separate from these proposals, the figures used in the calculation of how much a council tax payer needs to live on (known as the applicable amounts) will be automatically increased in 2024 to 2025 in line with Government policy. This will enable a number of new residents to claim council tax support for the first time.

3.9 The financial implications for implementing the changes to the LCTRS are set out in paragraph 6.1 of Report number: CAB/WS/23/057.

4. Council tax base for tax setting purposes 2024 to 2025

Portfolio holder: Councillor Diane Hind

Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/23/058](#)

Appendix 1 [West Suffolk CTB return as at 2 October 2023](#)

Appendix 2 [Distribution of WS properties and tax base across valuation bands](#)

Appendix 3 [2024 to 2025 council tax base for each town and parish council area within West Suffolk](#)

Recommended, that:

- 1. The tax base for 2024 to 2025, for the whole of West Suffolk be 58,684.97 equivalent band D dwellings, as detailed in paragraph 2.3 of Report number: CAB/WS/23/058.**
- 2. The tax base for 2024 to 2025 for the different parts of its area, as defined by parish or special expense area boundaries, be as shown in Appendix 3 to Report number: CAB/WS/23/058.**

4.1 The council tax base is the total taxable value at a point in time of all the domestic properties in the council's area. It is a yearly calculation and represents the estimated number of chargeable dwellings after allowing for exemptions and discounts, projected changes in the property base and after applying an estimated collection rate.

4.2 The total taxable value referred to above is arrived at by each dwelling being placed in one of eight valuation bands (A – H) by the Valuation Office, with a statutorily set fraction then being applied in order to convert it to a 'band D equivalent' figure. These band D equivalent numbers are then aggregated at a district wide level and are also sub totalled for parishes. This calculation has to be done by the council responsible for sending the bills out and collecting the council tax ('the billing authority'). In two tier areas, district councils fulfil this function.

- 4.3 The council tax base is used in the calculation of council tax. Each authority divides the total council tax income it needs to meet its budget requirement by the tax base of its area to arrive at its band D council tax. The same fractions referred to in the previous paragraph are then used to work out the council tax for properties in each of the other bands.
- 4.4 The calculation of the tax base for council tax setting purposes consists of three stages:
1. Calculation of the tax base for central government purposes as at 2 October 2023 (DLUHC return – CTB).
 2. Calculation of the tax base for council tax setting purposes by adjusting the band D equivalents to reflect changes in the tax base as a result of Local Council Tax Support scheme changes (CAB/WS/23/057), projected changes in the property base and predicted collection rates.
 3. Analysis of band D equivalents over each of the parish areas in order to determine individual parish council tax bases.
- 4.5 The tax base return 'CTB' is used by central government for data collection, grant allocations and policy development (see Appendix 1 to CAB/WS/23/058). This return shows the analysis of properties across the eight valuation bands for the following classifications of liability:
- properties attracting 100 per cent liability
 - properties attracting a premium, such as second homes
 - properties with an entitlement to a discount of 25, 50 or 100 percent, such as disabled relief
 - properties that are exempt, such as those occupied by United States air force personnel
 - local council tax reduction scheme discounts.
- 4.6 The figures used to make the above calculations are derived from the Valuation List as deposited on 11 September 2023, and as amended to reflect any errors or omissions so far detected in reviewing that list. They are based on the data held on the council tax system at a set point in time – 2 October 2023.
- 4.7 The band D properties figure as at 2 October 2023 of 59,651.1, as quoted in line 33 of the CTB form at Appendix 1, has been updated as at 31 October 2023 to allow for:
1. Any changes to the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. Proposals to increase the discount for Council Tax given to people on low incomes, which is being considered elsewhere on this agenda (CAB/WS/23/057), have been incorporated into the calculation of the tax base.
 2. Any technical changes to discounts and exemptions such as empty properties and second homes. There are no plans to change the current scheme for 2024 to 2025.

3. Potential growth in the property base during 2024 to 2025 taken from an average of the housing delivery numbers for those sites within the local plan and those that have planning permission, adjusted for an assumed level of discounts/exemptions.
 4. An allowance for losses in collection, which assumes that the overall collection rate for 2024 to 2025 will be 98.5 per cent.
- 4.8 The resulting tax base figure for council tax collection purposes, expressed in terms of the number of band D equivalent properties, is 58,684.97 for 2024 to 2025. This is an increase of 697.96 on the tax base for the current year of 57,987.01.
- 4.9 The table at Appendix 2 to Report number: CAB/WS/23/058 shows the actual number of dwellings in each tax band based on the current valuations which are discounted to 1 April 1991 and the percentage in each band. There has been no national revaluation since that date. It also shows the spread of the tax base across the bands totalling the tax base for central government purposes (CTB) and the tax base for council tax setting purposes after all of the adjustments have been made.
- 4.10 The tax base figure for West Suffolk outlined in paragraph 2.6, is analysed further across individual town and parish councils to form their tax base figures for the purpose of budget setting and determining the parish band D tax levels in each of those areas. Town and parish tax base figures are set out in Appendix 3 attached to the Cabinet report. In line with the delegated authority to administer the Council's financial affairs as outlined in the constitution, the arrangements for the scheduling of the precept payments for 2024 to 2025, will be determined by the Director (Resources and Property) (Chief Financial Officer). The payments schedule for all parish and town councils in West Suffolk will be full payment of the precepts by 30 April 2024.

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Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel – Members’ Allowances Scheme

Report number:	COU/WS/23/022	
Report to and date:	Council	19 December 2023
Cabinet member:	Councillor Gerald Kelly Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory Tel: 07968 396389 Email: Gerald.kelly@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Teresa Halliday Monitoring Officer Tel: 01284 757144 Email: Teresa.halliday@westsuffolk.gov.uk	

Decisions Plan: Not applicable as this is not an executive matter

Wards impacted: Not applicable

Recommendation: It is recommended that Council:

- 1. Notes the content of the Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, as contained in Annex A to Report number: COU/WS/23/022.**
- 2. Adopts the new West Suffolk Council Members’ Allowances Scheme proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel, as contained in Appendix 1 of Annex A to Report number: COU/WS/23/022, for implementation from 1 February 2024.**

1. Background and context

1.1 In September 2023, an Independent Remuneration Panel (“the Panel”) was appointed by West Suffolk Council in order to advise on the levels of remuneration that should be paid to members elected to West Suffolk Council.

1.2 The Panel met on several occasions throughout October and November 2023 and considered a range of material to support its deliberations for recommending a new Members’ Allowances Scheme for potential adoption by the Council.

1.3 The following documents are attached to this covering report for consideration:

Annex A: A detailed report prepared by the Panel providing details on the rationale that supports their recommendations for the new scheme.

Appendix 1 to Annex A: A new Members’ Allowances Scheme, proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel for the Council to consider and adopt, as appropriate.

Appendix 2 to Annex A: Supporting material considered by the Independent Remuneration Panel to assist their work.

1.4 The Council is requested to consider these documents and the recommendations set out on the first page of this report.

2. Alternative options that have been considered

2.1 The Council must take the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel into account when setting its Members’ Allowances Scheme, although the Council is within its right to agree alternative proposals. A new scheme must be adopted by December 2023 in order for it to be adopted before the current scheme expires in February 2024. The scheme will then be subject to annual review.

3. Consultation and engagement undertaken

3.1 Engagement has been undertaken with all members by way of an electronic survey to ascertain members’ views on the Members’ Allowances Scheme. A selection of interviews with specific members and members of the Leadership Team were also held.

4. Risks associated with the proposals

4.1 That a new Members’ Allowances Scheme is not adopted prior to the expiry of the existing scheme. However, the timeline that has been met which has

enabled a new scheme to be presented to members at this meeting has given some flexibility to help mitigate this risk.

5. Implications arising from the proposals

- 5.1 Financial – see Appendix B regarding the financial implications for adopting a new Members’ Allowances Scheme.
- 5.2 Legal compliance – the review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.
- 5.3 Equalities – The proposed scheme specifically allows the Council to grant additional expenses / allowances where required where the member has needs arising from a protected characteristic.

6. Background documents associated with this report

- 6.1 [The Local Authorities \(Members’ Allowances\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)
- 6.2 [COU/WS/23/015](#): 26 September 2023: Appointment of Independent Remuneration Panel
- 6.3 [COU/WS/23/011](#): 20 June 2023: Independent Remuneration Panel appointment process

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ANNEX A

Report of the West Suffolk Independent Remuneration Panel

December 2023

1. Background

- 1.1 In September 2023, the Council appointed an Independent Remuneration Panel ("the Panel") to review and amend the Members Allowances Scheme ("the Scheme"). The Council must have regard to the Panel's recommendations as required by The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.
- 1.2 This report provides details of the Panel's amendments to the Scheme together with their rationale. The amended Scheme is set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

2. The Panel

- 2.1 The Regulations provide that the Panel shall consist of at least three members none of whom is also a member of an authority in respect of which it makes recommendations or is a member of a committee or sub-committee of such an authority; or is disqualified from being or becoming a member of an authority.
- 2.2 The Panel is made up of four independent individuals, each selected by a panel of three councillors, an independent person, a strategic director and the monitoring officer following a recruitment process. They are:
 - Sue Putters (Chair)
 - Tricia Bernard-Hector
 - Sandra Cox
 - David Irvine

3. Acknowledgements

- 3.1 The Monitoring Officer acted as advisor to the Panel and was supported by a Democratic Services Officer. A member of the Policy, Projects and Performance team provided background assistance in obtaining benchmarking data and material.
- 3.2 The Panel received a range of representations, both via a survey and during interviews, to help inform their deliberations and would like to thank the Council for their support and assistance in undertaking this review.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The current West Suffolk Council Members' Allowances Scheme expires in February 2024 and the Panel is required to make recommendations to Council on the level of remuneration, allowances and expenses for councillors so that a new Scheme is in place upon expiry of the existing Scheme. The Council must give due regard to the Panel's recommendations but may agree alternative proposals.
- 4.2 In undertaking the review, the Panel considered a range of supporting material, details of which are attached at Appendix 2. The Panel has been particularly mindful of the following factors:
- The Leader and Cabinet decision making model together with the committee structure and role descriptions for councillors, and how these are reflected in the relative level of responsibilities for special responsibility allowances
 - The outcomes of benchmarking activities to review levels of remuneration agreed by other local authorities
 - The legislative framework
 - Feedback received from councillors on the current scheme and their thoughts on the role, benefits and challenges associated with being a councillor
 - External cost of living factors
 - Cost of the proposals to the public purse
- 4.3 This report provides detail on how the levels of remuneration and allowances proposed within this scheme have been calculated and the associated rationale.

