

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 22 February 2022** at **6.30 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

**Chair** Margaret Marks

**Vice Chair** Mike Chester

John Augustine	Diane Hind	Joanna Rayner
Sarah Broughton	Ian Houlder	Karen Richardson
Simon Brown	Paul Hopfensperger	David Roach
Tony Brown	Beccy Hopfensperger	Richard Rout
Carol Bull	James Lay	Marion Rushbrook
John Burns	Aaron Luccarini	Andrew Smith
Max Clarke	Victor Lukaniuk	Karen Soons
Nick Clarke	Birgitte Mager	Sarah Stamp
Simon Cole	Joe Mason	Lance Stanbury
Roger Dicker	Elaine McManus	Peter Stevens
Andy Drummond	Sara Mildmay-White	Peter Thompson
Robert Everitt	Andy Neal	Jim Thorndyke
Stephen Frost	David Nettleton	Julia Wakelam
Susan Glossop	Robert Nobbs	Cliff Waterman
Pat Hanlon	Colin Noble	Nick Wiseman
Brian Harvey	Sarah Pugh	Phil Wittam

## 179. **Welcome and introduction**

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all persons present in the Conference Chamber. She explained the rationale behind the precautionary health and safety measures that remained in operation for this meeting which aimed to reduce and restrict the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

## 180. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 181. **Chair's announcements**

The Chair reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which she and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 14 December 2021.

Particular recognition was drawn to the excellent attendance at the Holocaust Memorial Service held in the Holocaust Memorial Peace Garden, Abbey Gardens on 27 January 2022.

182. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Richard Alecock, Michael Anderson, Trevor Beckwith, Mick Bradshaw, Patrick Chung, Jason Crooks, Dawn Dicker, John Griffiths, Rachel Hood, David Palmer, David Smith, Ian Shipp, Clive Springett and Don Waldron.

The Chair paid tribute to Councillors Alecock and Bradshaw who remained significantly unwell. All members joined the Chair in wishing them well in their recovery.

183. **Declarations of interests**

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

184. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/22/001)**

On behalf of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Deputy Leader, presented the Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/22/001

In her introductory remarks, Councillor Mildmay-White:

- a. **Storms:** thanked councillors and staff for their support in helping to keep residents safe during the recent storms. Special recognition was given to the emergency services and the Suffolk-wide emergency planning team.
- b. **Budget:** made references to the proposed budget for 2022 to 2023, which was to be considered later on the agenda.
- c. **Historical anomalies:** that work was being undertaken to look at historical anomalies between the former St Edmundsbury and St Forest Heath councils when West Suffolk Council was created. The proposed review would not only look at street lighting and other similar issues, as highlighted by other members but would look at the future role and relationships the Council could have with the district's town and parish councils.
- d. **COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF):** West Suffolk Council had received an allocation of £4 million from the CARF, and applications could now be made by eligible businesses. This funding was to be used to support businesses most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but who were not eligible for earlier business rates reliefs linked to COVID-19.
- e. **Easing of COVID-19 restrictions:** following the Prime Minister's recent announcement to further ease mandatory COVID-19

restrictions, the Council remained committed to its business continuity plans and would ease restrictions in line with these plans. This involved making better use of space within the office, adopting a flexible approach which would allow staff to work collaboratively on projects, as well as providing sufficient desks to enable staff to work individually. Capacity was not being reduced and would return to pre-pandemic levels; however, working patterns within the office would fluctuate depending on working practices of individuals and teams.

