

# Extraordinary Council

**Minutes** of an extraordinary meeting of **Council** held on **Tuesday 26 July 2022** at **7.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present

**Councillors**

**Chair** Mike Chester

**Vice Chair** John Augustine

Richard Alecock  
Michael Anderson  
Sarah Broughton  
Carol Bull  
Patrick Chung  
Max Clarke  
Nick Clarke  
Jason Crooks  
Andy Drummond  
Stephen Frost  
Susan Glossop  
John Griffiths  
Pat Hanlon  
Diane Hind  
Rachel Hood

Ian Houlder  
Paul Hopfensperger  
Victor Lukaniuk  
Birgitte Mager  
Margaret Marks  
Joe Mason  
Andy Neal  
Robert Nobbs  
Colin Noble  
David Palmer  
Sarah Pugh  
Joanna Rayner  
David Roach  
Richard Rout  
Ian Shipp

David Smith  
Karen Soons  
Sarah Stamp  
Lance Stanbury  
Peter Stevens  
Peter Thompson  
Jim Thorndyke  
Julia Wakelam  
Don Waldron  
Nick Wiseman  
Phil Wittam

## 230. **Suspension of Council Procedure Rules**

The Chair welcomed members to this extraordinary meeting of Council.

He explained that the meeting had primarily been called to consider the matter listed under agenda item 6. 'Referral from Cabinet: UK Shared Prosperity Fund - investment plan allocations'. This was so the deadline to submit the proposed investment plan to Government could satisfactorily be met.

Paragraph 3.2 of the Council Procedure Rules referred to specific rules regarding business transacted at extraordinary meetings. Under paragraph 10.1 (o) of the Procedure Rules, Council's approval was sought for suspending Council Procedure Rule 3.2 so that the other items listed on the agenda at 1, 4, 5 and 7 may be considered at the meeting. These items were usually reserved for ordinary meetings; however, as Council was not scheduled to meet again until 27 September 2022, the Chair felt it was appropriate to include these items on this agenda and that they be considered in accordance with the rules that usually applied.

On the motion of Councillor John Griffiths, duly seconded by Councillor Joanna Rayner, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 42 for the motion, none against and one abstention, it was

**Resolved:**

That, Council Procedure Rule 3.2 regarding business limited to an extraordinary meeting, be suspended.

**231. 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 held on 14 June 2022.

Attention was particularly drawn to the 'Abbey 1000 Mid-Summer Party' event which was held on 23 June 2022 in the Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds. This event was extremely well attended, exceeding expectations, and the Chair placed his thanks on record to officers of West Suffolk Council that had contributed to the smooth running of the event.

**232. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Trevor Beckwith, Mick Bradshaw, Simon Brown, Tony Brown, John Burns, Simon Cole, Dawn Dicker, Roger Dicker, Robert Everitt, Brian Harvey, Beccy Hopfensperger, James Lay, Aaron Luccarini, Elaine McManus, Sara Mildmay-White, David Nettleton, Karen Richardson, Marion Rushbrook, Andrew Smith, Clive Springett and Cliff Waterman.

**233. Declarations of interests**

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

**234. Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/22/014)**

Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/22/014.

Members confirmed that they had received copies of the statement, which had been circulated following the distribution of the agenda for the meeting.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Griffiths:

- a. **Personal remarks:** thanked all members for attending the extraordinary meeting so that principally, debate could be held on agenda item 6, which if approved, would help unlock £1.9 million of new Government funding for the Council.
- b. **Heatwave:** paid tribute to staff working in difficult conditions and to local communities that had supported fellow residents and Council staff during the challenging temperatures.

- c. **Green Flags:** was delighted to report that all six of West Suffolk parks had been awarded with national Green Flag status.
- d. **Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award:** was also pleased to announce that the Council had had its 2017 Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award revalidated. This scheme encouraged employers nationally to support defence and inspire others to do the same.
- e. **Cabinet:** reported on the discussions held at the Cabinet meeting held on 19 July 2022, which included approval being given to the West Suffolk Annual Report 2021 to 2022; progress made on the Environment and Climate Change Action Plans; and the recommendations put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its review of the West Suffolk Council markets.
- f. **Barley Homes:** reported that Barley Homes (Group) Limited had earlier that day held its Annual Meeting. Despite challenges faced by other developers such as COVID-19, the company had achieved great success in the past year.

The Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **Environmental update:** alternative products to using glyphosate herbicides for the control of unwanted vegetation had been explored. Recognition was given to achieving a balance between using a product that was cost effective, performed results and was kinder to the environment. Using less glyphosate was also an option and it was acknowledged that education was key to promoting the environmental benefits where areas may be left untreated or weeded less frequently than in previous years.

In respect of improving air quality in certain areas, various solutions were being explored in partnership with others, particularly around educating drivers to avoid idling, especially adjacent to schools and nurseries.

- b. **Support for those in need during the cost of living crisis:** the Council recognised the burden placed on communities and businesses during these challenging times. For those in particular need, the Council was promoting various support packages and grant schemes that were currently available. These included grant schemes, which not only improved peoples' lives but also promoted green initiatives such as helping people to better insulate their homes, for example. Whilst politics sometimes differed, and particular reference was given by Councillor Max Clarke to asking councillors to encourage greater resident take up of membership to trade unions, the sentiment regarding the desire to help and support people in West Suffolk was shared.

- c. **Referral from Cabinet: UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): investment plan allocations:** Reference was given to paragraph 6.4 of Report number: COU/WS/22/015 (Referral from Cabinet: UK Shared Prosperity Fund: investment plan allocations), which referred to '...working in partnership with others to support initiatives that focussed on prevention and early intervention, particularly on issues such as health, crime and social isolation. It was considered that innovative new models should be developed to support residents and businesses to access public services, for example through the Mildenhall Hub and Western Way Development (WWD)'. In recognising the aforementioned, it was suggested to potentially use the former Debenhams building in the Arc, Bury St Edmunds as a public service hub as an alternative to progressing with the WWD project. This was not however, within the Council's gift as it did not own the building.

Reference was also given to paragraph 2.1(6) of the same report, regarding the '...encouragement of projects that supported net zero objectives as a cross cutting theme...', and whether, given the traditionally longer term payback associated with installing many alternative greener energy sources within homes, subsidies could be allocated by the Council from its share of the UKSPF to pensioners to help fund such projects. As was the case in response to part of the aforementioned question, the detail regarding specific interventions outlined in the proposed UKSPF investment plan would come forward during autumn 2022. It was envisaged that a range of initiatives would be explored, including those which supported environmental actions; however, it was acknowledged that not all pensioners were in need of financial support to install greener initiatives within their homes.

- d. **Taxi fares:** In the context of the recent decision taken by the Licensing and Regulatory Committee regarding the proposed increases in West Suffolk hackney carriage fares, Councillor Don Waldron asked whether the process for introducing the new fares could be accelerated. Like many others feeling the impact of the relatively significant rise in the cost of living, he felt the hackney carriage drivers should have the new fares implemented at the earliest opportunity to help mitigate some of their current financial challenges.

The Service Manager (Legal and Governance) / Monitoring Officer was invited by the Chair to provide a response regarding the statutory process that needed to be followed before any changes could be made to the fares; however, it was agreed that a more detailed written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Griffiths and Councillor Andy Drummond, Portfolio Holder for Regulatory and Environment. This response would be circulated to Councillor Waldron and all members.

- e. **West Suffolk Local Plan:** that some progress was being made in respect of working with Matt Hancock MP, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Natural England to try and reach an amenable solution to overcome the environmental challenges placed on Brandon which were adversely affecting its ability to bring forward development sites.

- f. **Integrated care system:** that once the regime was further embedded, a briefing on the relatively complex new integrated care system would be welcomed to assist members with effectively communicating pertinent issues to residents in their wards.

**235. Public participation**

No members of the public in attendance had registered to speak.