5. Legislative framework

- 5.1 Any scheme of allowances that is adopted by West Suffolk Council must comply with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003 ("The Regulations").
- 5.2 The Regulations stipulate what form of allowances and expenses may be made to councillors. In particular, the Council:
- Must set a rate of Basic Allowance, that shall be payable to all councillors at the same rate
 - May pay a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to councillors who have special responsibilities (the form of special responsibility is detailed in the legislation)
 - May make arrangements to pay the expenses of councillors who have caring responsibilities when they are undertaking official council duties
 - May make arrangements to pay travelling and subsistence expenses to councillors incurred when undertaking official council duties
 - May make arrangements for the provision of payments to co-opted members when undertaking their duties

6. The basic allowance

- 6.1 The basic allowance is payable to all councillors, regardless of the level of activity they undertake, although a councillor may elect to forego their allowance (see section 12. below).
- 6.2 The Panel recognises the aims and ambitions of the Council; enabling greater financial resilience; being better placed to capitalise on opportunities and having strong leadership to encourage and sustain growth.
- 6.3 The Panel also recognises how the Council places a strong emphasis on the role of the ward councillor in the community, as embodied in the Council's Families and Communities Strategy. The Panel notes that the workload for ward members has increased in recent years - for example, where help and support from residents has been sought during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.
- 6.4 During the course of the Panel's work, councillors provided representations regarding their time spent on council business and that the basic allowance needs to be sufficient to accurately reflect the amount of time undertaken, particularly where some need to take time off work, and the impact this would have on their finances when committing to Council activities. The Panel noted that being a councillor is something that people elect to do, and there is a degree to which people may take into account the wider public good in doing so. They recognise that a significant amount of the role of being a councillor is undertaken on a voluntary basis and whilst their efforts should be appropriately valued, the role should not be likened to paid employment.
- 6.5 All members were provided with a survey seeking their views on the current Scheme and 53 percent of all councillors responded. Councillors were asked what they considered the basic allowance should be. Answers varied:

Percentage of responses	Response
43%	Between £7000 to £8000
35%	Content with current allowance (£6,291.71)
18%	Above £8000

- 6.6 The Panel noted that some councillors felt the role was often a 24/7 role; residents may contact their councillors at any time of day, and many councillors put forward the high volume of correspondence they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis in addition to taking part in meetings. Due to the time commitment involved, which for many of the respondents equated to hours that would be spent in part-time or even full-time work, many felt they should be adequately remunerated. It was also felt the current level of allowances may deter people from standing for election, particularly those who require a regular income. The allowances were felt by some members not to adequately compensate for skills, expertise and loss of earnings.
- 6.7 The Panel took into account the outcomes of research undertaken to compare allowances from other councils based on their geographical location (in a

neighbouring county); their similarity in size to West Suffolk Council by population; and other authorities located in Suffolk. The Panel also noted that these rates were as at the Summer 2023 and that these councils may also be undertaking a review of their Schemes.

- 6.8 The Panel received representations about what costs the basic allowance should cover. Most schemes expect the basic allowance to cover incidental costs such as telephone calls, stationery and postage with some making separate provision for broadband costs. Some councillors highlighted that they are expected to cover the costs of using their own personal mobile phone, home energy and internet costs, and printing costs when undertaking council business.
- 6.9 The Panel noted provision for stationery, phone calls and home internet costs were already included in the basic allowance and it was felt appropriate that this should remain the case. The Panel also noted that all councillors are provided with a laptop and sundries (keyboard, mouse, etc) to assist them.
- 6.10 The Panel heard conflicting representations from councillors regarding mobile phone costs and whether the Council should supply mobile phones in addition to their Council-issued laptops. Some councillors choose not to accept a Council-issued laptop and make alternative arrangements with ICT to access their West Suffolk ICT profiles. This includes the use of 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) which is a secure platform enabling members to access their profiles on their own personal devices, including their own mobile phones. In addition, where members request additional kit to support their use of ICT and to promote paperless working, such as the issuing of an extra screen, this is provided utilising a separate budget.

The Panel felt that no additional allowance should be provided for ICT costs to run the equipment, mobile phones, stationery, printers or any other consumables as this is deemed to already be covered in the basic allowance. There are alternatives offered to assist with communication, such as BYOD and the use MS Teams via their laptops which means the issuing of a Council-owned mobile phone is not required.

6.11 The Panel also considered the following:

- That since 2019, the basic allowance has increased by approximately 6.5 percent to the current rate of £6,291.71 due to the application of the annual uplift. Although no increase has been applied since April 2021 due to Council resolving not to accept the recommended 6.9 percent uplift in December 2022 or any further uplifts until the Scheme was reviewed in full (Council minute. 259 refers)
- That inflation was averaging at approximately 3 to 4 percent between 2019 and 2021.
- That whilst inflation had been running high in recent years, it was reported at 4.6 percent in October 2023 and still falling. The current Government and Bank of England were working towards an active programme of inflation reduction.
- That in order for the basic allowance to be at least £7,000, an increase of 12 percent would need to be applied to the current rate.

Recommendation:

- 6.12 Taking all the above into account, the Panel consider it appropriate to propose a basic allowance of **£6,606.30** for West Suffolk Council, which is an **increase of five percent** on the current rate.
- 6.13 The Panel felt this represented a modest increase which compared reasonably well with other council schemes, recognising that no increase had been applied since 2021 and councillors had also faced similar personal cost-of-living increases as residents. This new rate means West Suffolk Council currently has the highest basic allowance of the comparable district and borough councils in East Anglia; and that this is justifiable due to the extensive ward work undertaken by councillors (see paragraph 6.3 above).

7. Special responsibility allowances (SRAs)

- 7.1 As set out above, the Panel has reviewed a range of factors in calculating proposed levels of allowances. In particular, the Panel considered comparative rates with other councils as well as understanding from councillors who are in receipt of SRAs regarding the level of responsibility this entails.
- 7.2 The Panel has sought to carefully understand the relative nature of responsibilities and determine levels of allowances in a systematic way, evaluating roles in a similar way to how an organisation may evaluate different job roles. The Panel considered the rates and multipliers that apply in the current Scheme, the outcome of the member survey, and the oral representations received, following which a formal analysis of each role was undertaken to validate the rates being proposed.
- 7.3 A similar approach was adopted by the previous Independent Remuneration Panel as advocated in the South West Councils' guidance to operating remuneration panels. This guidance is one of few documents nationally available to provide assistance to remuneration panels in undertaking their work. This guidance suggests tiers of allowances, where the levels of allowance is varied according to relative responsibilities.
- 7.4 Each tier represents a different multiplier of the basic allowance, and so those with the least responsibility (Tier 7) will receive a proportion of the basic allowance as their SRA, whilst those with the most responsibility will receive a multiplier of the basic allowance (Tier 1). Each SRA is paid in addition to the basic allowance.
- 7.5 The Panel agreed that this methodology alongside the member role descriptions set out in the Constitution, the outcomes of the survey, the oral representations received and the comparative data remained an appropriate, fair and equitable system to continue to apply.
- 7.6 The Panel determined the roles that they felt should attract an SRA and has set the level of responsibility regarding where they feel the role fits within the following tier system. This is not an exact science and a degree of judgement is applied when placing roles within each tier; however, in determining whether an

SRA is appropriate for a role, the Panel acknowledged the importance of considering whether the role is:

- a. Outside the scope of the basic allowance
- b. Formally recognised by the Council, as set out in the Constitution
- c. Recognised within the Regulations

7.7 The Panel consider the following tiers should continue to apply:

- Tier 1 – Leader of the Council: (2.5x basic allowance)
- Tier 2 - Deputy Leader: (1.5x basic allowance)
- Tier 3 - Cabinet Members and Chair of Council: (1.25x basic allowance)
- Tier 4 – See table below: (0.9x basic allowance)
- Tier 5 – See table below and Vice-Chair of Council: (0.66x basic allowance)
- Tier 6 – See table below: (0.4x basic allowance)
- Tier 7 – See table below: (0.35x basic allowance)
- Tier 8 – See table below: (no SRA)

The Panel feel that the political Group Leaders should continue to attract an SRA on the following basis within Tier 7:

- Group size of 21 to 32 members: (0.35x basic allowance)
- Group size of 11 to 20 members: (Two thirds of 0.35x basic allowance)
- Group size of 3 to 10 members: (one third of 0.35x basic allowance)

7.8 The Panel considers that the following Committee Chair and Vice Chair roles fell within the following tiers. Note the descriptors within each tier are example only:

Tier 4 (SRA = 0.9 x basic)	Tier 5 (0.66 x basic)	Tier 6 (0.4 x basic)	Tier 7 (0.35 x basic)	Tier 8 (no SRA)
<p>May be expected to chair meetings 8-12 times per year May be regularly required to defend Council decisions to public / press May be required to represent the Council / Committee Specific personal responsibilities in relation to decision making for which they could be held to account Expected to undertake regular (at least weekly) meetings with officers</p>	<p>May be expected to chair meetings 4-8 times per year May have some requirement to defend Council decisions to public / press May be required to represent the Council / Committee May have some liaison with officers / be consulted in relation to decision making (more than monthly)</p>	<p>May be called upon to act in Tier 4 / Tier 5 roles (as a Vice-Chair) May have some liaison with officers / be consulted in relation to decision making (monthly) May have some representative role / be required to represent the committee on occasions</p>	<p>May be called upon to act in Tier 4-6 roles (as a Vice-Chair) May have some liaison with officers / be consulted in relation to decision making (less than monthly) May have some representative role / be required to represent the committee on occasions</p>	<p>May be expected to chair / vice-chair a committee less than 4 times a year Unlikely to have further commitments beyond chairing the meeting</p>
<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Chair of Development Control Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Chair of Licensing Committee Vice-Chair of Council Vice-Chair of Development Control</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Vice-Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Vice-Chair of Licensing</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Standards Committee Chair / Vice-Chair</p>

Rationale

Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members

- 7.9 Submissions received indicated that the role of Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member not only meant being on call to residents at all times, but will often mean delivering the role on a near full-time basis. The Panel also recognised that these roles have an important function in working with partners, putting forward the Council's position and lobbying on behalf of the Council on both a regional and a national scale.
- 7.10 The Panel recognises that members with executive responsibility are expected to be the driving force of Council strategies and have strong insight into a range of services. They will lead and champion initiatives, make decisions within their areas of responsibility, and are expected to lead where there is challenge and scrutiny to the work they and the Council do.
- 7.11 As with the basic allowance, it is challenging to give full value to the roles of the leader, deputy leader and cabinet members given the current legislative framework. However, it was recognised by the Panel that by maintaining the current multipliers for the roles, these would be within the mid-upper range of the peer councils' rates to which West Suffolk had been compared.