- f. **Environment:** the Council was continuing with implementing initiatives to protect and improve the environment, and tackle climate change. The West Stow Anglo Saxon Village had recently won the RAC Cooling Industry Awards 2021 Building Energy Project of the Year for its bespoke heating and cooling systems, which demonstrated a range of benefits and efficiencies.
- g. **New Community Centre:** was delighted to attend the opening of the new community centre on the Howard Estate, Bury St Edmunds. This was an excellent example of the community coming together to achieve a common goal. Supported by public bodies, this project to replace the former nearby out-dated centre was led by the New Bury Community Association.
- h. **Families and communities:** recognised the importance of the Council's priority to support families and communities, which included a significant budget investment in councillors' locality funding and the Community Chest grant scheme. Over £460,000 had recently been allocated to voluntary and social enterprise organisations throughout the district following applications received for the 2022 to 2023 round of Community Chest funding. Examples of organisations receiving funding and their valuable work were provided.
- i. **Community Governance Review (CGR):** reminded members that the deadline for receiving initial CGR submissions was 25 February 2022. Subject to Council approval on 22 March 2022, consultation would commence on the draft CGR recommendations thereafter.

The Deputy Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **Harmonisation process:** as stated in her introductory remarks, and upon invitation, explained by Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, the historic anomaly between the provision and cost of street lighting between the former Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury areas was to be analysed, together with other anomalies that remained between the two areas following the creation of West Suffolk Council. Details of that review would be announced shortly. It was a previous Council decision to harmonise council tax across the two predecessor authorities sooner than the required seven years. This had resulted in numerous benefits for residents across the entire district.

## 185. **Public participation**

The following members of the public had registered to speak under this agenda item:

1. **Nathan Loader** was not in attendance but had submitted a written question in connection with the proposed Haverhill North West relief road. Mr Loader had provided context to his question in respect of the road's connection to the planning permission granted for development of a strategic site to the north west of Haverhill and asked whether the programme of construction of the North West relief road, including the start and completion dates, was still on track for completion by 21 March 2023; and if not, the nature of restrictions that would be imposed on both the North West and North East Haverhill construction sites.

The following response was provided by Councillor David Roach, Portfolio Holder for Planning:

"Outline planning permission SE/09/1283 for North West Haverhill includes planning permission for the construction of a relief road, residential development, a primary school, a local centre including retail and community uses, public open space and associated development. The S106 Obligation (legal agreement) for the development includes the requirement that the relief road should be complete no later than five years after the commencement of development (21 March 2023) or before the construction of the 500<sup>th</sup> dwelling on the site whichever is the sooner.

No date for commencement of the relief road has been given yet but work continues to prepare for its commencement and with an estimated build time of nine months, officers from West Suffolk planning team and Suffolk County Council Highways team have confirmed that the relief road is still on track to be delivered before the March 2023 deadline.

There is no restriction relating to the construction of the relief road on the planning permission for the North East Haverhill (Great Wilsey) development granted under planning permission DC/15/2151/OUT. This was not deemed necessary by Suffolk Highways Authority at the time permission was granted given the timings of the restriction on the North West Haverhill consent, predicted capacities and delivery rates relating to the two developments taken as a whole and the existence of the NW Haverhill relief road bond.

The current completion rates for the two developments are 230 at North West Haverhill and at North East Haverhill their first completion was at the end of January 2022."

As Mr Loader was not in attendance, no supplementary question was asked arising directly from the reply. The above response would be emailed to Mr Loader following the meeting.

2. **James Sheen** asked a question in connection with the forthcoming ballot for the establishment of a new Business Improvement District (BID) in Haverhill, and whether the Council should abstain from exercising its right to

vote in the ballot as Mr Sheen felt the businesses of Haverhill should decide for themselves how their town should be promoted.

Councillor Susan Glossop, Portfolio Holder for Growth, thanked Mr Sheen for his question and stated that he would be provided with a written response.

As the question was not answered during the meeting, no supplementary question was asked arising directly from the reply.

The Chair thanked Mr Sheen for attending and welcomed his presence for the remainder of the meeting should he wish to do so.

(Councillor Roger Dicker left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

186. **Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report number: COU/WS/22/002)**

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/22/002.

**A. Referrals from Cabinet: 8 February 2022**

**1. Financial Resilience – Strategy Statement 2022 to 2023 and Treasury Management Code of Practice**

Approval was sought for the Financial Resilience - Strategy Statement 2022 to 2023 and the Treasury Management Code of Practice.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice required that, prior to the start of the financial year the Council should formally approve a Treasury Management Policy Statement and Investment Strategy, setting out the Council's treasury management policy and strategy for the forthcoming year.

