

Focus Group Questions

Part 1: Questions for Councillors / dignitaries /Town and Parish Councils (either one-one or focus groups)

Introduction – what this session is about

- Creating a new Council for West Suffolk gives our communities an opportunity to help shape how it works, given the new council will cover a larger area.
- As part of this, we are looking at the role of the civic leader of the new council.
- This includes how our communities, businesses and local area may be visibly championed.
- We want to hear your views as people or organisations who are critical to this question, to help inform the debate.
- To clarify, the scope of today's discussion is West Suffolk's civic leadership. Whatever is decided will not affect the existing arrangements at parish or town level as they can co-exist. For example, Haverhill or Newmarket can continue to have town mayors, whatever the decision at the West Suffolk level.
- The first part of the focus group will focus on the roles and functions of civic leadership, and I'll now give you the background on that, then some questions.
- Once we've considered these issues, we'll then turn to the specific questions around borough or district status and chairman or mayor. But I'll give you more information before we get to those questions.

What is civic leadership?

- As you will know, all councillors demonstrate civic leadership as part of their role but it is the responsibility of one of our elected members each year to perform the role of civic leader, be it a chairman (for a district council) or mayor (for a borough council), who also ensures the smooth running of council meetings.
- The focus of our discussions today is on the civic leader of the Council rather than the Leader of the council who with his/her Cabinet is responsible for setting the direction of the council and delivering services and as such we will be talking about representing the Council and the associated ceremonial responsibilities rather than executive ones.

Questions

1) What do you think should be the priorities for civic leadership in West Suffolk?

If needed, please prompt the group with the following statements, by way of examples:

- *ensure the smooth running of council meetings in order to promote and increase public confidence in democracy*
- *be a visible champion for the council and community*
- *promote and represent West Suffolk and its communities locally, regionally and nationally*
- *promote local business*
- *promote local arts, heritage and culture*
- *give all residents, particularly children and young people, an understanding of citizenship and local institutions*
- *continue the history and heritage of West Suffolk*
- *engender a sense of local identity, belonging and pride*
- *promote community cohesion*
- *support local groups and community and voluntary organisations*
- *promote, support and champion specific issues for example, health and wellbeing, young people, older people, the environment, rural communities*

2) What would you like to see the civic leader doing to help address the issues faced by West Suffolk communities?

3) Thinking about your answer to question 2, which organisations should the civic leader work with to achieve this and how should they work together? For example, how should the civic leader engage with the current town/parish arrangements?

4) How can the civic leader of West Suffolk ensure they are approachable, visible to, and engage with a wide range of individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds?

5) How can West Suffolk Council most effectively recognise the contributions of local citizens, groups and businesses in the future?

For example (prompts if needed):

- *Chairman / Mayor's charity*
- *Letters of congratulation*
- *Awards*
- *Visits, openings*

Other ideas

What form should civic leadership in West Suffolk take?

- We are keen to hear your opinions on whether the Council should apply for borough status or be a district council and whether it should have a chairman or mayor *[Facilitators note "Please note – I am using the language of the current constitution and recognise this could change in the future"]*.
- Incidentally a borough does not automatically have to have a mayor, it can be headed by a chairman but a district council must be led by a chairman.

Borough or district status

- The new West Suffolk Council will legally be a district council. However, the new council will have the option of applying for a borough charter, to be a borough council. The charter would cover the whole of the area of the new council – i.e. the area previously covered by Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Civic Leader - Mayor or Chairman?

- We are also keen to hear your views on whether the civic leader of West Suffolk should be a chairman or a mayor.
- All Councils must have a designated member to chair meetings. For those councils who have borough status, this role can be taken by a mayor. If West Suffolk Council successfully applied for borough status, it could have either a mayor or chairman as its civic figurehead.
- So now, we'll discuss some questions to gain your views on borough or district status and mayor or chairman.
- *[Facilitator's note – "Do you feel you know enough about the similarities and differences between a mayor and a chairman to give opinions about it, or would you like further explanation? (refer to FAQs if so)]"*

6) What do you think would be the benefits (if any) for West Suffolk of being a borough council, instead of a district council, in terms of civic leadership?

