

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 20 June 2023** at **7.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present

Councillors

Chair Roger Dicker

Vice Chair Pat Hanlon

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Richard Alecock | Gerald Kelly | Jools Savage |
| Michael Anderson | Rowena Lindberg | Marilyn Sayer |
| Peter Armitage | Jon London | Ian Shipp |
| John Augustine | Aaron Luccarini | Andrew Smith |
| Mick Bradshaw | Victor Lukaniuk | David Smith |
| Tony Brown | Charlie Lynch | Karen Soons |
| Carol Bull | Birgitte Mager | Sarah Stamp |
| Patrick Chung | Margaret Marks | Frank Stennett |
| Nick Clarke | Joe Mason | David Taylor |
| Dawn Dicker | Sara Mildmay-White | Jim Thorndyke |
| Paul Firman | Lora-Jane Miller- | Julia Wakelam |
| Susan Glossop | Jones | Don Waldron |
| John Griffiths | Richard O'Driscoll | Cliff Waterman |
| Donna Higgins | Sue Perry | Indy Wijenayaka |
| Diane Hind | Joanna Rayner | Phil Wittam |
| Beccy Hopfensperger | Karen Richardson | |
| Ian Houlder | Richard Rout | |
| Janne Jarvis | Marion Rushbrook | |

294. **Remembrance**

Before commencing business, all members were asked to stand and observe a minute's silence in remembrance of former Forest Heath District Councillor Pat Barker, and former St Edmundsbury Borough Councillor Bob Cockle who had both sadly died recently. The Chair made a statement of condolence, reflecting on each of the late councillors' contributions during their time on their respective councils.

295. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 March 2023 and 23 May 2023 (Annual Meeting of Council) were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

296. **Chair's announcements**

The Chair reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since their election at the Annual Meeting on 23 May 2023.

The Chair specifically made reference to attending:

- The civic service in Felixstowe on Sunday 18 June 2023
- A community lunch in Gazeley, a village located in his ward, earlier that day

297. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah Broughton, Mike Chester, Andy Drummond, Luke Halpin, Rachel Hood, Andrew Martin, Andy Neal, Sarah Pugh, Liz Smith, Andrew Speed, Tracy Whitehand and Kevin Yarrow.

298. **Declarations of interests**

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

299. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/23/009)**

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/23/009.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Waterman:

- Suffolk Day:** reflected on the benefits of living in Suffolk together with drawing attention to the range of events being held in the district and across the county to celebrate Suffolk Day on 21 June 2023.
- West Suffolk:** drew attention to the various positive aspects of living, working and visiting West Suffolk, particularly highlighting examples within the district's towns.
- West Suffolk Working Partnership:** set out an outline of the core areas upon which the West Suffolk Working Partnership would be focusing its efforts in the coming months, which included (but not limited to): protecting the environment; business growth; the right housing development in the right place; and supporting residents with the cost of living crisis through the extensive families and communities work.
- Invitation to all ward members:** urged members to accept his offer to all members to discuss pertinent matters within their wards within the next year.
- Cabinet – 13 June 2023:** that the first meeting of his Cabinet was held on 13 June 2023 at the Mildenhall Hub, where amongst other

issues considered, it had agreed the establishment of a number of working groups. This included a new Environment and Sustainability Working Group which would commence work very shortly in accordance with its approved terms of reference. It was intended that the venues for Cabinet meetings would alternate between West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds and the Mildenhall Hub to encourage better access to open democracy.

- f. **Gender balance and diversity:** that he very much supported equality and diversity amongst West Suffolk councillors to build on the excellent breadth of knowledge and skills the Council already had. In response to a question following his introductory remarks, the Leader reinforced this view. He was extremely proud of his Cabinet, which he felt demonstrated a range of exceptional talent; however, he recognised the important issue of improving gender equality and increasing diversity particularly in the wider context of society.
- g. **Events:** provided details of current and forthcoming events including the Makers Markets and Young Traders Market competition; the hosting of the Jobs and Skills Fair in Haverhill Arts Centre; the Mutiny in Colour art exhibition; and various events commemorating Armed Forces Week.
- h. **Council priorities:** that work was progressing to develop the Council's priorities, which included working with partners and organisations to support the identification of challenges and opportunities.

The Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **New administration:** that the detail of the broad agenda upon which the new administration was working would be forthcoming in due course. Priorities were being carefully developed and reviews of ongoing issues, such as the examples given of street lighting provision and the present restricted growth in Brandon due to the protection of stone curlews, were being undertaken and would be progressed accordingly.
- b. **'Debate not hate':** welcomed support from all councillors for the Local Government Association's (LGA) 'debate not hate' campaign. A programme of training developed by the LGA would be offered to councillors in due course.
- c. **Families and Communities portfolio:** that the Families and Communities portfolio was extensive which would support the work of members within their wards. This included working positively with partners and communities, including providing support to voluntary sector organisations, where possible. The West Suffolk Grant Working Party had been re-established which in due course, would look at recommending the awarding of Community Chest funding to successful applicants, which included a range of voluntary sector organisations.