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022 to 2023 was attached as Appendix 1 to Report number: FRS/WS/22/002, and the Treasury Management Code of Practice attached as Appendix 2.

The report also included additional supporting information on treasury advisors; borrowing strategy; investment strategy counterparty ratings and interest rate projections.

On 27 January 2022, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) considered the report and asked various questions relating to the setting of net costs, capital and revenue limits and the borrowing strategy, to which responses were provided. In particular, the Committee discussed the Treasury Management Code of Practice (Appendix 2) and referred to page 24 of the Code and the section which related to 'Use of External Brokers/Advisors/Fund Managers'. The Committee expressed some reservations around the wording used within that section, in that the Council 'will' employ the services of other organisations to assist it in the field of

treasury management. The Committee recommended that this word be replaced with 'may', so that the Council had the flexibility around the use of services of other organisations.

The Cabinet had supported the approval of the Code of Practice, including the proposed amendment, and approval of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022 to 2023, as summarised above.

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Ian Houlder, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 45 for the motion, none against and four abstentions, it was

**Resolved:**

That:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022 to 2023 as set out in Appendix 1 to Report number: FRS/WS/22/002, be approved.
2. The Treasury Management Code of Practice, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report number: FRS/WS/22/002, be approved, subject to an amendment within the section of the Code of Practice entitled 'Use of External Brokers / Advisors / Fund Managers', with the removal of the word 'will', to be replaced with the word 'may', to ensure that the Council has the flexibility on the use of services of other organisations.

**2. Treasury Management Report (December 2021)**

Approval was sought for the Treasury Management Report for the third quarter of the 2021 to 2022 financial year.

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

On the motion of Councillor Broughton, seconded by Councillor Brian Harvey, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 45 for the motion, none against and four abstentions, it was

**Resolved:**

That the Treasury Management Report (December 2021), as contained in Report number: FRS/WS/22/001, be approved.

**3. Budget and Council Tax Setting 2022 to 2023 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2026**

The recommendations emanating from the Cabinet's consideration of this report, together with its approval of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee's recommendation contained in Report number: CAB/WS/22/005 'Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget' were

integrated within the main budget setting report, which was considered next on this agenda.

No decision was therefore required at this stage.

187. **Budget and Council Tax Setting 2022 to 2023 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2026 (Report number: COU/WS/22/003)**

Council considered this report, which presented the proposals for Budget and Council Tax Setting in 2022 to 2023 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022 to 2026.

West Suffolk Council had an exemplary track record in robust financial management which had meant it continued to deliver high quality services as well as meeting the strategic vision of the authority.

This was despite a series of challenges. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic which had not only reduced income (Government policy had been that councils create income to supplement reduction in national funding) but also costs to the Council in playing its role to support communities and businesses. National finances had been reduced significantly over the last decade for local councils and added burdens had been placed on authorities too during this time.

The 2022 to 2023 budget had been created not only to be balanced and sustainable but as an investment in the priorities of the district's residents and businesses. It was designed to make the communities of West Suffolk greener, healthier and more prosperous.

Members considered the report in detail, which included the following issues for securing a balanced budget for 2022 to 2023 and plans for the medium term from 2022 to 2026, together with corresponding detailed appendices:

- Section 1: Summary: which included reference to the Council's proposed new £9 million investment in a range of initiatives to help meet priorities that would contribute to achieving the aspiration of zero carbon emissions by 2030; progressing its health and wellbeing agenda; and a proposed £1.3 million (2022 to 2026) for the upkeep of the district's open spaces, parks and other leisure attractions.
- Section 2: Context: which included reference to the Council's robust financial planning and management enabling the Council to deliver both services and the strategic aims of West Suffolk despite the pressures on local government finances; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council's finances, including the role of the Council in supporting residents and businesses throughout the pandemic; 'Investing in our Growth Agenda'; the Council's transformation programme; and further detail on the Council's plans to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- Section 3: Provisional local government finance settlement: which included reference to the Revenue Support Grant and Rural Services Delivery Grant; the Lower Tier Services Grant; the new 2022 to 2023 Services Grant; the future of New Homes Bonus; the