Recommendation:

- 7.12 It is proposed that the rates be established as follows:

Tier 1 - Leader: £16,515.74pa (2.5x basic allowance)
Tier 2 - Deputy Leader: £9,909.44pa (1.5x basic allowance)
Tier 3 - Cabinet Members: £8,257.87pa (1.25x basic allowance)

Chair and Vice Chair of Council

- 7.13 The Panel considers that being Chair can be a very demanding role. The Chair is expected to Chair Council meetings, facilitating difficult discussions, in a balanced, intelligent way, whilst also acting as the civic leader of the Council, representing the Council at numerous events. This requires someone with a wide skillset to perform the role effectively.
- 7.14 The Panel recognises the important role the civic leader can play in supporting the Council's priorities and acting as a key figurehead in the community. Even with a reduced commitment, the postholder would regularly be required to give up evening and weekend time, and very much put personal commitments aside, to fulfil the role effectively.
- 7.15 The Panel similarly recognises that the skillsets required to fulfil the role also apply to the Vice Chair. The Vice Chair may be called upon at little

notice, and needs to be prepared to have to step into the Chair's role at frequent intervals.

- 7.16 The Panel also acknowledges the demands on the personal time of the post holder – including travelling to many events – and that this should be reflected in the level of allowance received.

Recommendation:

The Panel therefore consider it appropriate to propose that the rates be established as follows:

Tier 3 – Chair of Council: £8,257.87pa (1.25x basic allowance)

Tier 5 – Vice Chair of Council: £4,360.16 (0.66x basic allowance)

Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs

- 7.17 The Panel analysed the relative responsibilities associated with being a committee Chair, and the time commitments involved, to determine relative levels of allowances. The Panel's evaluation has been undertaken with regard to the Constitution, which establishes the relative responsibilities of each Committee, and specific responsibilities given to the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as feedback from councillors.
- 7.18 The Panel also took a similar approach to the evaluation of Vice-Chairs, on the basis that the Vice-Chair would be expected to be able to fulfil all the responsibilities of the respective Chair.
- 7.19 The Panel received specific representations in relation to the Vice-Chairs' role for Development Control, including the need to have two vice-chairs and the need for the Vice-Chairs' to attend many of the same meetings as the Chair. The Panel consider it is a matter for the Council to decide whether to appoint one vice-chair or two but have taken the feedback relating to the demands of the role into account when setting the level of remuneration.
- 7.20 In addition, the Panel received representations in relation to the responsibilities of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. The Panel considered that whilst attendance at scheduled meetings may be fewer than that attended by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the time commitment needed outside of meetings to become fully conversant with the topics under scrutiny was considered to warrant an SRA from the same tier. The Panel noted the statutory role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in that they may call-in and review decisions made; however the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee was responsible for scrutinising the performance of the Council's services; suggesting means of improving and promoting performance management and audit functions of the Council; and assisting the Cabinet and Council in the development of the budget framework. The Panel therefore felt that both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee should be

sufficiently remunerated to recognise the importance of leading this committee's work.

- 7.21 The Panel, as with other roles, has also assessed comparative information in relation to other councils. This indicates that practices for payment of Committee Chairs varies significantly and, whilst regard has been given to this in establishing levels of remuneration, the Panel has focussed on what they consider to be suitable remuneration for West Suffolk Council. The Panel felt there was insufficient argument to alter the rates by any significant degree.

Recommendation:

This has resulted in the Panel recommending the following levels of allowances, as set out in the table at paragraph 7.8 above:

Tier 4 roles: £5,945.67pa
Tier 5 roles: £4,360.16pa
Tier 6 roles: £2,642.52pa
Tier 7 roles: £2,312.20pa
Tier 8 roles: No allowance

Group Leaders

- 7.22 The Panel acknowledged that Group Leaders are currently given a specific allowance for their role depending on the size of their Group (see paragraph 7.7 above). It was recognised that since the election in May 2023 that there has been a significant change to the political groups resulting in an administration where there is no overall control. The Conservative Group is the largest political group but does not have a majority. Representations had been received from some members where they felt more recognition should be placed on the role of 'Opposition Group Leader' principally due to the time and effort spent on the role. The Panel however, felt that this role was not formally currently recognised in the Constitution and it was difficult to quantify the amount of work entailed due to the political nature of the role. The Panel therefore felt that the current multipliers for Group Leaders should remain.
- 7.23 Following a representation received as to whether an SRA should be given to a Group Leader where the member may be different to the Leader of the Council, the Panel reasoned that there was nothing in the Constitution to prevent the roles from being taken on by different members of the same political group and this was not a matter within the Panel's remit to consider.

Other roles

- 7.24 Other roles have been considered for attracting an SRA, including the Chair and Vice-Chair of Standards Committee. Other councils provide an SRA for these roles; however, it was felt the workload of these roles at West Suffolk Council was limited and as no specific representations had

been received where members felt SRAs were warranted, these are proposed to remain categorised under Tier 8.

- 7.25 Some councillors had fed back that consideration should be given to making provision for members (and potentially substitutes) of the Development Control Committee to receive an SRA. The Panel recognised the extensive workload of this committee compared to other committees and had noted that some other councils provided this as an SRA. Having deliberated this matter at length, the Panel felt that members appointed to this committee were committed to their work and the absence of an SRA was not considered to be a barrier. It was therefore considered that no SRA should be recommended for this role at the present time.
- 7.26 The role of Cabinet Member (without portfolio) had also been raised by some members as a consideration whereby they would potentially receive less SRA than a Cabinet Member that held a portfolio. The Panel felt that this was presently irrelevant if members were only allowed to claim one SRA (see paragraph 7.28 below) and have therefore not proposed that this role be remunerated.
- 7.27 Some members had indicated that Chairs of informal working groups should potentially be remunerated; however, the Panel considered it would be difficult to quantify the workload involved for each which varied considerably and to try and be fair and equitable to all. These roles have therefore not been proposed to be remunerated.

Payment of multiple special responsibility allowances

- 7.28 The Panel considered whether councillors holding more than one special responsibility should be paid for one or more of these posts. This was discussed at length principally given the mixed views received in response to the survey and the oral representations received. Currently only one special responsibility allowance may be claimed and the Panel felt this practice should continue on the basis that it would encourage more members to take on key roles and discourage those that may wish to only be appointed to more than one role for financial gain. This was also a common practice amongst the councils where comparisons had been made. It has however, been clarified in the scheme that payment would be made for the SRA that attracts the highest rate.

Overall costs of special responsibility allowances and the proposed scheme of allowances

- 7.29 The total cost of special responsibility allowances based on posts held in May 2023, is £138,627. The proposed scheme, assuming the Council continues to appoint a full Cabinet of 10 members, and two Vice-Chairs of the Development Control Committee, and for remunerating the change in tier for the Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee recommended by the Panel would be £147,474 which is an increase of £8,847.

- 7.30 Overall, the proposed total costs of basic (paragraph 6.12) and special responsibility (paragraph 7.29) allowances will be £570,277. This represents an increase in costs of to the Council of 5.35 percent compared to existing costs. Note that this does not include costs spent on travel, subsistence or carers/dependents claims.

8. Uplifts and review of allowances

- 8.1 The Panel considers it appropriate to recommend that allowances are indexed and therefore periodically increased. This has the advantage of ensuring that allowances keep pace with increases in the cost-of-living, and as such remain fair and consistent. It also avoids the need for substantial increases in allowances simply to “catch-up” as opposed to changes in responsibilities.
- 8.2 The Panel has considered a range of indices that could be used for such increases, including Retail Price Index (RPI), Consumer Price Inflation (CPI), and Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures of increases in median salaries, together with the same increase that the majority of Council staff receive annually following the national local government salary settlement. The latter is currently written in the present scheme; however, for 2022 and 2023 there has been no direct comparative percentage increase as a cash lump sum has formed part, if not all, of the annual staff pay award for these two years.

Recommendation:

- 8.3 The Panel has therefore proposed that the basic allowance should be uplifted each year by the same rate as the CPI index for the reasons set out in paragraph 6.13 regarding its rationale for increasing the basic allowance. However, should CPI be above three percent, it is recommended that the Panel should convene to consider an appropriate level of increase.
- 8.4 In accordance with the Regulations, this annual uplift may only apply for up to four years. The Panel will, however, undertake an annual review of the Scheme to allow the Panel to assess whether the Scheme is operating effectively.

9. Co-optees allowance

- 9.1 The Panel has considered making provision for a co-optees allowance within the scheme; however, as the Council currently does not have any co-optees and was not seeking to appoint any to its committees at the present time, the Panel felt unable to recommend remuneration without an assessment of what a co-optee’s role might entail.

Recommendation:

- 9.2 The Panel recommends that no provision be made in the Members’ Allowances Scheme for a co-optees allowance for the reasons given

above; however, the Panel may be convened to review the matter should the need arise.

