

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held virtually via **Microsoft Teams** live remote meetings platform on **Tuesday 15 December 2020** at **6.30 pm**.

Present **Councillors**

Chair Brian Harvey

Vice Chair Margaret Marks

Richard Alecock	Andy Drummond	David Palmer
Michael Anderson	Mary Evans	Joanna Rayner
John Augustine	Robert Everitt	Karen Richardson
Trevor Beckwith	Stephen Frost	David Roach
Mick Bradshaw	Susan Glossop	Marion Rushbrook
Sarah Broughton	John Griffiths	Ian Shipp
Simon Brown	Pat Hanlon	Andrew Smith
Tony Brown	Diane Hind	David Smith
Carol Bull	Ian Houlder	John Smith
John Burns	Paul Hopfensperger	Karen Soons
Mike Chester	Beccy Hopfensperger	Clive Springett
Patrick Chung	James Lay	Peter Stevens
Max Clarke	Victor Lukaniuk	Peter Thompson
Terry Clements	Elaine McManus	Jim Thorndyke
Simon Cole	Sara Mildmay-White	Don Waldron
Jason Crooks	Andy Neal	Cliff Waterman
Dawn Dicker	David Nettleton	Ann Williamson
Roger Dicker	Robert Nobbs	Phil Wittam

95. **Welcome**

The Chair formally opened the meeting and welcomed all persons present including those that were viewing the meeting externally via the live broadcast, to this virtual meeting of Council.

96. **Meeting Facilitation**

Leah Mickleborough, Service Manager (Democratic Services), was acting as facilitator for the meeting where support was felt necessary, and upon being invited to do so, assisted the Chair in detailing the housekeeping matters and guidance as to how the meeting would operate within the virtual setting.

97. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

98. **Chair's announcements**

The Chair reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 29 September 2020.

The Chair drew attention to the complimentary comments he had received from members of the public regarding the outstanding efforts of staff at West Suffolk Council, specifically in response to the impacts of the pandemic. Particular recognition was given to the Families and Communities Team for their support to vulnerable persons, and to the Parks and Landscapes Team for keeping the parks, open spaces and public toilets located within the parks maintained to a very high standard.

99. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rachel Hood, Lisa Ingwall-King, Aaron Luccarini, Joe Mason, Jim Meikle and Richard Rout.

Councillor James Lay was in attendance by viewing the live broadcast only. This unfortunately meant he was unable to partake in any debate or any votes, neither electronically nor verbally. Councillor Lay's votes are therefore recorded as abstentions.

The Chair paid tribute to Councillors Ingwall-King and Meikle who were currently unwell. Members joined the Chair in wishing them a speedy recovery.

100. **Declarations of interests**

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

101. **Leader's statement (paper number: COU/WS/20/014)**

Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/20/014.

In his introductory remarks:

- a. **Covid-19:** Councillor Griffiths made reference to his involvement with the Local Outbreak Engagement Board meetings, which was the cross-partner body co-ordinating the county-wide response to Covid-19 across Suffolk. The situation was constantly evolving and it was expected that the Government would make an announcement regarding changes to the present tier arrangements on 16 December 2020. Councillor Griffiths urged everyone to adhere to the guidelines to control the spread of the virus.
- b. **Business Support Grants:** Councillor Griffiths informed that new Covid-19 Tier 2 and Tier 3 Business Support Grants would be available for eligible businesses to apply for in the coming days. Final details

were awaited but the Council was ready to make payments once the launch date was announced and grant allocations were received.