7) What concerns would you have (if any) about West Suffolk being a borough council, instead of a district council, in terms of civic leadership?

Note to facilitator: These questions should also include thoughts on the benefits and concerns of remaining as a district.

Now, turning to the issue of chairman or mayor:

8) What do you think would be the benefits (if any) for West Suffolk of having a mayor, instead of a chairman, in terms of civic leadership?

9) What concerns would you have (if any) about West Suffolk having a mayor, instead of chairman, in terms of civic leadership?

Note to facilitator: These questions should also include thoughts on the benefits and concerns of having a chairman.

Part 2: Questions for all other focus groups with adults

Introduction – what this session is about

- Creating a new Council for West Suffolk gives our communities an opportunity to help shape how it works, given the council will cover a larger area.
- As part of this, we are looking at the role of the civic leader of the new council.
- This includes how our communities, businesses and local area may be visibly championed.
- We want to hear your views which will help inform the debate on:
 - whether the Council will apply for borough status or be a district council;
 - whether to have a chairman or mayor; and
 - the role of the new councillors and their civil leadership responsibilities.

[Facilitators note "Please note – I am using the language of the current constitution around mayor and chairman and recognise this could change in the future"].

- To clarify, the scope of today's discussion is West Suffolk's civic leadership. Whatever is decided will not affect the existing arrangements at parish or town level as they can co-exist. For example, Haverhill or Newmarket can continue to have town mayors, whatever the decision at the West Suffolk level.
- The first part of the focus group will focus on the roles and functions of civic leadership, and I'll now give you the background on that, then some questions.
- Once we've considered these issues, we'll then turn to the specific questions around borough or district status and chairman or mayor. But I'll give you more information before we get to those questions.

What is civic leadership?

- All councillors demonstrate civic leadership as part of their role but it is the responsibility of one of our elected councillors each year to perform the role of civic leader, be it a chairman (for a district council) or mayor (for a borough council), who also ensures the smooth running of council meetings.

- The civic leader of the council has a different role to that of the council Leaders themselves. In the case of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, the Leader of the council is the leader of the majority political group.
- As such, the Leader of the Council is primarily concerned with strategy and the executive functions of the council, such as running services, forming policy and taking investment decisions.
- The Chairman or Mayor can be from any political party and is voted in annually by the council as a whole.
- While still a ward councillor, the civic leader, when acting in their capacity as mayor or chairman, is primarily concerned with the council's ceremonial and community role. This might include representing the council at civic events such as Remembrance Day services and religious events, hosting other events and parades and supporting local voluntary, youth or charity groups.

Questions

- 1) Why is civic leadership important to you?
- 2) Have you been at events/functions with the Mayor / Chairman? What was the benefit of their attendance?
- 3) What do you think should be the priorities for civic leadership in West Suffolk?

If needed, please prompt the group with the following statements, by way of examples:

- *ensure the smooth running of council meetings in order to promote and increase public confidence in democracy*
- *be a visible champion for the council and community*
- *promote and represent West Suffolk and its communities locally, regionally and nationally*
- *promote local business*
- *promote local arts, heritage and culture*
- *give all residents, particularly children and young people, an understanding of citizenship and local institutions*
- *continue the history and heritage of West Suffolk*
- *engender a sense of local identity, belonging and pride*
- *promote community cohesion*
- *support local groups and community and voluntary organisations*
- *promote, support and champion specific issues for example, health and wellbeing, young people, older people, the environment, rural communities*

- 4) What would you like to see the civic leader doing to help address the issues faced by West Suffolk communities?
- 5) Thinking about your answer to question 4, which organisations should the civic leader work with to achieve this and how should they work together? For example, how should the civic leader engage with the current town/parish arrangements?
- 6) How can the civic leadership of West Suffolk ensure they engage with and support a wide range of individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds?
- 7) How can West Suffolk Council most effectively recognise the contributions of local citizens, groups and businesses in the future?