10. Other allowances

Travel allowances

- 10.1 Whilst the Panel was appreciative that costs of fuel have increased since the last review, HMRC set standard rates to allow for the reclaiming of fuel costs incurred. The Panel consider that these provide a sensible benchmark for councillors to reclaim expenditure for travelling.
- 10.2 The Panel therefore consider that if travelling by car or van, motorcycle or bicycle, the rates should remain in line with HMRC guidelines before being liable to pay tax on any mileage travelled over the threshold stated. To encourage car sharing, the rate for travelling with a passenger that was either another councillor or officer should remain in the West Suffolk Council (WSC) scheme.
- 10.3 Consideration was given to the rate by which mileage should be claimed if councillors are travelling by electric car. The HMRC guidelines state that if driving a personal electric car for business purposes, the mileage rates would be equal to those driving a petrol or diesel fuelled car. The Panel feel that to encourage 'greener' travel, the rate for driving an electric car, or other 'green' operated vehicle, should be same as a petrol or diesel fuelled car.
- 10.4 Consideration was given to the reduced rate for travelling over 10,000 miles by car in a given tax year as this was unlikely to apply; however, upon reflection, the Panel was minded for it to remain in the WSC's scheme in case the situation did occur.
- 10.5 The Panel recognised the mileage rates which were currently in line with the HMRC rates had applied for some time but may shortly be due for review. It is therefore considered that the scheme should continue to include similar reference to the statement already provided in WSC's Members' Allowances Scheme, which would allow the rates to be adjusted to accord with the new HMRC rates or the Council could reconvene the Panel to review the rates.
- 10.6 Councillors usually claim from their home addresses as a starting point if it is located in the district. Some members live outside the district and some may be returning from a temporary address (for example, having been away on holiday) to attend an event. To cover this, the Panel felt the scheme should continue to include similar reference to the text already provided; however, further clarification has been given to the starting point of the councillor's journey.
- 10.7 The Panel has also considered where members may travel by public transport and taxis and felt the provisions made for claiming in the current WSC scheme should continue to apply. Consideration was given to

capping the amount of fares claimed, particularly when using taxis; however, this might appear discriminatory if there was a genuine need to use taxis. No gratuity would be reimbursed when using taxis, as was permitted by some councils.

- 10.8 The Panel recognised the Council's commitment to protecting the environment and reducing carbon emissions and considered whether any other measures could be included in the scheme to 'incentivise' greener travel. Whilst use of public transport or bicycle was to be encouraged, it was acknowledged that this was not always practical when members are travelling from rural areas where public transport networks are sparse or a relatively long distance away. The following text was already provided in the current scheme and the Panel felt this should continue to be encouraged:

'Councillors should, when possible, seek to use alternatives such as walking, cycling, public transport or car sharing instead of personal car journeys to support the Council in reducing the environmental impact of its activities.'

- 10.9 Councillors may use the Council's existing pool cars and electric bicycles upon request therefore it is considered sensible to continue to make reference to this in the scheme.

- 10.10 Some councils reimburse for ship fares, aircraft fares, garaging costs and a proportion of the cost to hire vehicles. These were historically not matters that had arisen at West Suffolk Council and the Panel felt there was not a need to include reference to these within the revised Scheme.

- 10.11 The Panel felt the following conditions should apply when claiming travelling expenses:

- As was required by employees claiming mileage, receipts for fuel/electricity purchases were expected to be retained by the councillor for inspection upon request but not required to be submitted with the claim.
- Travelling by public transport: reimbursement would be given for a standard fare incurred. Councillors were expected to use any discount / concessionary fare entitlements and the claim was to be evidenced by receipts / tickets.
- Travelling by taxi: reimbursement would be given for the actual fare incurred, as evidenced by receipt. Use of taxis should normally be pre-approved by the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer.
- Car parking and toll fares: reimbursement would be given for the actual cost incurred, as evidenced by receipt / ticket / statement.

Subsistence allowance

- 10.12 The Panel considered the comparative data and the criteria that needed to be met as set out in the current scheme and felt that the subsistence allowance should be kept as simple to understand and to administer as possible. It was also noted that where it was deemed appropriate, refreshments were provided at meetings utilising a separate budget.
- 10.13 Also acknowledging that overnight accommodation was able to be booked separately in advance, which often included the provision of breakfast if attending a conference for example, the Panel has made the following recommendation:

Recommendation:

'Where a member leaves the district and attends an event in their capacity as a councillor listed under Schedule 2, for five hours or more, claims may be made for subsistence up to a maximum of £20. This is to be evidenced by receipt.'

Carers and dependents allowances

- 10.14 A number of councillors raised concern with the Panel that it is difficult for those with family / caring commitments to become a councillor and this was recognised as a potential barrier. As referred to in paragraph 6.4 above, the Panel did not feel able to reflect this fully within the basic allowance, however did feel it important to ensure there is appropriate provision to enable councillors to be able to claim for the costs for care they would have to incur in order to undertake their council work.
- 10.15 Following feedback received from councillors and having noted how some other councils provide a carers /dependents allowance, the Panel felt the West Suffolk Council scheme should allow greater flexibility and be simplified. Discussion was held on the fact that the councillor's child(ren) or dependent/s may feel more comfortable being cared for by a family member or a trusted friend or neighbour, for example and professional care was therefore not always the most appropriate option. It was recognised that care may need to be pre-booked and that care was required for the entire time the councillor was away from their caring responsibilities (i.e. not just for the duration of a meeting). Whilst professional services may not always be required, research was also undertaken into the relative costs of childcare and more specialist support care for those with needs.
- 10.16 The Panel also considered that even where a councillor is required to take part in a virtual meeting as part of their role they may still require someone to assist with the care of their dependents to be able to concentrate on their Council work without distraction. Should this be the case, councillors should be aware they may claim under the Carers Allowances criteria outlined above.

Recommendation:

- 10.17 The Panel proposes that whilst undertaking Council duties, councillors who have caring responsibilities for dependents are allowed to claim for the costs they incur. Up to a maximum of £10 per hour may be claimed for childcare, and £28 per hour for support care for dependents. Costs incurred where care is required to be pre-booked may be claimed.
- 10.18 These payments will be reimbursed on production of receipts (which may include a personal receipt with the carer's details and signed by the councillor) or invoices for costs incurred. They should be claimed in respect of those who live with the councillor, or are dependent on the councillor for support, and cannot be left unsupervised during the councillor's absence.

11. When councillors are allowed to make claims

- 11.1 In addition to setting rates and conditions for allowances, the Panel determined what events members could claim for attending. The Panel considered the legal position and whether the Council allowed claims to be made for attending such an event within its current scheme. The Panel agreed that these should remain.
- 11.2 The Panel then considered what other events may be claimed for attending. This fell within the remit of 'the carrying out of any other duty approved by the authority, or any duty of a class so approved, for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees' as provided in the Regulations. The Panel considered what other duties would be seen to be in connection with the discharge of functions of the authority.
- 11.3 Examples of events that may or may not be deemed to be discharging the functions of the authority were considered in turn, together with others which showed where other authorities allowed their members to make claims if attending the event listed.
- 11.4 In making its deliberations on the above, the Panel was very clear in determining whether attendance at an event was deemed to be discharging the functions of the authority or was in a personal capacity. The Panel wished to make the list of events by which attendance could or could not be claimed for as clear as possible to assist appropriate officers authorising the claim.
- 11.5 The Panel then considered the examples of events that could and could not be claimed for attending in members' capacities as ward councillors, together with supporting text. This section of the current scheme was considered to remain acceptable and no suggested amendments have been made.

Recommendation:

- 11.6 The Panel recommends that the approved duties for the purpose of payment of travel, subsistence and carers / dependents allowances set out in Schedule 2 of the new draft Members' Allowances Scheme, be accepted.

Submission of claims

- 11.7 The Panel has considered how long councillors should have in which to submit expense claims. The Panel consider that the current two-month window provides sufficient scope for councillors to submit expense claims and although an operational matter, councillors should endeavour to use the recently introduced electronic method for submitting claims where possible.

12. Foregoing of allowances

- 12.1 Whilst members have not indicated that they wish to be able to forego allowances and expenses that they receive, the Regulations requires the scheme to allow councillors to forego their allowance and this has been included in the scheme.

13. Implementation of the new Members' Allowances Scheme

- 13.1 If adopted, it is proposed that the new scheme will take effect from 1 February 2024 when the current scheme expires. As referred to in paragraph 8.4 above, it will be subject to annual review as required by the Regulations. Thereafter, a full review would need to be undertaken with a new scheme adopted before 1 February 2028.



Appendix 1

DRAFT

Members' Allowances Scheme

(Revised: February 2024)

1. The West Suffolk Council remuneration scheme

- 1.1 All councils are required to form a scheme of allowances that:
- Determines how much individual members receive for being a councillor (the basic allowance).
 - Determines how much those members who have additional responsibilities should receive (special responsibility allowances).
 - Determines the circumstances under which members may claim expenses for costs they have incurred because they are a member.
- 1.2 The Council must set the scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The scheme has been produced on the recommendation of an Independent Remuneration Panel, a group of individuals who are entirely separate from the Council who have considered how much members should receive.
- 1.3 This scheme was approved by West Suffolk Council on xxxx and as required by the Regulations, will be subject to annual review.

2. Basic allowance

- 2.1 Each member shall receive a payment of £6,606.30 per year for undertaking their work as a councillor. This payment is intended to include all expenses and costs they incur that fall outside the scope of the expenses scheme (see below), including costs of stationery, printing, phone calls, mobile phone, and home energy and internet costs. In addition to the basic allowance, members are offered a laptop and sundries (keyboard, mouse, etc).
- 2.2 The sum of £6,606.30 shall be uplifted each year by the same rate as the Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) index as at 1 April in each year commencing on 1 April 2025. Should this be greater than three percent, the Remuneration Panel shall consider the level of increase and make recommendations to the Council accordingly.

3. Special responsibility allowances

- 3.1 Members shall receive a payment in line with Schedule 1 for any special responsibilities posts that they are appointed to by the Council. Special responsibility allowances are paid in addition to the basic allowance.
- 3.2 A member may hold more than one special responsibility post but may only be paid one special responsibility allowance that attracts the highest rate.

4. Payment and foregoing of allowances

- 4.1 Allowances shall be paid in 12 monthly instalments on the 23rd of each month unless that day is a weekend or bank holiday, in which case it shall be paid the previous Friday.
- 4.2 A member shall be paid any allowances from their date of appointment, so that:
- 4.2.1 In an ordinary election year, basic allowances are payable from four days after the date of election.
 - 4.2.2 In the event of a by-election, basic allowances are payable from the date of the by-election.
 - 4.2.3 In the event appointment to a special responsibility post, from the date the appointment was made.
- 4.3 Where a member's entitlement to an allowance begins or ends part of the way through the year, their entitlement shall be the same proportion as the number of days during the term of office to the number of days in that year.
- 4.4 A member may write to the Monitoring Officer to notify of their intention to forego any allowance, or part of any allowance, payable to them under this scheme.
- 4.5 In the event that the Council agrees that a member may be granted a leave of absence of more than six months, then the member will not be entitled to receive a basic allowance after they have been absent for more than six months. Their allowance payment will be resumed after they have attended a Council meeting.
- 4.6 Where a member has been overpaid, they shall be invoiced for the value of the overpayment and required to repay the allowance. Where they have been underpaid, this shall be paid to them by the Council as part of any subsequent payment.
- 4.7 PAYE arrangements apply to members' allowances, in that they are subject to national insurance and income tax, and deductions shall be made by the Council accordingly. Members cannot join the Local Government Pension Scheme.