- c. **Barley Homes:** Councillor Griffiths made reference to Cabinet's approval of the revised Barley Homes Business Plan 2020 and that it was encouraging to see good progress had been made with much needed housing, including affordable homes, now underway with construction commencing on two sites in Haverhill. Work to bring forward two further sites agreed at College Heath Road, Mildenhall, and School Lane, Great Barton was also continuing. The loan facility had been extended to take advantage of a new opportunity identified in Rougham and to explore other potential pipeline sites.
- d. **Homelessness funding:** Councillor Griffiths reported that the Council had secured over £600,000 in homelessness funding from the Government, and working with partners, Sanctuary Supported Living, had been awarded significant grants from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme. These grants would be used to provide extra support for those with additional support needs, and for providing additional units of temporary accommodation. Since the first lockdown in March 2020, the Council had helped more than 520 households, including a significant number of rough sleepers, with the provision of housing advice and support.
- e. **Leisure:** Councillor Griffiths highlighted the need for good leisure facilities and emphasised the importance of integrating community health and leisure facilities to achieve better health benefits and outcomes. Combined health and leisure facilities would be a key part of the £1.97 million refurbishment of Brandon Leisure Centre. Support had been given to Abbeycroft Leisure during these difficult times in the form of providing a Covid-19 loan facility, and details were awaited on the Government's national leisure support grant and which aimed to provide financial support to leisure trusts such as Abbeycroft.
- f. **Thanks:** Councillor Griffiths placed his thanks on record to all staff of West Suffolk Council for their sterling efforts over the past year, including drawing attention to the tremendous success of new initiatives put in place on Haverhill market. He also recognised the successes of the other markets within the district.

The Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **National award achievements for the West Suffolk Operational Hub:** Councillor Griffiths agreed that the site for the Waste Transfer Station (WTS) had originally been identified by Suffolk County Council at a site at Rougham Hill, Bury St Edmunds; however, due to a number of factors and following thorough investigations and a detailed site selection process, the proposal for a combined WTS, depot and Household Waste and Recycling Centre was agreed for the now existing site of the Operational Hub on Fornham Road. The Leader acknowledged the contributions of numerous partners, and the community, that had helped shape the project as it progressed to the

construction phase. The Council had taken the decision to consult extremely thoroughly with stakeholders, community groups and individuals and this had resulted in positive engagement to achieve in a superb fit-for-purpose, future-proofed facility.

- b. **Collection of council tax:** Councillor Griffiths stated that a written reply would be provided in response to a question put by Councillor Diane Hind, to confirm the support being provided by Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership regarding the collection of council tax and advising how to register for council tax support. The response would be circulated to all members.
- c. **Homes for Life:** Councillor Griffiths stated that there may be potential for itemising the existing number of 'homes for life' in the district and those that may be required in the future; however it was important to ensure the data collated complied with the correct definition and those identified for the future were the right kind of homes required.
- d. **Haverhill:** Councillor Griffiths shared Councillor John Burns sentiments regarding the success of the market in Haverhill and the new initiatives adopted; and the marketing for the homes on the new Barely Homes' sites was in hand.
- e. **Temporary Accommodation:** Councillor Griffiths stated that a written reply would be provided in response to a question put by Councillor Max Clarke, in respect of the number of temporary accommodation units the Council had available throughout the year; and the number of units of supported accommodation the Council had and whether West Suffolk Council had been given any indication that a Covid-19 recession may affect its capability to support vulnerable people in the future. The response would be circulated to all members.

(Councillor Roger Dicker left the meeting during the consideration of this item at 7.01pm.)

102. **Public participation**

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

1. **Marilyn Sayer of Fornham St Martin**, made a statement in connection with the consultation process undertaken by the Council on the West Suffolk Local Plan Issues and Options. Mrs Sayer expressed concern that there was a lack of engagement with the public and despite Covid-19 restrictions being in place, she felt that more could have been done to reach communities, particularly those individuals that were not proficient with the use of online technology.

In response, Councillor David Roach, Portfolio Holder for Local Plan Development and Delivery, stated the reasons for undertaking the consultation at this time, and that with the advent of Covid-19, this had meant different methods of consultation had been utilised at a time when face to face meetings were discouraged as a precautionary measure to ensure communities remained safe.