- expected cessation of the Sales, Fees and Charges Lost Income Reimbursement scheme; business rates and business rates reliefs; Transitional Relief and Supporting Small Business Relief; Collection Fund deficits; council tax referendum limits; and support for energy prices – the council tax energy rebate.
- Section 4: Council tax for 2022 to 2023
- Section 5: Setting the budget – 2022 to 2023 and across the medium term to 2025 to 2026: which included reference to inflation assumptions assumed in the MTFS; fees and charges (as approved by Cabinet on 8 February 2022); delivering a sustainable future beyond 2022 to 2023.
- Section 6: Capital programme 2020 to 2025: which included reference to the planned capital expenditure over four years to 2025/2026; disposal of surplus assets.
- Section 7: Minimum revenue provision (MRP)
- Section 8: General fund balance
- Section 9: Earmarked reserves
- Section 10: Strategic priorities and MTFS reserve
- Section 11: Adequacy of reserves
- Section 12: Calculation of the council tax

Having acknowledged the issues highlighted above, Council noted that currently, council tax made up approximately one fifth of the authority's budget (exclusive of housing benefit) and therefore only contributed to a fifth of service delivery. West Suffolk Council charged around 11 percent of a local council tax payer's bill with the rest comprising precepts from the County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner as well as the relevant Parish or Town Council. It was recognised that any increase provided an extra burden on taxpayers but did mean the protection of vital services which would otherwise possibly have to be considered for reductions. Councillors were asked and expected by Government to look at local taxation levels to meet the authority's financial needs to support its communities and help future proof from financial uncertainty.

To help secure a balanced budget for 2022 to 2023, on 8 February 2022, the Cabinet recommended to Council that the level of Band D council tax for 2022 to 2023 be set at £187.11, an increase of £5 on the average West Suffolk council tax for 2021 to 2022. This recommendation was based upon the option to harmonise the council tax levels of the two predecessor areas (Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury) by 2022 to 2023. For 2022 to 2023 this represented an average Band D weekly increase of 22 pence (for the predecessor area of Forest Heath) and three pence (for the predecessor area of St Edmundsbury). Noting that just over 70 percent of West Suffolk residents were in bands A to C, these would actually see a lower increase.

Councillor Broughton drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including commending the finance team and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, together with staff and other members across the authority for their work in securing a balanced budget for 2022 to 2023 and for developing plans in the medium term. Recognition was also given to the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership, particularly for the additional work created for the partnership during the pandemic. Councillor Broughton duly summarised the extensive work that had been undertaken to reach this point



and the key proposals that contributed to securing a balanced budget for 2022 to 2023 and their significance in planning for the medium term.

A detailed debate ensued which included a number of comments, observations and questions, including:

- a. **Creation of £9 million net zero carbon budget:** The proposed creation of a new £9 million investment facility to demonstrate the Council's commitment to its previous declaration of an environment and climate emergency and to achieve its aspiration of meeting the Council's net zero emissions target by 2030. Examples were provided on the proposed initiatives contained in the budget that would help deliver a number of the recommendations identified by the Environment and Climate Change Taskforce and approved by Cabinet. This budget facility specifically allocated within the capital programme to deliver environmental projects were anticipated to deliver a 31 per cent carbon saving on Council operations, together with a return to the Council of two per cent after allowing for borrowing costs. Businesses and residents were encouraged to access Government-funded grant schemes for making energy efficiencies, where possible.
- b. **Western Way Development:** Whilst the Labour Group commended officers and staff for their support to communities during the past year and for the formulation of a balanced budget for 2022 to 2023, the Group felt it could not support approval of the budget due to consistent under-funding from central Government; and due to the capital expenditure allocated towards the proposed Western Way Development (WWD) project. It was questioned whether, in the current financial climate, with rising inflation, interest rates, energy costs and the cost of living in general, it was appropriate to proceed with the WWD at the present time. Examples were given of where, in the Labour Group's opinion, the proposed capital could potentially be better utilised or how the site could be alternatively redeveloped. Concern was also expressed regarding the need to undertake such substantial borrowing; the impact on the existing road network in the locality and the need to focus efforts on addressing services that required immediate improvement and support.