For example (prompts if needed):

- *Chairman / Mayor's charity*
- *Letters of congratulation*
- *Awards*
- *Visits, openings*
- *Other ideas*

What form should civic leadership in West Suffolk take?

- We are keen to hear your opinions on whether the Council should apply for borough status or be a district council and whether it should have a chairman or mayor?
- Incidentally, a borough does not automatically have to have a mayor. It can be headed by a chairman but a district council must be led by a chairman.

Borough or district status?

- The new West Suffolk Council will legally be a district council. However, the new council will have the option of applying for a borough charter, to be a borough council. The charter would cover the whole of the area of the new council – i.e. the area previously covered by Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Civic Leader - Mayor or Chairman?

- We are also keen to hear your views on whether the civic leader of West Suffolk should be a chairman or a mayor.
- All Councils must have a designated member to chair meetings. For those councils who have borough status, this role can be taken by a mayor. If West Suffolk Council successfully applied for borough status, it could have either a mayor or chairman as its civic figurehead.
- So now, we'll discuss some questions to gain your views on borough or district status and mayor or chairman
- *[Facilitator's note – "Do you feel you know enough about the similarities and differences between a mayor and a chairman to give opinions about it, or would you like further explanation? (refer to FAQs if so)]"*

8) What do you think would be the benefits (if any) for West Suffolk of being a borough council, instead of a district council, in terms of civic leadership?

9) What concerns would you have (if any) about West Suffolk being a borough council, instead of a district council, in terms of civic leadership?

Note to facilitator: These questions should also include thoughts on the benefits and concerns of remaining as a district.

Now, turning to the issue of chairman or mayor:

10) What do you think would be the benefits (if any) for West Suffolk of having a mayor, instead of a chairman, in terms of civic leadership?

11) What concerns would you have (if any) about West Suffolk having a mayor, instead of a chairman, in terms of civic leadership?

Note to facilitator: These questions should also include thoughts on the benefits and concerns of having a chairman.

Part 3: Questions for young people's focus groups

Introduction – what this session is about

- Creating a new Council for West Suffolk gives our communities an opportunity to help shape how it works, given the new council will cover a larger area.
- As part of this, we are looking at the role of the civic leader of the new council.
- This includes how our communities, businesses and local area may be visibly championed.
- We want to hear your opinions on whether the Council should apply for borough status or be a district council and whether it should have a chairman or a mayor [*Facilitator's note "Please note I am using the language of the current council constitution – Mayor and Chairman – but recognise this could change in the future"*]
- Just to be clear, we're talking about the arrangements for the whole of West Suffolk today, not individual towns like Haverhill and Newmarket who have mayors of their own. Their arrangements will stay the same whatever is decided.
- The first part of the focus group will focus on the roles and functions of civic leadership, and we'll now go through the background on that, then some questions.
- Once we've talked about that, we'll cover some more specific questions about whether West Suffolk should be a borough council or a district council and whether it should have a mayor or a chairman. But I'll give you some more information before we get to those questions.

What is civic leadership?

Have a discussion with the group and use analogy of Chair of Governors and Headteacher – figures of authority examples.

- All councillors demonstrate civic leadership as part of their role but it is the responsibility of one of our elected members each year to perform the role of civic leader, be it a chairman or mayor, who also ensures the smooth running of council meetings.
- The civic leader of the council has a different role to that of the Council Leaders themselves. In the case of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, the Leader of the council is the leader of the majority political group.
- The Chairman or Mayor can be from any political party and is voted in by the council as a whole.