5. Travel, subsistence and carers / dependents allowances

- 5.1 Members are allowed to claim travel, subsistence and carers / dependents allowances when carrying out official duties as listed within Schedule 2.
- 5.2 Members must submit claims within two months using any approved electronic IT systems / forms. For claims to be processed within the month submitted, they must be submitted in accordance with stated deadlines provided to members.

5.3 Travel allowances

- 5.3.1 When claiming mileage, receipts for fuel/electricity purchases are expected to be retained by the member for inspection upon request but are not required to be submitted with the claim.
- 5.3.2 Members living inside the district should claim expenses from their home, or the starting point of their journey, whichever is the closest. Where a member lives outside the district the nearest border should be agreed with them by the Monitoring Officer or Chief Executive, which would then become their notional base for travel purposes from which claims from their "home" may be made.
- 5.3.3 Members should, when possible, seek to use alternatives such as walking, cycling, public transport or car sharing instead of personal car journeys to support the Council in reducing the environmental impact of its activities.
- 5.3.4 Where members are undertaking official duties, claims for travel allowances will be paid at the following rates:

Travelling by car or van: First 10,000 miles Each mile over 10,000 If providing transport to another member or council employee to attend the same event	45 pence per mile 25 pence per mile An additional 5 pence per mile
Travelling by motorcycle	24 pence per mile
Travelling by bicycle	20 pence per mile
Public transport	Standard fare incurred; members are expected to use any discount / concessionary fare entitlements. Evidenced by receipt.
Taxis	Actual fare, as evidenced by receipt; this should normally be pre-approved by the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer and only in exceptional circumstances. No gratuity reimbursed.
Car parking and toll fares	Actual fee / fare incurred, as evidenced by ticket / receipt / statement

- 5.3.5 Any other forms of transport or arrangements that do not fall within the scope above should be notified to the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer to agree. Wherever possible, where public transport or alternative transport is being used, then the member or Council (on their behalf) should seek to pre-purchase tickets to ensure best value.

- 5.3.6 Should HMRC adjust the standard rates for car, motorcycle or bicycle travel, then the Council may adjust the rates in section 5.3.4 accordingly, or the Council could reconvene the Independent Remuneration Panel to review the rate changes.
- 5.3.7 Members must ensure that they have complied with the relevant tax and MOT requirements for their vehicle and have appropriate insurance in place that covers their member activities for their vehicle. Claims may not be paid if these requirements have not been complied with.
- 5.3.8 Members are entitled to use the Council's pool cars and electric bicycles when undertaking council business. The pool cars include use of a fuel card and therefore mileage expenses cannot be claimed when the journey has been undertaken by pool car.

5.4 Subsistence allowances

- 5.4.1 Any overnight accommodation should be booked and paid for by the Council on behalf of the member in advance.
- 5.4.2 Where a member leaves the district and attends an event in their capacity as a councillor listed under Schedule 2 for five hours or more, claims may be made for subsistence up to a maximum of £20. This is to be evidenced by receipt.
- 5.4.3 Any other exceptional circumstances, may be agreed by the Monitoring Officer or Chief Executive.

5.5 Carers / dependents allowances

- 5.5.1 Whilst undertaking Council duties as set out within Schedule 2, members who have caring responsibilities are allowed to claim for the costs they incur. Up to a maximum of £10 per hour may be claimed for childcare, and £28 per hour for support care for dependents. Costs incurred where care is required to be pre-booked may be claimed.
- 5.5.2 These payments will be reimbursed on production of receipts (which may include a personal receipt with the carer's details and signed by the councillor) or invoices for costs incurred. They should be claimed in respect of those who live with the member, or are dependent on the member for support, and cannot be left unsupervised during the member's absence.
- 5.5.3 Costs in respect of childcare may only be claimed outside of normal child care provision times – for example, claims may not be made when the child is in school or using entitlement to free childcare hours.

6. Members with additional needs

- 6.1 If any members have particular needs arising due to a protected characteristic under the equalities act – for example, they have a disability that prevents them using some forms of transport, then the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer may agree to the payment of any additional claims or support arrangements that fall outside the scope of the scheme, to support their needs.

Schedule 1

Rates of allowances – as at 1 February 2024

Tier	Value in relation to basic	Responsibility	Value*
	1	Basic Allowance	£6,606.30
1	2.5	Leader of the Council	£16,515.74
2	1.5	Deputy Leader of the Council	£9,909.44
3	1.25	Cabinet Members Chair of Council	£8,257.87
4	0.9	Chair of Development Control Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny	£5,945.67
5	0.66	Chair of Licensing Vice-Chair of Council Vice-Chair of Development Control	£4,360.16
6	0.4	Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Vice-Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny	£2,642.52
7	0.35	Vice-Chair of Licensing	£2,312.20

Rates of Allowances: Group Leaders

7	0.35	Group size of 21-32	£2,312.20
	2/3 of 0.35 (tier 7)	Group size of 11-20	£1,541.47
	1/3 of 0.35 (tier 7)	Group size of 3-10	£770.73

**Special responsibility allowances are paid in addition to the basic allowance.*

Schedule 2

Approved duties for the purpose of payment of travel, subsistence and carers / dependents allowances

Members may claim travel, subsistence and carers / dependents allowances* when undertaking the following duties:

1. Attendance at a meeting of the authority or of any committee or sub-committee of the authority, or of any other body to which the authority makes appointments or nominations, or of any committee or sub-committee of such a body.
2. Attendance at any other meeting, the holding of which is authorised by the authority, or a committee or sub-committee of the authority, or a joint committee of the authority and at least one other local authority provided that where the authority is divided into two or more political groups it is a meeting to which members of at least two such groups have been invited; or if the authority is not so divided, it is a meeting to which at least two members of the authority have been invited.
3. The attendance at a meeting of any association of authorities of which the authority is a member.
4. The attendance at a meeting of the executive or a meeting of any of its committees, where the authority is operating executive arrangements
5. The performance of any duty in pursuance of any standing order made under section 135 of the Local Government Act 1972 requiring a member or members to be present while tender documents are opened.
6. The performance of any duty in connection with the discharge of any function of the authority conferred by or under any enactment and empowering or requiring the authority to inspect or authorise the inspection of premises.
7. The carrying out of any other duty approved by the authority, or any duty of a class so approved, for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees. Specifically:
 - a. Meetings arranged by, or on behalf of, or approved by the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Directors or Service Managers to which members have been invited.
 - b. Appointed to represent the Council other than as members of outside bodies (see 1. above), either by virtue of specific resolution or in the capacity of Leader or Deputy Leader or as Chair or Vice-Chair of a committee.
 - c. Meetings and engagements undertaken by the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader or Cabinet Members through the course of their duties and as part of their specific roles and responsibilities.
 - d. Representing the Council at official and courtesy visits of a civic nature within the United Kingdom at the request of the Chief Executive or an officer authorised by the Chief Executive.
 - e. Attending training and development courses, seminars, workshops and conferences.
 - f. Representing the Council at Public Inquiries.

**Carers / dependents allowance may be claimed in accordance with section 5.5 above if care is required while a member is attending meetings or engagements held in person or by virtual means.*

In addition, members are entitled to claim travelling expenses when acting as a local ward member. Members should use their judgement (or seek advice from the Monitoring Officer) to determine whether the meeting or event they are travelling to is genuinely in their local ward work and therefore eligible to be claimed. The following is not exclusive, but acts as guidance on the type of matters that members **can claim for**:

1. Attending meetings of a local town or parish council, or resident / community association.
2. Attending meetings of community groups when requested to do so by the group.
3. Representing the community as a local ward member at events such as parish forums and meetings / events that are making decisions about the community.
4. Visiting residents or local businesses to respond to enquiries.
5. Attending meetings where proposals relating to the local ward are being presented.
6. Attending meetings relevant to expenditure on the Council's locality ward budget scheme.
7. Meetings arranged by the member with specific officers to discuss ward matters or to resolve ICT problems.

It is expected that ordinarily claims should be within the local member's ward, except where the member is acting at a community representative. Members may also claim where another member has asked them to act as the local ward member on their behalf.

Attendance at the following events **cannot be claimed for**:

1. Attending meetings when they are a part of the town /parish council/ community group who have convened the meeting.
2. Attending meetings / making visits which have no relation to Council business.
3. Attending meetings / making visits which are primarily to deal with personal or political business. This includes attendance at political group meetings where Council officers are present for a proportion of the time.
4. Unless specifically representing the Council (see 7e. above), attending civic events (such as the annual civic reception, Remembrance service etc).

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Supporting material considered by the Independent Remuneration Panel to assist their work

- The Local Authorities (Members Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003
- The current Members' Allowances Scheme (adopted February 2020)
- Guidance on members' allowances produced by HMRC and HMRC guidance on allowable expenses
- Comparisons made with other Members' Allowances Schemes as published during Summer 2023, in respect of neighbouring authorities; other Suffolk authorities, and authorities of a similar size (in terms of population) to West Suffolk Council
- Briefing note compiled by the Monitoring Officer as requested by the Panel on the political composition of the Council since the May 2023 elections
- Member role descriptions as set out in the Constitution
- Membership and meeting information of Cabinet, Committees, Sub-Committees etc
- Information on the role of the ward member, as embodied in the Families and Communities Strategy
- The outcomes of the member survey sent to all West Suffolk Councillors in October 2023
- Oral representations received from West Suffolk Councillors in November 2023
- A range of indices by which to index link the scheme if wishing to apply an annual increase to the basic allowance.
- The costs for implementing the present scheme compared against costs of a scheme where a range of potential percentage increases to the basic allowance (and the consequential impact on the SRA multipliers) were applied.

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Polling district and polling place review

Report number:	COU/WS/23/023	
Report to and date:	Council	19 December 2023
Cabinet member:	Councillor Gerald Kelly Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory Email: gerald.kelly@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Jennifer Eves Director (HR, Governance and Regulatory) Email: Jennifer.eves@westsuffolk.gov.uk	

Decisions Plan: **Not applicable as this is not an executive matter**

Wards impacted: **All wards**

Recommendation: **It is recommended that Council:**

- 1. Approves the amended scheme of polling districts and polling places as set out at Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/023.**
- 2. Authorises the Chief Executive to amend the scheme of polling districts and polling places for Moreton Hall Ward and Haverhill West Ward following completion of the necessary assessments, as detailed in the Report number: COU/WS/23/023, and in consultation with relevant ward members.**
- 3. Authorises the Chief Executive, as Electoral Registration Officer, to take the necessary measures as soon as possible to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes,**

ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies, until the boundaries are fully in force.