In response, Council was informed that following unanimous approval given for the full business case in September 2019, recognition had been given to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the context in which the Western Way Development would be delivered, which had changed significantly. It had therefore been appropriate to assess whether the tests set for the project in 2019 could still be met. Whilst the original masterplan for the site, the strategic case for the project, the design of the scheme, its highways provisions or the final mix of facilities did not require reconsideration, Council was asked in June 2021 to review the affordability of a deliverable scheme, and the appropriate safeguards that needed to be in place to secure delivery. The adjustments to the business case as a result of the review were subsequently approved by Council as the majority of members had been assured that each key area of the proposed scheme had been carefully reviewed against affordability, risk, safeguards and

deliverability. The adjusted flexible, phased approach within the parameters of the full business case and planning consent would enable the project to progress.

Emphasis was placed on the fact that at each gateway review, the relevant checks and balances would be assessed to ensure the project remained on track to proceed to the next stage.

The NHS were potential key public sector partners within the proposed development and emphasis was placed on the continued commitment the NHS had on partnership working with other public sector organisations and the provision of space within the Western Way Development would help achieve its aims and ambitions for undertaking a joined-up approach to delivering excellent care and health services within the community.

The Council had been working with the Highways Authority throughout the development of the proposed scheme. Working within the parameters of the masterplan for the site, planning consent had been given, which included measures required to be met by the Highways Authority and a travel plan was in place.

The majority of members remained confident that sufficiently robust safeguards were in place to mitigate the risks. To move forward with this exciting, innovative project required courage and leadership; however, it was recognised that through effective partnership working, better services and outcomes would be delivered for the residents of West Suffolk. The consensus was that organisations working collaboratively and holistically would lead to better outcomes for the residents of West Suffolk. Such outcomes included better health and wellbeing, economic and environmental benefits. A prime example of the successful co-location of services through the Hub approach were already being demonstrated following the opening of the Mildenhall Hub in summer 2021.

- c. **Swimming pool provision in the proposed new leisure centre (as part of the Western Way Development):** That following assessment of need, engagement with residents, dialogue with Sport England and Swim England which had resulted in the proposal for an eight-lane swimming pool for the new leisure centre, Councillor Paul Hopfensperger considered this remained unfit-for-purpose as he felt the pool would not be of sufficient size to accommodate major swim competitions.
- d. **Housing:** Whether New Homes Bonus could be allocated towards the provision of directly managed housing and for retrofitting poorly insulated and energy inefficient homes. In response, Council was informed that housing remained a key strategic priority of West Suffolk Council. Examples of where this priority was being met included the recent construction of two Barley Homes developments in Haverhill, including the provision of 30 percent affordable housing on both sites; together with highlighting that the Council's housing delivery target was currently being exceeded. The New Homes Bonus could be utilised

for directly managed housing; however, there were implications with this as the Council did not have its own housing stock. Three funding bids had been successful to deliver energy efficiencies to local housing. Access to the relevant grant could be made through an application process.