Consultations were currently being carried out on the Public Space Protection Orders and Cumulative Impact Assessment areas in the

district. Taking the outcome of the consultations into account, appropriate recommendations on whether to renew or not would be presented to Cabinet in September 2023.

The Leader agreed that it was unacceptable, not only locally but on a national scale, for unclaimed benefits to reach such significant levels. He aimed to actively pursue this matter with Suffolk Public Sector Leaders and other partners, where appropriate, to encourage greater uptake of benefit claim entitlement.

The Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities added to the Leader's response, stating that the portfolio covered such a wide-ranging spectrum, the Leader's statement had not focussed on specific areas of work. The direction of the portfolio was however, being developed and further detail would be shared with all members in due course.

- d. **Leaders of political groups:** providing confirmation that the leader of the largest minority group, the Conservative Group, was Councillor Nick Clarke. The leaders of the Progressive Alliance Grouping and the Independents were Councillors David Smith and Victor Lukaniuk respectively.
- e. **Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA):** providing confirmation that in accordance with the adopted Members' Allowances Scheme, Councillor David Smith would receive an SRA of £1,447.86 per annum as Group Leader of the Progressive Alliance minority group. In line with the requirements of the Members' Allowances Scheme, Councillor Victor Lukaniuk would claim one SRA as Deputy Leader of the Council and not as leader of the Independents minority group. Whilst the Deputy Leader was not responsible for a specific portfolio, his workload remained significant. Councillor Waterman added that a budget was provided for all allowances payable under the Members' Allowances Scheme.

300. **Public participation**

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

1. **Jo Owen**, a resident in the district, made a statement in connection with the process followed to erect 5G communication monopoles in Bury St Edmunds. She expressed her views on what she felt were the potential effects on human health and biodiversity in the locality and felt there had been a lack of transparency and consultation when the decision was taken to erect a 5G mast near to her home. Concern was particularly expressed regarding exposure to, in her view, potentially harmful levels of radiation emitted from the 5G masts.

In response, Councillor Jim Thorndyke, Portfolio Holder for Planning, stated that the Government required local planning authorities (LPAs) to 'support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G)'. The Government further advised that 'local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only.

They should not seek to question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure'. Councillor Thorndyke added that supplementary information, including details of consultation undertaken, was required to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). Applicants were required to 'self-certify' that the proposal fell within the recommended guidelines.

Councillor Thorndyke also stated that the Council would continue to lobby Government on the considerations LPAs were to take into account when determining applications for 5G mast and antennae development.

2. **Aaron Leeves**, a resident in the district, made a statement in connection with "the effects the Agenda 2030 and The Great Reset are having on our children and families' lives, and how the World Health Organisation and World Economic Forum are dictating how we should live our lives." Specific reference was given to, in his view, the impacts of the sustainable goals set out in Agenda 2030, and the detrimental impacts to the health and well being of society of the COVID-19 lockdowns; the COVID-19 vaccine; the erection of 5G communication masts; and scanning technology. He also felt that in his view, there was over sexualisation of children in the education system.

In response, Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, stated that the newly established West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group would be reviewing the Council's approach to environmental issues and climate change. The group would consider a range of topics, supported by evidence, and would report back to Cabinet in due course.

3. **Dylan Roques**, a resident in the district, asked a question in connection with ways in which to encourage people under the age of 30 to stand as a councillor.

In response, Councillor Donna Higgins, Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities, supported the sentiments and with the help of officers, would look to develop a programme to encourage more young people to become engaged with the work of the council, the democratic process and the role and functions of a councillor. In the meantime, Councillor Higgins welcomed approaches from young people to discuss this and any other council-related matter.

4. **Geoff Mealing**, a resident in the district, provided his own views on the works of Alfred Kinsey and John Money. He then referred to the content of sex education taught in schools and how he felt that children were inappropriately exposed to certain aspects at too young an age. Reference was made to the LGBTQAI+ community as part of his statement.

In response, Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, stated that the Council was proud to raise the LGBTQAI+ flag outside West Suffolk House in recognition of Pride month. A considered approach was taken on how to teach sex education in schools and that everyone had the right to their own identity.

5. **Donna Smith**, a resident in the district, provided her views and doubts felt regarding the work of specific philanthropists she quoted, and of the World Health Organisation. She also gave her views on the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particular concern was expressed that she was to temporarily lose her employment in the care sector for not being vaccinated against COVID-19. Reassurance was sought from the Council that similar impositions and restrictions would not happen again.