- 4. That power to designate polling places, is delegated to the Chief Executive. Such power to be exercised where the decision is required at short notice and it is not possible to await a decision of Council.**

1. Context to this report

1.1 There are three ways of voting at elections and referendums; an elector can vote in person at a polling station, they can also vote by post or by appointing a proxy to vote on their behalf. West Suffolk Council actively promotes postal voting as being an easy and convenient way of voting for those that do not want to vote at a polling station and ultimately it is up to voters to choose the most convenient way for them to vote.

1.2 Arrangements for providing places for electors to vote at are set out in legislation and under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.

The following definitions may help to explain the requirements:

- “Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
- “Polling places” are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
- “Polling stations” are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

1.3 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.

1.4 At its meeting on 26 September 2023 West Suffolk Council agreed to undertake an interim review of polling places, as set out in section 2 of Report number: COU/WS/23/016.

2. Proposals within this report

2.1 The draft schedule of polling districts and polling places, which was included at Appendix A to Report COU/WS/23/016, detailed the current arrangements for polling districts and polling places and comments relating to areas which were considered as part of this review. The outcomes of the areas reviewed are detailed below.

Accessibility

2.2 To ensure compliance with the Elections Act 2022 and the Equalities Act 2010 the Council should seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who have a disability.

- 2.3 The feedback gathered following the May 2023 elections identified some polling stations which may not provide electors with reasonable facilities for voting or are not accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 2.4 With regard to accessibility of polling places, it should be noted that West Suffolk Council undertook an interim review of polling districts and polling places in 2022 and several polling places were changed on grounds of accessibility. The decision to change the polling place for Westley was appealed by the Parish Council and the appeal was considered by the Electoral Commission. The appeal was recently dismissed by the Electoral Commission and the report, which is included under the 'background documents' section provides detail of their investigation and response to all issues that were raised by the Parish Council. The Commission supported West Suffolk Council's processes and decisions in respect of all issues that were raised.
- 2.5 In line with the changing legislation and in light of feedback from the May 2023 elections, several polling places were assessed in relation to accessibility during this review and the outcome of the assessments are detailed in table one below.

Table one

Polling Place	Comments
Nowton Village Hall	Enquiries made regarding accessibility for wheelchair users. Confirmation received that an entrance with a ramp is available. No further assessment or change required as part of the review.
St Mary's Church (Denham)	Site visit undertaken to assess the accessibility of the venue for disabled users. Change of polling place required as St Mary's Church does not have adequate facilities for disabled access due to large internal steps, the internal and external lighting being insufficient and there are not sufficient welfare facilities for staff due to no running water, toilet facilities and, at the time of visit, a known rodent issue too.
St Andrew's Church (Great Saxham)	Enquiries made regarding accessibility for wheelchair users. Confirmation received that a shallow ramp is available providing access for wheelchair users. No further assessment or change required as part of the review.
Herringswell Village Hall	Site visit undertaken to assess the accessibility of the venue for disabled users. Level access is available to the polling station via a disabled access entrance. No further assessment or change required as part of the review.
St Catherine's Church, (Flempton)	Site visit undertaken to assess the accessibility of the venue for disabled users. A ramp is available to access the polling station and additional lighting will be provided for the path to the polling station. No further assessment or change required as part of the review.
The Old School Hall, Icklingham	Enquiries made regarding accessibility, in particular the door width for electors in motorised wheelchairs. Confirmation received from the Village Hall to confirm door width size which meet the requirements for accessibility. No further assessment or change required as part of the review.

Polling Place	Comments
Thelnetham Village Hall	Enquiries made regarding accessibility, in particular the level access and door width. Confirmation received from the Village Hall to confirm door widths, which meet the requirements, and the purchase of additional ramps for internal steps. No further assessment or change required as part of the review.

Change of polling place

2.6 Changes of polling place are proposed for the following reasons:

- future availability of venues
- alternative venues proposed and assessed during the consultation period; and
- accessibility

2.7 The proposed changes are detailed in table two below.

Table two

Current Polling Place	Proposed Polling Place	Comments
St Mary’s Church (Denham)	Barrow Village Hall	<p>Current polling place at St Mary’s Church is not accessible as detailed at Table one. An alternative facility in the polling district could not be identified and it is proposed that we combine with a polling station in the neighbouring polling district of Barrow. This is part of the same Parish Council and is where the Parish Council meetings for Barrow cum Denham Parish Council are held.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that changing the polling place to the proposed location would arguably make it more difficult for people within the village who are unable to drive or walk to the new venue. However, it should be noted that Denham has very few facilities within the village itself with no post office, shop or public house within walking distance and it is likely that those living in Denham would have to travel a short distance using a car or some other means of transport to access those services. Whilst it is preferable that electors are able to walk to their polling places, it is unrealistic to expect all polling places to be accessible by foot, by all electors, particularly in rural areas. In areas where residents may expect to need transport to access basic amenities it is reasonable for polling places to be situated where accessible only by transport. Subject to approval of the proposed polling places, officers will write to all electors with a change of polling place to advise them of the change and will invite them to apply for a postal vote if they wish.</p> <p>This change will future proof our polling arrangements and provide better accessibility for all electors. If improvements are made at St Mary’s Church then the</p>

Current Polling Place	Proposed Polling Place	Comments
		<p>venue could be reconsidered as part of a future review and further contact will be made to signpost to potential funding opportunities to make improvements.</p> <p>Proposal to change was not supported by the ward member or a parish councillor but alternative options were not put forward for consideration.</p>
Brandon Day Centre	Brandon Heritage Centre	<p>The current polling place for Brandon East is allocated as the Brandon Day Centre and it is proposed that this polling place is changed to The Heritage Centre which has been assessed and provides adequate and accessible facilities for polling. The reason for the proposed change is due to the car parking near to the Brandon Day Centre as we have received negative comments and observed issues at previous elections regarding the parking being limited. The Town Council responded to support this proposal.</p>
Unity Schools Partnership Offices (Haverhill)	To be confirmed	<p>The Unity Schools Partnership Offices, as the current polling place, is very unlikely to be available for future use as the site is being sold. An alternative facility in the polling district could not be identified and it is proposed that we combine with a polling station in a neighbouring polling district. Further assessments are required to determine the suitability of two proposed venues (Cadet Centre and Rugby Club) to accommodate a second polling station.</p>
Horringer Court Middle School (Bury St Edmunds)	West End Home Guard Club	<p>The Horringer Court Middle School has closed and the venue is not available for future use as a polling station. An alternative facility in the polling district could not be identified and it is proposed that we combine with a polling station in a neighbouring polling district. The West End Home Guard Club has been assessed and is suitable to accommodate a dual polling station. The Westgate Primary School, which is also in a neighbouring polling district, was considered but the Department for Education/Cabinet Office advice is to avoid using schools where it is practically possible to do so.</p>

2.8 Authorisation is requested for the Chief Executive to amend the scheme of polling places for Haverhill West Ward following completion of the necessary assessments at the Rugby Club and the Cadet Centre. This amendment will be made in consultation with the relevant ward members.

2.9 Subject to approval of the proposed polling places, officers will write to all electors with a change of polling place to advise them of the change and will invite them to apply for a postal vote if they wish.

Electorate forecast

- 2.10 An electorate forecasting exercise was undertaken for 15 polling districts which were identified as being close to the Electoral Commission guidance limit of 2250 per polling station.
- 2.11 The polling district "Bury St Edmunds (Moreton Hall) 2" exceeds the limit and whilst it would be possible to split the polling district streets alphabetically between two polling stations in the same venue, it is instead proposed that the polling district boundaries are reviewed to determine if an additional polling district may be required.
- 2.12 Authorisation is requested for the Chief Executive to amend the polling district boundary for Moreton Hall in consultation with the relevant ward members.

Change of polling district prefix

- 2.13 30 polling districts will have a change of their polling district prefix to reflect the change of constituency for their area. For example, the first letter of the prefix will change from W to B to reflect the change from West Suffolk constituency to Bury St Edmunds constituency at the next UK Parliamentary General Election.
- 2.14 It should be noted that if a parliamentary by election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries and the Register of Electors will reflect both the existing and new constituencies.

Delegated decision making

- 2.15 The designation of polling districts and places is a function of the Council, whereas decisions about polling stations are for the Returning Officer.
- 2.16 The Council's Constitution identifies the determination of polling district reviews as a matter to be reserved for full Council. In certain situations, it might not be practicable to await formal Council approval to designate a polling place – for example, where a building becomes unavailable at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances. Due to the potential need to identify alternative locations as polling stations as a matter of urgency, it is recommended that the authority to re-designate polling places be delegated to the Chief Executive.
- 2.17 This delegation is only to be exercised where a decision is required at short notice, and it is not possible to await a decision of Council. The decision should be made in consultation with relevant ward members.

3. Other considerations

- 3.1 A consultation response was received from an elector regarding the location of the polling place at Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre and the journey to the polling station by car requiring the elector to drive out of the polling district and then back in again. The elector suggested the potential to use local schools and also commented on poor signage at the polling station, which can be addressed at a future election. Contact was made with King Edward VI school to enquire about the availability of use as a polling station and they advised that they would not be able to facilitate a polling station without closing part of the school. No change has been proposed as part of this review.
- 3.2 A consultation response was received from Councillor Pat Hanlon which commented on the turnout at the New Croft (Haverhill) polling place when compared to the turnout at a polling station in a neighbouring polling district. Councillor Hanlon suggested that this may be related to the ANPR car park charges in place at The New Croft, which are turned off on polling day, and whether this puts people off voting. Councillor Hanlon suggested Samuel Ward Academy as a potential alternative. Enquiries were made but unfortunately the school cannot offer us a room which is separate from the rest of the school. No change is proposed as part of this review and additional communication activity will take place ahead of an election to ensure electors are aware that car park charges are not in place on polling day.
- 3.3 The current polling place for Brandon Central is allocated as the Royal British Legion and following the May 2023 elections communication was received regarding the potential to use The Church Institute as a polling place. The Church Institute was assessed and provides adequate and accessible facilities for polling. The suggestion of changing the polling place was consulted on and Brandon Town Council responded to suggest that the Royal British Legion is the better option and should continue to be the polling place. No change has been proposed as part of this review.