- e. **2022 to 2023 Capital Programme – Leisure Asset Management Plan Breakdown (Attachment D Appendix 2b): Motts Field (East Town Park) Haverhill:** The play area on this site was located within Haverhill South East ward and Councillor Tony Brown expressed his concern that the play area had been removed without consultation with him as ward member or seemingly those in the locality. He felt it was well-used by children of occupants of neighbouring flats and was disappointed that no consultation was undertaken before the decision was taken to close the play area. Officers would respond to Councillor Brown's comments accordingly.
- f. **Families and Communities:** This area remained a strategic priority of the Council and recognition was given to the work undertaken with partners, town and parish councils, and other key stakeholders to help improve the lives of residents in the community. Examples were provided, including that it was being proposed that the 2022 to 2023 budget should include an allocation of around £650,000 for the provision of Community Chest funding and councillor locality budgets, for granting to organisations and groups striving to make a difference in their communities.
- g. **Brandon:** The perceived lack of investment in Brandon by local ward members who felt that West Suffolk Council was not supporting prosperity for Brandon. In response, it was reiterated that Brandon Leisure Centre had recently benefitted from an almost £2 million investment to upgrade its current leisure offer. Members sympathised with the frustrations regarding the environmental challenges that had historically restricted housing development in the locality and extensive work was being undertaken to try and overcome these obstacles.

In summary, the majority of members acknowledged that despite the financial challenges being faced including the added pressures of COVID-19 and particularly its impact on income, the Council had made, and were continuing to make, successful investments in services; growth; greener; and health and well-being projects; together with creating efficiencies, resilience and ensuring the effective management of resources, all of which and more would enable West Suffolk Council to secure a balanced budget for 2022 to 2023.

The motion was then put to the statutorily required recorded vote. With 49 members present, the votes recorded were 37 votes for the motion, 10 against, and two abstentions; the names of those members voting for, against and abstaining, being recorded as follows:

**For the motion:**

Councillors Augustine, Broughton, Simon Brown, Bull, Chester, Nick Clarke, Drummond, Everitt, Frost, Glossop, Harvey, Beccy Hopfensperger, Houlder,

Lay, Mager, Marks, Mason, McManus, Mildmay-White, Nettleton, Nobbs, Noble, Pugh, Rayner, Richardson, Roach, Rout, Rushbrook, Andrew Smith, Soons, Stamp, Stanbury, Stevens, Thompson, Thorndyke, Wakelam and Wiseman.

**Against the motion:**

Councillors Tony Brown, Burns, Max Clarke, Hanlon, Hind, Luccarini, Lukaniuk, Neal, Waterman and Wittam.

**Abstentions:**

Councillors Simon Cole and Paul Hopfensperger.

It was therefore

**Resolved:**

1. Having taken into account the information received by Cabinet on 8 February 2022 (Report number: CAB/WS/22/008) including the report by the Director (Resources and Property) (Section 151 Officer) set out in Attachment C, together with the up to date information and advice contained in Report number: COU/WS/22/003, the level of West Suffolk Council's band D council tax for 2022 to 2023 be set at £187.11. The level of council tax beyond 2022 to 2023 will be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year.
2. Subject to recommendation 1. above, the following formal council tax resolutions be adopted:
  - a. the revenue and capital budget for 2022 to 2026, attached at Attachment A to Report number: COU/WS/22/003, and as detailed in Attachment D (Appendices 1 to 5), Attachment E (Appendices 1 to 4), Attachment F and Attachment H to, be approved.
  - b. A general fund balance of £5 million be agreed to be maintained, as detailed in paragraph 8.2.
  - c. The statutory calculations under Section 30 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, attached at Attachment J, be noted.
  - d. The Suffolk County Council and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk precepts issued to West Suffolk Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and outlined at paragraphs 12.6 and 12.7, be noted.
  - e. In accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the amounts shown in Schedule D of Attachment I be agreed as the amount of Council Tax for the year 2022 to 2023 for each of the categories of dwellings shown.

3. The Director (Resources and Property), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, be authorised to vire funds between existing Earmarked Reserves (as set out at Attachment D, Appendix 3) as deemed appropriate throughout the medium term financial planning period.
4. Approval be given to the extension of the business rate reliefs set out in paragraphs 3.12 to 3.15, in support of West Suffolk's business community.
5. Approval be given to the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Attachment G.
6. The Director (Resources and Property), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, be authorised to implement the council tax energy rebate scheme and discretionary fund, as set out in paragraphs 3.18 to 3.23.

