

Civic Leadership Working Group

Proposed Terms of Reference

Context

On 1 April 2019, Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council will be replaced with a new single West Suffolk Council.

At present, the civic leadership role is provided by the Chairman of Forest Heath, and the Mayor of St Edmundsbury. Each operates in line with a role description or protocol. The role of the civic leader will need to be re-defined for the new Council given the greater scale and new dynamics of the Council.

Civic Leadership is wider than one individual and is concerned with:

- how residents engage with and understand the Council;
- how the Council demonstrates the support for its communities right across the new District area, encourages civic pride in its area and promotes local democracy.
- how Civic Leadership supports the aims and ambitions of the Council

The civic leader is the figurehead of this work, alongside their Deputy and local ward Councillors.

Given the importance of this issue, both Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils established this Working Group to assess how civic leadership should be delivered under the new West Suffolk Council.

The group's work will need to take account of the legislative framework, most notably:

- a) The West Suffolk (Local Government Changes) Order 2018, which establishes how Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils will work together to support the transfer of functions to West Suffolk;
- b) The Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, which establishes the civic structure of principal Councils, and the ability to award local statuses;

Objective

The Civic Leadership Working Group has been established by the West Suffolk Shadow Council to:

- Determine how the Civic Leader will collaboratively work with local members, establishing those areas of activity and the role local members will play to complement the Civic Leader's role;
- Determine the role of Civic Leadership when assessing the objectives in the Single Council business plan, and how Civic Leadership should support the aims and ambitions of West Suffolk Council;
- Identify how the Civic Leadership should operate in conjunction with other civic leaders and dignitaries across West Suffolk, including the High Sheriff and Lord Lieutenant, and Mayors and Chairmen of Parish and Town Councils;
- Establish and identify the priorities for the Civic Leader's commitments, identifying where the Civic Leadership offers greatest value representing West Suffolk – for example supporting businesses, supporting community events, supporting arts and cultural events, charity fundraising, campaign work, promoting local democracy;
- Advise West Suffolk Council on how it might most effectively recognise the contributions of local citizens, groups and businesses;
- Advise West Suffolk Shadow Council on whether, given the role and function of the Civic Leadership, and the relative arguments, the Council should have a Mayor, which would require the Council to apply for Borough status.

How the Group will operate

In undertaking their work, the group shall:

- Consider supporting evidence and research undertaken on the potential role and remit of civic leaders, taking into account the role currently discharged by the Chairman and Mayor, the role undertaken by other civic leaders in West Suffolk, and the role of Civic Leadership elsewhere ;
- Carry out / Commission engagement with local stakeholders as to their views on the role and function of a Civic Leader for West Suffolk; this would be expected to include local residents; Parish and Town Councils; local community organisations; other public / third sector service providers and local businesses;
- Ensure that their work evaluates the context across the whole of West Suffolk, and views are taken into account from a cross-section of the West Suffolk community;

- Prepare reports to the Shadow Council on their work which draws clear conclusions for consideration.

The group itself shall not be delegated any functions or responsibilities of the Shadow Council or future West Suffolk Council, but instead make recommendations for the Council to consider.

Methodology

To determine the role of a civic leader within West Suffolk Council, the following work will be undertaken;

- Reviewing the current position in Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, considering the similarities and differences between both ways of working;
- Reviewing the role of ward members in terms of supporting local events, considering their current position and how this could be developed in the future;
- Review of all events attended in both councils and by whom over the last two years;
- Interviewing of councillors (consideration will be given to one-one meetings and focus groups as applicable);
- Public engagement with the community, to include, links with Community Action Suffolk, Suffolk Chambers of Commerce, Town and Parish Councils and Locality officers;
- Engagement with the business community through the Federation of Small Businesses and Suffolk Chambers of Commerce; and
- Review of national/international approaches to civic leadership (as relevant)

Group meetings

Meetings will usually be open to the public, however the group may wish to hold briefing sessions or informal debates which would not normally be in the public domain.

Composition of the Group

The group shall consist of:

- a) Up to 4 members of Forest Heath District Council, at least one of whom must be a former Chairman of the Council;
- b) Up to 4 members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council, at least one of whom must be a former Mayor of the Council

If there are fewer than 4 nominations from either Council, then the vacant seats shall be offered to members of the other Council that has filled its nominated places.

As a non-decision making body, there is no requirement to ensure political balance, and moreover the work of the group should be undertaken in a non-political way.

However, it is recommended that at least 1 member of the group should be from the non-Conservative groups, and also that membership should be reflective of membership across West Suffolk. Group leaders shall nominate members of the group to the Monitoring Officer, and thereon shall work collectively to determine the final membership.

Group leaders may nominate substitutes who shall be entitled to attend and participate fully at meetings of the group in the absence of members of the same group.

Support

The work of the group shall be supported by officers from Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils. There shall be no specific budget allocation for the review, although council officer time will be committed to the project. The group may make reasonable requests for resources should it wish.

Quorum

The quorum of the group shall be at least 5, to include at least 2 members of Forest Heath and 2 members of St Edmundsbury (including substitutes)

Frequency

Group meetings shall be convened at a frequency determined by the work to be undertaken. The group shall be responsible for maintenance of its own work programme and targets for delivering work.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The Chairman of the working group shall be elected from the members of the group as the first item of business at its first meeting. As the working group is expected to serve for a time limited period, it is not expected for the Chairmanship to be rotated. The Vice-Chairman shall be elected from the remaining members of the group. Should the Chairman be a member of Forest Heath, then the Vice-Chairman shall be a member of St Edmundsbury and vice-versa

Procedure

As a non-decision making body, the committee procedure rules and access to information do not apply. Meetings shall be managed by the Chairman, who may use their discretion to determine the most effective way to consider each item

before the committee, ultimately seeking to operate in a collaborative way towards gaining consensus on options.

Where consensus cannot be agreed, then the committee may report minority recommendations to the council at its discretion.

By default, members and officers should consider meetings and papers of the committee as confidential, on the grounds that reports may test options that could be considered controversial or sensitive, that ultimately the committee does not support. Further, confidentiality allows for a free and frank exchange of views. Officers should seek to identify to members the extent to which papers should be considered confidential, and how the work of the group is being communicated to the wider membership, stakeholders and residents.

Report

The activities of the Civic Leadership Working Group will be reported to the West Suffolk Shadow Council (via the Future Governance Steering Group), who should make all decisions there on. It is anticipated that the work of the group would be available for the Shadow Council to consider by the autumn of 2018.

Disbanding

The Civic Leadership Working Group shall be considered disbanded once it has made its final report to the West Suffolk Shadow Council.