4. Consultation and engagement

- 4.1 Consultation with stakeholders was carried out with those groups with an interest in the review and proposed changes and this included:
- Local government electors/residents of the district
 - Parish and town councils
 - Parish meetings
 - District councillors
 - County councillors
 - Members of Parliament

- Residents Associations
- Local public and voluntary organisations
- Local disability groups
- Polling place venues

4.2 Information about the review, including maps with boundaries and polling places detailed, was published on the Council’s website and parish and town councils and local groups were encouraged to make information available where facilities were available. Press releases and social media was also issued.

4.3 A total of 22 responses were received from the consultation and a summary of the responses are included at Appendix B. All responses have been published in full on the consultation page on the Council’s website.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

5.1 If the review is not completed then the Council will breach the requirement of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

5.2 If suitable polling districts are not in place and suitable venues are not secured for use as polling stations, then voters may be disenfranchised and there is a risk of an election petition.

5.3 If polling station venues are not accessible to disabled electors, then this may be a breach relating to accessibility under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Election Act 2022.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

6.1 Legal compliance: The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

7.1 Appendix A – schedule of polling districts and polling places

7.2 Appendix B – Consultation summary

8. Background documents associated with this report

8.1 Report number: COU/WS/23/016 - [Agenda for Council on Tuesday 26 September 2023, 7.00 pm \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](#)

- 8.2 Electoral Commission guidance - [Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations | Electoral Commission guidance](#)
- 8.3 Record of decision of the Electoral Commission
Appeal against the closure of the polling place at the Westley Club - [Councillors - Record-of-decision-of-the-Electoral-Commission-in-the-appeal-against-the-closure-of-the-polling-place-at-Westley.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- 8.4 Review of Polling District and Polling Places Consultation webpage - [Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023 \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix A – Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Polling Place	District Ward
B-BE-AB1	Bury St Edmunds (Abbeygate) 1	United Reformed Church	Abbeygate
B-BE-AB2	Bury St Edmunds (Abbeygate) 2	Quaker Meeting House	Abbeygate
B-BE-AB3	Bury St Edmunds (Abbeygate) 3	Thomas Clarkson Centre	Abbeygate
B-BDW	Bardwell	Tithe Barn (Bardwell)	Bardwell
B-BHM	Barnham	Barnham Village Hall	Bardwell
B-CWE	Coney Weston	Coney Weston Village Hall	Bardwell
B-EUS	Euston	Barnham Village Hall	Bardwell
B-FMA	Fakenham Magna	Honington and Sapiston Village Hall	Bardwell
B-HN-VL	Honington (Village)	Honington and Sapiston Village Hall	Bardwell
B-SAP	Sapiston	Honington and Sapiston Village Hall	Bardwell
B-BGM	Barningham	Barningham Village Hall	Barningham
B-HEP	Hepworth	Hepworth Community Pavilion	Barningham
B-HOP	Hopton	Hopton Village Hall	Barningham
B-KNE	Knettishall	Hopton Village Hall	Barningham
B-MWE	Market Weston	Market Weston Village Hall	Barningham
B-THE	Thelnetham	Thelnetham Village Hall	Barningham
W-BRW	Barrow	Barrow Village Hall	Barrow
W-DEN	Denham	Barrow Village Hall	Barrow
W-LSX	Little Saxham	St Andrew`s Church (Great Saxham)	Barrow
W-GSX	Great Saxham	St Andrew`s Church (Great Saxham)	Barrow
W-WES	Westley	Westbury Community Centre	Barrow
W-BR-C	Brandon (Central)	Royal British Legion (Brandon)	Brandon Central
W-BR-E	Brandon (East)	Brandon Heritage Centre	Brandon East
W-SAD	Santon Downham	Santon Downham Village Hall	Brandon East
W-BR-W	Brandon (West)	Brandon Leisure and Health Hub	Brandon West
W-CHD	Chedburgh	The Erskine Centre	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-CHV	Chevington	Chevington Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-DAL	Dalham	Dalham Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-DEP	Depden	The Erskine Centre	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-HAR	Hargrave	Hargrave Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-LID	Lidgate	Lidgate Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-OUS1	Ousden Part 1	Ousden Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington

Appendix A – Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Polling Place	District Ward
W-OUS2	Ousden Part 2	Ousden Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-RED	Rede	Rede Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington
W-BND	Barnardiston	Barnardiston Hall Preparatory School	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-CAV	Cavendish	Cavendish Memorial Hall	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-CLA	Clare	Combined Halls of Clare	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-HUN	Hundon	Hundon Village Hall	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-KED	Kedington	Royal British Legion (Kedington)	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-POS	Poslingford	Stansfield Village Hall	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-SBC	Stoke By Clare	Stoke-By-Clare Village Hall	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-STR	Stradishall	Stirling House Training and Conference Centre	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
W-WIX	Wixoe	St Leonard`s Church (Wixoe)	Clare, Hundon & Kedington
B-BE-EA1	Bury St Edmunds (Eastgate) 1	Garland Street Baptist Church	Eastgate
B-BE-EA2	Bury St Edmunds (Eastgate) 2	Bury Town Football Club	Eastgate
W-EXN	Exning	Exning Community Church Hall	Exning
W-HH-C1	Haverhill (Central) 1	Haverhill Arts Centre	Haverhill Central
W-HH-C2	Haverhill (Central) 2	Haverhill Arts Centre	Haverhill Central
W-HH-E1	Haverhill (East) 1	Chalkstone Community Centre	Haverhill East
W-HH-E2	Haverhill (East) 2	The New Croft	Haverhill East
W-HH-N1	Haverhill (North) 1	New Cangle Community Primary School	Haverhill North
W-HH-N2	Haverhill (North) 2	Army Cadet Centre	Haverhill North
W-HH-S1	Haverhill (South) 1	Leiston Community Centre	Haverhill South
W-HH-S2	Haverhill (South) 2	St Felix Church (Haverhill)	Haverhill South
W-HH-SE	Haverhill (South East)	East Town Park	Haverhill South East
W-HH-W2	Haverhill (West) 2	<i>To be confirmed</i>	Haverhill West
W-HH-W1	Haverhill (West) 1	<i>To be confirmed</i>	Haverhill West
W-HH-W3	Haverhill (West) 3	Haverhill Rugby Club	Haverhill West
W-GWH	Great Whelnetham	Whelnetham Community Centre	Horringer
W-HAW	Hawstead	Hawstead Village Hall	Horringer
W-HOR	Horringer	Horringer Community Centre (Hall)	Horringer
W-ICK	Ickworth	Horringer Community Centre (Hall)	Horringer

Appendix A – Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Polling Place	District Ward
W-LWH	Little Whelnetham	Whelnetham Community Centre	Horringer
W-NOW	Nowton	Nowton Village Hall	Horringer
W-HER	Herringswell	Herringswell Village Hall	Iceni
W-REL1	Red Lodge Part 1	Red Lodge Millennium Centre	Iceni
W-REL2	Red Lodge Part 2	Red Lodge Sports Pavillion	Iceni
W-REL3	Red Lodge Part 3	Red Lodge Millennium Centre	Iceni
B-IXW	Ixworth	Ixworth Village Hall	Ixworth
B-IXT	Ixworth Thorpe	Ixworth Village Hall	Ixworth
W-GAZ	Gazeley	Gazeley Village Hall	Kentford & Moulton
W-HIG	Higham	Gazeley Village Hall	Kentford & Moulton
W-KEN	Kentford	St Mary`s Church (Kentford)	Kentford & Moulton
W-MOU	Moulton	Moulton Village Hall	Kentford & Moulton
W-ELV	Elveden	Elveden Village Hall	Lakenheath
W-ERI	Eriswell	Eriswell Reading Room	Lakenheath
W-LK-SF	Lakenheath (Sedge Fen)	Baptist Church Hall	Lakenheath
W-LK-VL1	Lakenheath (Village) 1	Lakenheath Methodist Hall	Lakenheath
W-LK-VL2	Lakenheath (Village) 2	Lakenheath Community Centre	Lakenheath
W-BAR	Barton Mills	Barton Mills Village Hall	Manor
W-CAV	Cavenham	The Club Room	Manor
W-FRE	Freckenham,	Freckenham Village Hall	Manor
W-TUD	Tuddenham St Mary	Tuddenham St Mary Village Hall	Manor
W-WOR	Worlington	Worlington Village Hall	Manor
W-ML-GH	Mildenhall (Great Heath)	St John`s Community Centre	Mildenhall Great Heath
W-ML-KM	Mildenhall (Kingsway & Market)	The Mildenhall Social Club	Mildenhall Kingsway & Market
W-ML-QU	Mildenhall (Queensway)	Mildenhall Hub	Mildenhall Queensway
B-BE-MI1	Bury St Edmunds (Minden) 1	Westbury Community Centre	Minden
B-BE-MI2	Bury St Edmunds (Minden) 2	Bridge Community Church	Minden
B-BE-MI3	Bury St Edmunds (Minden) 3	All Saints Church (Bury St Edmunds)	Minden
B-BE-MI4	Bury St Edmunds (Minden) 4	Westbury Community Centre	Minden
B-BE-MH3	Bury St Edmunds (Moreton Hall) 3	Skyliner Sports Centre	Moreton Hall