In response, Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, respected Ms Smith's views; however, this was not within the Council's responsibility to accept.

No further questions were asked. The Chair concluded this item and invited the members of the public present to remain in the meeting to observe the following agenda items should they wish to do so.

301. Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet

There were no referrals emanating from the last meetings of Cabinet held on 11 April 2023 and 13 June 2023.

302. Annual Scrutiny Report 2022 to 2023 (Report number: COU/WS/23/010)

Council received and noted the West Suffolk Annual Scrutiny Report for 2022 to 2023.

Article 7 of the Council's Constitution required that 'the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee must report annually to the Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.'

Councillor Ian Shipp, outgoing Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee drew relevant issues to the attention of Council. He placed his thanks on record to the outgoing Committee, its partners and to the former Cabinet, and acknowledged the work of officers that had supported him and the then Committee. He also wished to place on record his support for the incoming Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillors Sarah Broughton and Marion Rushbrook, and as a present member of Cabinet, he looked forward to working with the Committee in the future.

Councillor Ian Houlder, outgoing Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) drew attention to the specific work of the outgoing PASC and its two sub-committees. He placed his thanks on record to the former Committee and to the teams in Finance and Internal Audit for their continuing support. He too, wished his support to be placed on record for the incoming Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, Councillors Peter Armitage and Andy Neal.

No questions were asked.

303. **Independent Remuneration Panel appointment process (Report number: COU/WS/23/011)**

Council considered this report which sought approval for a number of recommendations to commence the process towards appointing a new Independent Remuneration Panel.

West Suffolk Council's Members' Allowances Scheme was required to be reviewed in full by a newly appointed independent remuneration panel. The panel would make recommendations to Council on the level of remuneration, allowances and expenses for councillors. These recommendations must be considered by the Council, although the Council was within its right to agree alternative proposals. A new scheme must be adopted by December 2023 in order for it to be adopted before the current scheme expired in February 2024. The scheme would then be subject to annual review.

An independent remuneration panel must comprise a minimum of three members. The process for appointing must command public confidence, and both the process, and the panel, should not only be independent, but seen to be independent.

The report recommended that the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) would be appointed for no longer than a four-year term, as proposed in the terms of reference for the IRP attached at Appendix A.

The IRP's work would be supported by officers of the Council, who would offer appropriate training, briefing and support to panel members. Members also considered the appointment of an advisor to the panel who could act as a conduit between council officers, elected members and the panel. Person specifications for IRP members and the advisor to the panel were attached at Appendices B and C respectively.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including the proposed arrangements for the IRP appointment process, as set out in section 2. This would be carried out in accordance with the timeline provided in section 3.1.

In response to a question, Councillor Kelly informed Council that once appointed, the Independent Remuneration Panel would be expected to fully review the entire Members' Allowances Scheme, including the range of roles and level of remuneration covered under the scheme's Special Responsibility Allowances. It would be for the Council to consider whether to accept the IRP's recommendations or not.

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Diane Hind, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That:

1. The process for appointing a new Independent Remuneration Panel for West Suffolk Council, as set out in section 2 of Report number: COU/WS/23/011, be agreed.

2. Delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the respective Group Leaders, to each appoint a member from the Progressive Alliance Grouping and the Conservative Group to join the Portfolio Holder, being a member of the Independents, to sit on the proposed Selection Panel, as set out in paragraph 2.2.1.
3. The terms of reference for the Independent Remuneration Panel, as set in Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/011, be approved.
4. The person specifications for IRP members as set out in Appendix B, be agreed.
5. The appointment of an advisor to the panel, as set out in Appendix C, be agreed.

304. Constitution Review Group (Report number: COU/WS/23/012)

Council considered this report which sought approval for the establishment of a Constitution Review Group in accordance with the proposed terms of reference attached to the report.

The Constitution Review Group was originally formed in 2019 for the development of the Constitution for West Suffolk Council. Thereafter it was recognised that it would be helpful to continue as a smaller group in order to assess how the Constitution operated and make recommendations for change where necessary and appropriate.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council. These included recognising that the Constitution must evolve to accord with changes in legislation and the Administration it was proposed that the Constitution Review Group continued to operate with the terms of reference attached at Appendix A to the report with the proposed membership arrangements set out in section 2.2 of the report.

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Diane Hind, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

It be agreed that the Constitution Review Group continues to operate in accordance with the terms of reference attached at Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/012 and the membership as set out in section 2.2 of the same report.

305. Any other urgent business

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

The meeting concluded at 8.25 pm

Signed by:

Chair