- As such, the Leader of the Council is primarily concerned with the executive functions of the council, such as running services, forming policy and taking investment decisions.
- While still a ward councillor, the civic leader, when acting in their capacity as mayor or chairman, is primarily concerned with the council's ceremonial and community role. This might include representing the council at civic events such as Remembrance Day services and religious events, hosting other events and parades and supporting local voluntary, youth or charity groups.

Discuss Suffolk Assembly of Youth – importance of having a say

Discuss what a Chair or Mayor do – opening events, projects, figure head etc

Questions

12) Why is civic leadership important to you?

13) Have you been at events/functions with the mayor / chairman? What do you think was the benefit of them attending?

14) What do you think should be the priorities for civic leadership in West Suffolk?

If needed, please prompt the group with the following statements, by way of examples:

- *ensure the smooth running of council meetings in order to promote and increase public confidence in democracy*
- *be a visible champion for the council and community*
- *promote and represent West Suffolk and its communities locally, regionally and nationally*
- *promote local business*
- *promote local arts, heritage and culture*
- *give all residents (including children and young people) an understanding of citizenship and local organisations*
- *continue to celebrate the history and heritage of West Suffolk encourage a sense of local identity, belonging and pride*
- *promote community cohesion*
- *support local groups and community and voluntary organisations*
- *promote, support and champion specific issues for example, health and wellbeing, facilities and opportunities for young people or older people, the environment, rural communities*

15) What would you like to see the civic leader doing to help address the issues faced by West Suffolk communities?

16) Thinking about your answer to question 4, which organisations should the civic leader work with to achieve this and how should they work together? For example, how should the civic leader engage with the current town/parish arrangements

17) How can the civic leadership of West Suffolk ensure they engage with and support a diverse range of communities?

18) How can West Suffolk Council most effectively recognise the contributions of local citizens, groups and businesses in the future?

For example (prompts if needed):

- *Chairman / Mayor's charity*
- *Letters of congratulation*
- *Awards*
- *Visits, openings*
- *Other ideas*

What form should civic leadership in West Suffolk take?

- We are keen to hear your opinions on whether the Council should apply for borough status or be a district council and whether it should have a mayor or a chairman.
- Just so we're clear – a borough does not automatically have to have a mayor. It can be headed by a chairman but a district council must be led by a chairman.

Borough or district status?

- So, the new West Suffolk Council will legally be a district council. However, the new council will have the option of applying for a borough charter, to be a borough council. The charter would cover the whole of the area of the new council – i.e. the area previously covered by Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Civic Leader - Mayor or Chairman?

Use Chair or Mayor slide – can the YP identify the difference using



Chair or Mayor.pptx

photos. Discuss.

- We are also keen to hear your views on whether the civic leader of West Suffolk should be a chair or a mayor.
- All Councils must have a designated councillor to chair meetings. chairman. For some councils, who have Borough status, this role can be taken by a mayor. If West Suffolk Council successfully applied for borough status, it could have either a mayor or chairman as its civic figurehead.
- So now, we'll discuss some questions to gain your views on borough or district status and mayor or chairman.

19) What do you think would be the benefits (if any) for West Suffolk of being a borough council, instead of a district council, in terms of civic leadership?

20) What concerns would you have (if any) about West Suffolk being a borough council, instead of a district council, in terms of civic leadership?

Note to facilitator: These questions should also include thoughts on the benefits and concerns of remaining as a district.

Now, turning to the issue of Chairman or Mayor:

21) What do you think would be the benefits (if any) for West Suffolk of having a mayor, instead of a chairman, in terms of civic leadership?

22) What concerns would you have (if any) about West Suffolk having a mayor, instead of a chairman, in terms of civic leadership?

Note to facilitator: These questions should also include thoughts on the benefits and concerns of remaining as a district.

Potential prompts to discuss in terms of the pros and cons of Mayor or Chairman:

- Cost
- Relevance to 21st century Britain
- Retaining a sense of history and heritage
- Visibility
- Bringing in tourism, investment, business opportunities