Appendix A – Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Polling Place	District Ward
B-BE-MH2	Bury St Edmunds (Moreton Hall) 2	Skyliner Sports Centre	Moreton Hall
B-BE-MH1	Bury St Edmunds (Moreton Hall) 1	Moreton Hall Community Centre	Moreton Hall
W-NM-E1	Newmarket (East) 1	All Saints Church (Newmarket)	Newmarket East
W-NM-E2	Newmarket (East) 2	St Agnes Church Hall	Newmarket East
W-NM-E3	Newmarket (East) 3	The Racing Centre	Newmarket East
W-NM-E4	Newmarket (East) 4	The Racing Centre	Newmarket East
W-NM-N2	Newmarket (North) 2	Exning Road WM Club	Newmarket North
W-NM-N1	Newmarket (North) 1	Studlands Park Sports & Social Club	Newmarket North
W-NM-W1	Newmarket (West) 1	King Edward VII Memorial Hall	Newmarket West
W-NM-W2	Newmarket (West) 2	Newmarket Leisure Centre	Newmarket West
W-NM-W3	Newmarket (West) 3	The NSDA Pavilion (Rugby Club)	Newmarket West
B-AMP	Ampton	Great Livermere Village Hall	Pakenham & Troston
B-GLI	Great Livermere	Great Livermere Village Hall	Pakenham & Troston
B-HN-ST	Honington (Station)	RAF Honington Community Centre	Pakenham & Troston
B-LLI	Little Livermere	Great Livermere Village Hall	Pakenham & Troston
B-PAK	Pakenham	Pakenham Village Hall	Pakenham & Troston
B-TIM	Timworth	Great Livermere Village Hall	Pakenham & Troston
B-TRO	Troston	Troston Village Hall	Pakenham & Troston
W-CUL	Culford	Culford Village Hall	Risby
W-FLE	Flempton	St Catherine`s Church (Flempton)	Risby
W-HEN	Hengrave	St Catherine`s Church (Flempton)	Risby
W-ICK	Icklingham	The Old School Hall Icklingham	Risby
W-ING	Ingham	St Bartholomew`s Church (Ingham)	Risby
W-LAC	Lackford	Lackford Community Meeting Room	Risby
W-RIS	Risby	Risby Village Hall	Risby
W-WST	West Stow	Culford Village Hall	Risby
W-WDW	Wordwell	Culford Village Hall	Risby
B-BCS	Bradfield Combust with Stanningfield	Methodist Church (Schoolroom)	Rougham
B-BSC	Bradfield St Clare	Bradfield St George Village Hall	Rougham

Appendix A – Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Polling Place	District Ward
B-BSG	Bradfield St George	Bradfield St George Village Hall	Rougham
B-RUS-N	Rushbrooke with Rougham (North)	Rougham Sports Hall	Rougham
B-RUS-S	Rushbrooke with Rougham (South)	Rougham Sports Hall	Rougham
B-BE-SG1	Bury St Edmunds (Southgate) 1	Victory Sports Ground	Southgate
B-BE-SG2	Bury St Edmunds (Southgate) 2	Southgate Community Centre	Southgate
B-BE-SO1	Bury St Edmunds (St Olaves) 1	Northumberland Avenue Methodist Church	St Olaves
B-BE-SO2	Bury St Edmunds (St Olaves) 2	New Bury Community Centre	St Olaves
B-STN	Stanton	Stanton Community Village Hall	Stanton
B-FAS	Fornham All Saints	Fornham All Saints Village Hall	The Fornhams & Great Barton
B-FSG	Fornham St Genevieve	Fornham St Martin Village Hall	The Fornhams & Great Barton
B-FSM	Fornham St Martin	Fornham St Martin Village Hall	The Fornhams & Great Barton
B-GB-N	Great Barton (North)	Great Barton Village Hall	The Fornhams & Great Barton
B-GB-SV	Great Barton (Severalls)	Great Barton Village Hall	The Fornhams & Great Barton
W-BEC1	Beck Row Part 1	Beck Row Parish Hub	The Rows
W-BEC2	Beck Row Part 2	Holywell Row Village Hall	The Rows
W-WER1	West Row Part 1	West Row Village Hall	The Rows
W-WER2	West Row Part 2	The Beeches	The Rows
B-BE-TG1	Bury St Edmunds (Tollgate) 1	Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre	Tollgate
B-BE-TG2	Bury St Edmunds (Tollgate) 2	Seventh Day Adventist Church	Tollgate
B-BE-TG3	Bury St Edmunds (Tollgate) 3	Anselm Community Centre	Tollgate
B-BE-WE1	Bury St Edmunds (Westgate) 1	West End Home Guard Club	Westgate
B-BE-WE2	Bury St Edmunds (Westgate) 2	West End Home Guard Club	Westgate
B-BE-WE3	Bury St Edmunds (Westgate) 3	West End Home Guard Club	Westgate
W-BRO	Brockley	Brockley Village Hall	Whepstead & Wickhambrook
W-DES	Denston	Denston Village Hall	Whepstead & Wickhambrook
W-HAK	Hawkedon	Hawkedon Village Hall	Whepstead & Wickhambrook
W-STF	Stansfield	Stansfield Village Hall	Whepstead & Wickhambrook
W-WHE	Whepstead	Whepstead Community Centre	Whepstead & Wickhambrook

Appendix A – Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Polling Place	District Ward
W-WIC2	Wickhambrook Part 2	Wickhambrook Memorial Social Centre	Whepstead & Wickhambrook
W-WIC1	Wickhambrook Part 1	Wickhambrook Memorial Social Centre	Whepstead & Wickhambrook
W-COW	Cowlinge	Cowlinge Village Hall	Withersfield
W-GBR	Great Bradley	Great Bradley Village Hall	Withersfield
W-GTH	Great Thurlow	Thurlow Village Hall	Withersfield
W-GWR	Great Wratting	Thurlow Village Hall	Withersfield
W-LBR	Little Bradley	Great Bradley Village Hall	Withersfield
W-LTH	Little Thurlow	Thurlow Village Hall	Withersfield
W-LWR	Little Wratting	Thurlow Village Hall	Withersfield
W-WIT	Withersfield	Withersfield Village Hall	Withersfield

Appendix B – Consultation summary

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Proposed Polling Place	District Ward	Consultation response
B-CWE	Coney Weston	Coney Weston Village Hall	Bardwell	Coney Weston Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements
W-DEN	Denham	Barrow Village Hall	Barrow	<p>Cllr Houlder commented on the proposed change of polling place for Denham stating that there is no need for restrictive measures and that those who physically cannot make it to a polling station have several alternative measures they may take.</p> <p>Cllr Cousins (Denham Parish Councillor) objected to the proposed change commenting that Denham is a separate to Barrow and should have its own Polling Station, that the current arrangements at the church work well and bring a high turnout and that the Barrow Polling station is over 1.5 miles from the furthest Denham households with no street lights or footpaths between Denham and Barrow. Cllr Cousins also commented that there is heating and lighting in St Mary's Church and although there are no toilet facilities, the Porta Loo provided serves adequately. He also commented that there is a disabled ramp that is used for any disabled voters.</p>
W-WES	Westley	Westbury Community Centre	Barrow	Westley resident requested that the Westley Polling Station be changed to The Westley Club. The resident was advised that this was the subject of an appeal which was being considered by the Electoral Commission
W-BR-C	Brandon (Central)	Royal British Legion (Brandon)	Brandon Central	Brandon Town Council - commented on the proposed option to change the polling place to The Church Institute and stated that the current arrangements are more suitable, and a change is not required.
W-BR-E	Brandon (East)	Brandon Heritage Centre	Brandon East	Brandon Town Council - supportive of the proposed change to poll at the Heritage Centre.
W-CHD	Chedburgh	The Erskine Centre	Chedburgh & Chevington	Chedburgh Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements

Appendix B – Consultation summary

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Proposed Polling Place	District Ward	Consultation response
W-CHV	Chevington	Chevington Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington	Chevington Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements
W-LID	Lidgate	Lidgate Village Hall	Chedburgh & Chevington	Lidgate Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements
W-CAV	Cavendish	Cavendish Memorial Hall	Clare, Hundon & Kedington	Cavendish Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements
W-EXN	Exning	Exning Community Church Hall	Exning	Cllr Jon London - supportive of the existing arrangements
W-HH-E1	Haverhill (East) 1	Chalkstone Community Centre	Haverhill East	<p>Haverhill Town Council commented that the room used in the Chalkstone Community Centre is too small and not accessible.</p> <p>Chalkstone Community Centre - confirmation that the Main Hall will be provided for use as a polling station at future elections which would be more accessible.</p>
W-HH-E2	Haverhill (East) 2	The New Croft	Haverhill East	<p>Cllr Pat Hanlon - commented on the turnout at the New Croft (Haverhill) polling place when compared to the turnout at a polling station in a neighbouring polling district. Cllr Hanlon suggested that this may be related to the ANPR car park charges in place at The New Croft, which are turned off on polling day, and whether this puts people off voting. Cllr Hanlon suggested Samuel Ward Academy as a potential alternative.</p> <p>Haverhill Town Council commented that voters may be put off by thinking car park charging was in place, and that it can be difficult in the evenings when the football is on at the venue.</p>

Appendix B – Consultation summary

Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Proposed Polling Place	District Ward	Consultation response
W-HH-N1	Haverhill (North) 1	New Cangle Community Primary School	Haverhill North	Haverhill Town Council commented on the growing number of new dwellings being built which are a long way from the Cangle school, which is awkwardly situated for these voters who are likely to drive to the school to vote.
W-HH-W2	Haverhill (West) 1 and 2		Haverhill West	<p>Cllr Margaret Marks - commented that the Rugby Club, which was proposed as an option for the new polling place is a long way for some residents, although it does afford good parking. Cllr Marks suggested whether the Army Cadet building on Withersfield Road would be an acceptable 2nd building, which also has parking and is an easy location for many of the residents.</p> <p>Cllr Andrew Martin - responded with no objection with the proposal to combine with the existing station at Haverhill Rugby Club, as long as the facility has the capacity to be able to deal with this.</p> <p>Haverhill Town Council commented that the Rugby Club, which was proposed as an option for the new polling place, may cause issues due to the additional traffic movements at school beginning/end times. It was instead suggested that the Army Cadet Centre, on Withersfield Road could be a good option</p>
W-HOR	Horringer	Horringer Community Centre (Hall)	Horringer	Horringer resident - supportive of the existing arrangements
W-WOR	Worlington	Worlington Village Hall	Manor	Worlington Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements

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Polling District prefix	Polling District name	Proposed Polling Place	District Ward	Consultation response
W-NM-E1	Newmarket (East) 1	All Saints Church (Newmarket)	Newmarket East	Cllr Sue Perry - enquired about the electorate forecast and suggested alternative options which could be considered if required.
W-CUL	Culford	Culford Village Hall	Risby	Culford resident - supportive of the existing arrangements
B-BE-TG1	Bury St Edmunds (Tollgate) 1	Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre	Tollgate	Bury St Edmunds resident - commented that the station is located on the edge of the ward, some distance from the nearest houses in this ward and that vehicle access is from another ward. The resident also commented on the signage for the polling station.
B-BE-WE1	Bury St Edmunds (Westgate) 1	West End Home Guard Club	Westgate	Cllr John Augustine - commented on the need for a new polling place to suggest the Westgate Primary School and if that is not possible then the suitable alternative would be the West End Home Guard Club.
W-BRO	Brockley	Brockley Village Hall	Whepstead & Wickhambrook	Brockley Parish Council - supportive of the existing arrangements