**236. Referral from Cabinet: UK Shared Prosperity Fund: investment plan allocations (Report number: COU/WS/22/015 and addendum)**

Council considered this report which sought approval for the West Suffolk UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan allocations.

Members confirmed that they had received copies of the report, which had been circulated following the distribution of the agenda for the meeting. In addition, an addendum was tabled which provided corrections to figures contained in tables at paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7. These corrections however, did not impact on the recommendations contained in the report, which had been referred by Cabinet for a final decision.

The £2.6 billion UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was part of measures for implementing the Government's Levelling Up White Paper and was the successor to EU Structural Funds covering the period 2022 to 2025.

The vision for the fund was that 'it will lead to visible, tangible improvements to the places where people work and live, alongside investment in human capital, giving communities up and down the UK more reasons to be proud of their area.'

The report set out the requirements of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and how West Suffolk Council's respective funding allocation must be spent on specific 'interventions' listed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) under three main investment priorities, as listed in paragraph 1.5 of the report. In order to access the total funding allocation of £1,943,467 (spread over three years as set out in paragraph 1.9), the investment plan was required to be submitted to the DLUHC by 1 August 2022.

Councillor John Griffiths, Leader of the Council, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the Council's approach would see this funding supporting a range of initiatives to help:

- the local economy, in particularly in the district's high streets and rural areas
- residents gain new skills and better job prospects
- community projects and groups that would make a real difference to the prosperity and wellbeing of people in their area, including tackling the cost of living crisis

Reaching this point involved a large amount of work in order to meet the Government's criteria, especially in terms of engagement with stakeholders.

Councillor Griffiths thanked those that had replied and engaged in this process, which had been invaluable in shaping the report presented. Engagement would continue as work progressed into more detailed delivery. He also placed his thanks on record to officers for the enormous amount of work that had been undertaken on the process to date.

It was noted that once the funding had been split across three years and the range of priorities, the amounts were in some cases quite modest, and it would therefore be impossible to fund every initiative that was put forward during the engagement stage.

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, seconded the motion and demonstrated her support for the proposed investment plan allocations. Any new funding from Government was welcomed and this would go some way to support the Council's own strategic priorities; however, it was also recognised that this funding would form only part of much larger existing Council investments and would sit alongside funding streams already in place.

Members were reminded that the investment plan did not detail specific projects as the Government required the Council to allocate its share of the UKSPF to interventions. Discussion was however, held on a range of topics where some members felt the funding was needed to be allocated, including:

- Areas of deprivation, such as Brandon
- To support local businesses to create 'green' jobs
- To support communities in rural areas

It was reiterated that the £1.9 million was only one source of funding, with very strict requirements and did not represent the full range of investments being made by the Council. It was also hoped it would help to unlock further match funding streams (examples of which were given).

Council generally expressed its support for the proposed investment plan allocations and positively looked forward to the detail in due course. To ensure the process could continue in a timely manner, Council also agreed to endorse Cabinet's decisions for enabling certain matters to be resolved under delegated authority.

On the motion of Councillor Griffiths, seconded by Councillor Sarah Broughton, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**Resolved:**

That:

1. The West Suffolk UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment allocations (at Appendix B to Report number: COU/WS/22/015), for submission to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), be approved (these were approved by Cabinet on 19 July 2022).

2. Cabinet's decision be endorsed, that officers complete the full DLUHC investment plan template in line with the details contained in this report, COU/WS/22/015.
3. Cabinet's decision be endorsed, to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to make minor adjustments to the investment plan allocations before submission to Government, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
4. Cabinet's decision be endorsed, to delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property to implement the approved investment plan once funding has been received from DLUHC, including implementing minor variations in the funding amounts for each intervention, in order to respond to changing circumstances over the lifetime of the Fund.

(Councillor Paul Hopfensperger left the meeting during the consideration of this item and did not return. He therefore did not partake in the vote.)

**237. Any other urgent business**

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

The meeting concluded at 8.02 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chair**

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