A range of promotional material had been utilised, which included both electronic and more traditional methods such as posters and flyers in order to reach out to the community in a safe way. The Council's offices had needed to remain closed to the public during the pandemic, but Local Plan literature had been placed in libraries, sports centres and supermarkets throughout West Suffolk area. A virtual exhibition room was also created and to date had been popular with respondents.

Councillor Roach also listed the engagement undertaken with town and parish councils; statutory consultees, stakeholders and other harder to reach groups. He explained that a detailed written response on the consultation process would be provided to Mrs Sayer, and a copy would also be provided to all members.

The Chair allowed a supplementary question to be asked, and in response, Councillor Roach stated that it was imperative that the council offices were kept as Covid-secure as possible (and reducing the chance of them being involved in a local outbreak). A number of staff have needed to continue to work in them throughout 2020 to ensure services kept operating, including partner organisations such as the Job Centre, Adult and Children's Care, Public Health England and Community Nurses. In order to keep premises Covid-secure, any public access to them would have had to be supervised and controlled by staff. Opening offices to the public and providing staff to support exhibitions would have not been consistent with either Government guidelines or the Council's need to protect essential public services.

(Councillor Peter Thompson joined the meeting during the consideration of this item.)

103. **Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report number: COU/WS/20/015)**

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/20/015.

A. Referrals from Cabinet: 10 November 2020

1. West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) 2021 to 2022

Approval was sought for the West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) 2021 to 2022.

Each year the Council was required to review its LCTRS. Report number CAB/WS/20/067 set out the various considerations with regard to the application of the scheme in 2021 to 2022. Given these considerations, Cabinet was recommending to continue with the current scheme in 2021 to 2022, before undertaking a more comprehensive review early next year that took into account learning from Covid-19. At this point a range of options may be considered for possible consultation. This would also bring stability to customers' household budgets as they recovered or managed the impact of Covid-19.

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

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Mike Chester, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 52 for the motion, none against and 3 abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That:

1. the review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for 2020 to 2021, as outlined in Report number: CAB/WS/20/067, be noted; and
2. the retention of the existing Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for 2021 to 2022, be agreed.

2. Council Tax Technical Changes 2021 to 2022

(The following local non-pecuniary interests were declared by the following members:

- Councillor John Griffiths as a director and shareholder of a company that rented out properties in the district. He remained in the meeting but abstained from the vote.
- Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger as the owner of an empty property located within the district. She remained in the meeting but abstained from the vote.
- Councillor Paul Hopfensperger as the owner of an empty property located within the district. He remained in the meeting but abstained from the vote.
- Councillor Victor Lukaniuk as a landlord of properties in the district. He remained in the meeting and voted thereon.
- Councillor Margaret Marks as a landlord of properties in the district. She remained in the meeting but abstained from the vote.
- Councillor Karen Soons as the owner of an empty property located within the district. She remained in the meeting but abstained from the vote.
- Councillor Don Waldron as the owner of an empty property located within the district. He remained in the meeting but abstained from the vote.)

Approval was sought for the West Suffolk Council Tax Technical Changes Scheme for the 2021 to 2022 financial year.

Since April 2013, councils had the discretion to charge up to 100 per cent for some previously exempt properties, to charge up to 100 per cent in respect of furnished empty properties (usually referred to as holiday homes), to charge up to 100 per cent in respect of second homes and to charge up to 50 per cent (100 per cent from April 2019) empty homes premium for properties that had been empty for over two years. These discretions, which were

provided under sections 11a and 11b of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, were described in this and previous council reports as the 'Council Tax Technical Changes'.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council including that contained within Section 2 of Report number: CAB/WS/20/068 (and reproduced in Report number: COU/WS/20/015), was a table setting out the current scheme for continuation from April 2021. No changes had been proposed, or recommended by Cabinet, to the existing scheme.

Properties that fell into specific categories and did not attract the empty homes premium were listed in paragraph 2.3 of Report number: COU/WS/20/015.

