

West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group

Terms of Reference

Background

West Suffolk Council is in the process of developing a new Local Plan for its area. The Local Plan must be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework and be informed by evidence gathered that relates to West Suffolk and the wider area. All Local Plan policies and documents must be approved by the Council, on the recommendation of Cabinet.

This Local Plan Working Group is being established to support Cabinet in the development of West Suffolk Local Plan, reviewing matters in depth, assessing a wide range of evidence and providing a range of thoughts, opinions and recommendations for Cabinet to consider.

Role and Purpose of the Local Plan Working Group

In addition to drawing on local insights and experience, members will be asked to share their knowledge and insights of West Suffolk as a whole. This balance is important and will support Cabinet in creating an informed local plan, which benefits all our community. Specifically, they will:

- Advise on the development of Local Plan documents, through reviewing and commenting on the associated evidence base and draft documentation.
- Review consultation responses, assessing how these should inform policy preparation and how the local plan should be influenced by responses
- Support the Council in its duty to consult with its partners including other local authorities in the development of the local plan, evaluating their proposals and how these shape / influence policy developments, particularly with regard to cross-boundary issues
- Evaluate how the local plan is compliant with national planning policy guidance and good practice
- Evaluate consultation approaches, advising on potential methods and options to ensure effective engagement. Support the Portfolio Holder for Planning in monitoring the delivery of the project timetable
- Undertake other roles that the Portfolio Holder for Planning, in consultation with the Chair, considers appropriate

In order to perform these roles, the Portfolio Holder for Planning shall agree a Work Programme for the Working Group. This Work Programme shall be reviewed by the Group at each meeting to ensure that progress is being achieved as expected. From time to time, the Portfolio Holder for Planning may modify the work programme or notify the Committee of changes to it.

Membership

10 Members including the **Portfolio Holder for Planning**.

The working group will comprise councillors from across all political groups. Membership will be broadly apportioned in line with the political balance and appointees from each party will be agreed by their respective group leader.

Group leaders are encouraged to work to ensure there is a balance in the geographic representation across the District and ensure there is representation from both rural and urban areas.

Continuity and commitment is important to make this group effective. Members on the Working Group are expected to ensure they make every effort to attend meetings and where they are unable to do so, appoint a substitute.

In addition to performing their collective role, members of the group will be expected to:

- Act as a champion for engagement with the local plan development process, promoting consultations with local community groups, residents and stakeholders, and attending in person and virtual consultation events where able to do so
- Engage with their political groups to ensure all members are kept informed on the local plan development process
- Keep informed of national and local developments and legislation that may impact on the work of the group
- Actively participate in debates at the Working Group meetings
- Be creative, supporting new ideas coming forward and being open minded to alternative proposals or viewpoints
- Read and consider papers presented in advance of the meeting, being proactive in contacting officers to resolve any points of confusion ahead of the meeting
- As mentioned above, they will use their experience, knowledge and insight of their local area, but be mindful of the need to consider the plan across the whole of West Suffolk

At all times when taking part in the Working Group, members will be subject to the West Suffolk Code of Conduct

Substitutes

Each group is allowed to appoint one standing substitute. In order to ensure they can effectively contribute to debate when called upon, substitutes are allowed to be in attendance at all Group meetings and will have access to all papers and reports.

Chair

Portfolio Holder for Planning will Chair the group.

The Chair shall appoint a Vice-Chair from amongst their members.

The Chair shall be responsible for the effective conduct of meetings and ensuring clear conclusions are reached.

The Chair will also be expected to attend Cabinet meetings and other committees / groups as appropriate to present the views of the Group as required.

Quorum

The Quorum for meetings shall be 4 members

Frequency

Meetings shall take place in accordance with the work programme, established to ensure the effective delivery of items on forthcoming agendas.

Voting

The Group should work towards achieving a consensus on matters subject to consideration. The Portfolio Holder, as above, will be in attendance at meetings in order to consider all views put forward in debate.

Officer Support

The lead officer for the Working Group shall be the Director (Planning and Growth), supported by the Service Manager (Strategic Planning). Reports will be prepared and presented to the Group by Officers from the Planning Policy team and officers from the Council when relevant. Administration of meetings will be undertaken by the Democratic Services Team.

Authority

The working group is advisory and has no decision-making powers.

Confidentiality

As a non-decision-making body, the normal Access to Information Rules do not apply. Members may want to have a free and frank debate, in which they may test concepts and ideas and to share such information when it is in a formative state. These ideas may be subsequently discounted in entirety. Releasing information into the public domain could undermine the subsequent proposals and decisions of the taskforce and have the potential to damage the Council's reputation.

Papers should therefore (minutes, reports etc) should be treated as confidential unless it is stated / agreed otherwise, or the information is already in the public domain. Confidential information should not be shared with other parties, including other Councillors and outside organisations.

Any members who have concerns regarding access to information or the papers of the meeting should raise this with the Monitoring Officer.