(Councillors Beccy Hopfensperger and Karen Richardson left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

**188. Amendments to the Constitution (Report number: COU/WS/22/004)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for proposed amendments to the Constitution following their consideration by the Council's informal Constitution Review Group.

Councillor Carol Bull, Portfolio Holder for Governance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that as a result of requests for change, the following issues had been considered and accepted by the Constitution Review Group. These would require amendments to the Constitution, further details of which were set out in section two of the report:

- Formalisation of the procedure allowing adjacent ward members to be able to speak on applications at Development Control Committee meetings, on behalf of and with the approval of the relevant ward member(s)
- Changing the commencement time for Council meetings from 6.30pm to 7pm, which would allow greater flexibility for working members of the Council, or those with other commitments, to attend on time.

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

**Resolved:**

That, with immediate implementation of the decisions:

1. the revised wording to paragraph 4.2 of Section 3 (Functions and Responsibilities) Section 2 – Responsibility for Council (Non-Executive) Functions – Development Control Committee as set out in paragraph 2.1 of Report number: COU/WS/22/004, be approved.

2. It be agreed for Council meetings to start at 7pm, effective from the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2022, as set out in paragraph 2.2.

(Councillor Paul Hopfensperger left the meeting during the consideration of this item.)

189. **Calendar of Meetings: 2022 to 2023 (Report number: COU/WS/22/005)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for the proposed calendar of meetings for West Suffolk Council in 2022 to 2023.

Councillor Carol Bull, Portfolio Holder for Governance, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that there had been an increasing number of meetings cancelled over the past few years due to no items requiring decision. This had been particularly noticeable for full Council meetings.

To try to avoid this situation this year, before producing next year's calendar the Democratic Services Team had completed some analysis of meetings held and cancelled over recent years and adjusted the meeting dates and frequency to reflect forthcoming expected agenda items. Members noted that some additional reserve dates for Council and Cabinet had been included in the proposed 2022 to 2023 calendar, which would be used for meetings if required. This should see less meetings being cancelled.

No venues had been stipulated on the calendar at present. This was largely due to the COVID-19 situation as was known at the time of preparing the report, together with the need to have the required equipment in place to support meetings at the Mildenhall Hub.

Furthermore, a corporate hybrid meeting project was currently ongoing. The outcome of which would influence future meeting operation, being mindful of current legislation which required public, decision making meetings to be held in person, but noting that the Government was considering a longer-term decision about whether to make provision for councils to be able to meet remotely on a permanent basis. The venues would therefore be reviewed throughout the year and members would be updated accordingly.

Other specific changes proposed to previous years' calendar of meetings, as set out in section two of the report were also noted.

In response to questions, Council was informed that:

- In future, communication would be had with town councils in advance of the report containing the draft meetings calendar being published on the Council's website in order to avoid potential meeting clashes, where possible.
- Since the creation of West Suffolk Council, the Licensing and Regulatory Committee had met regularly, but this was largely on an informal basis as no decisions had needed to be made. For 2022 to 2023, four meetings had been scheduled and, as agreed with the Chair of the Committee, these had

been arranged as informal briefings as it was not yet known when formal decisions would be required. If a decision was needing to be taken then, with agreement of the Chair, the meeting would be changed to a formal public, decision making meeting.

Decision making meetings of Licensing and Regulatory Sub-Committees, for which membership was drawn for each hearing from the full Committee, were held quite regularly on an ad-hoc basis.

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

**Resolved:**

That the Calendar of Meetings 2022 to 2023, as attached at Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/22/005, be approved.

(Note: the decision to change the commencement time for Council meetings from 6.30pm to 7pm with effect from the Annual Meeting in May 2022, had previously been agreed for immediate implementation, as recorded under minute 188 above.)

190. **Any other urgent business**

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

The meeting concluded at 8.20 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chair**

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