Some concern was expressed that the 100 per cent discount for an empty, substantially unfurnished property only applied for one week as it was sometimes difficult for landlords to move new tenants in within such a short timescale. Other questions were asked in connection with the exemption that applied to properties that were empty because of specific circumstances such as the owner being in care, prison or being the executor of an estate where probate had been granted (time limited). In response, Councillor Broughton explained that this was not a newly proposed scheme and the premiums and exemptions that applied to empty properties had been in place for some time. Landlords were usually given at least a month's notice of an existing tenant leaving, which should be sufficient time to seek a new tenant. The scheme was about getting empty properties back into use as quickly as possible. On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 36 for the motion, 12 against and 7 abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That the continuation of the West Suffolk Council Tax Technical Changes Scheme, as set out in Section 2 of Report number CAB/WS/20/068, be approved, and, that the Special Provision Discounts and Premiums continue to apply until such time as any amendments are made.

3. Council Tax Base for Tax Setting Purposes 2021 to 2022

Approval was sought for the council tax base for tax setting purposes for the 2021 to 2022 financial year.

The council tax base was the total taxable value at a point in time of all the domestic properties in the council's area. It was a yearly calculation and represented 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. The council tax base was used in the calculation of council tax, further details regarding which was set out in Report number: CAB/WS/20/069.

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

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Patrick Chung, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 53 for the motion, none against and 2 abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That:

1. The tax base for 2021 to 2022, for the whole of West Suffolk be 55,339.97 equivalent Band D dwellings, and for each of the predecessor areas be: Forest Heath 18,572.56 and St Edmundsbury 36,767.41, as detailed in paragraph 2.6 of Report number CAB/WS/20/069.
2. The tax base for 2021 to 2022 for the different parts of its area, as defined by parish or special expense area boundaries, be as shown in Appendix 3 of Report number CAB/WS/20/069.
3. The Assistant Director (Resources and Performance) be given delegated responsibility to make changes to the tax base figures as a result of any Government announcements pertaining to local council tax support as detailed in paragraph 2.5 of Report number CAB/WS/20/069.

B. Referrals from Cabinet: 8 December 2020

Following the publication of the agenda and papers for this meeting, which took place before the Cabinet meeting was held on 8 December 2020, the Chair confirmed that no changes had been made to the recommendations contained in the referral report.

1. Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget

Approval was sought for budget proposals for inclusion in the Council's medium-term financial plans.

In July 2020, Cabinet had agreed proposed next steps and principles for future financial planning across the medium term (Report number: CAB/WS/20/043). The approach was designed to enable the Council to respond effectively to changing circumstances while maintaining a medium-term focus on the Council's financial sustainability.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including thanking the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee for its thorough consideration of the proposed key budget assumptions, as set out in Section 2 and Table 1 of Report number: PAS/WS/20/019) and for subsequently recommending their approval to Cabinet and Council.

In response to a question in connection with the Council's levels of reserves in the different reserve categories, Councillor Broughton informed Council that a written reply would be provided. The response would be circulated to all members.

The recommendations contained in the report, together with any further recommendations emanating from the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in the coming weeks, would be incorporated into the budget setting process, the composite report for which would be considered by Cabinet and Council in February 2021.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Clive Springett, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 52 for the motion, none against and 3 abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That the proposals as detailed in Section 2 and Table 1 of Report number PAS/WS/20/019, be included in the medium-term financial plans.

2. Financial Resilience (September 2020)

Approval was sought for the Financial Resilience Report for the first half of the 2020 to 2021 financial year from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.

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

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Marion Rushbrook, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 52 for the motion, 1 against and 2 abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That the Financial Resilience Report (September 2020), as contained in Report number: FRS/WS/20/003, be approved.

104. Any other urgent business

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

105. Conclusion

On conclusion of the meeting, the Chair thanked all present for their attendance at this virtual meeting of Council. The live broadcast subsequently ended at this point.

The meeting concluded at 7.55 pm

Signed by:

Chair
