

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 26 September 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	Rowena Lindberg	David Smith
Michael Anderson	Jon London	Liz Smith
Peter Armitage	Aaron Luccarini	Andrew Speed
Mick Bradshaw	Victor Lukaniuk	Karen Soons
Sarah Broughton	Charlie Lynch	Sarah Stamp
Tony Brown	Birgitte Mager	Frank Stennett
Carol Bull	Margaret Marks	David Taylor
Mike Chester	Joe Mason	Jim Thorndyke
Patrick Chung	Sara Mildmay-White	Julia Wakelam
Dawn Dicker	Lora-Jane Miller-	Don Waldron
Paul Firman	Jones	Cliff Waterman
Susan Glossop	Andy Neal	Indy Wijenayaka
John Griffiths	Richard O'Driscoll	Phil Wittam
Luke Halpin	Joanna Rayner	Kevin Yarrow
Donna Higgins	Karen Richardson	
Diane Hind	Jools Savage	
Beccy Hopfensperger	Marilyn Sayer	
Ian Houlder	Ian Shipp	
Gerald Kelly	Andrew Smith	

**306. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**307. Chair's announcements**

The Chair was delighted to welcome to the meeting Chris Wiley, Lynda Seldis, Simon Hobson and Tom Hagger, representatives of the Bury in Bloom team. Both Bury in Bloom and Brandon in Bloom were winners in this year's Anglia in Bloom competition; however, unfortunately members of the Brandon in Bloom team were unable to attend the meeting.

On behalf of Council, the Chair formally congratulated both team's achievements and thanked them for all their hard work in helping to aesthetically improve the towns of Brandon and Bury St Edmunds.

The Chair then reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 20 June 2023.

The Chair specifically made reference to attending Armed Forces Day in Haverhill; was delighted with the excellent attendance at his civic service in Kentford; enthused about his visit to Clare; and enjoyed attending a Civic Leaders event at RAF Lakenheath.

308. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Augustine, Nick Clarke, Andy Drummond, Rachel Hood, Janne Jarvis, Andrew Martin, Sarah Pugh, Sue Perry, Richard Rout, Marion Rushbrook and Tracy Whitehand.

309. **Declarations of interests**

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

310. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/23/013)**

Councillor Waterman, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/23/013.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Waterman:

- a. **Environment:** reported that the protection of the environment remained a key priority of the Council. The Cabinet very much welcomed the recent recommendations of the West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group and building on that initial work, which was limited to completion by September, the Leader felt it was time to pick up the pace and do more with residents and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change. It was intended that the Environment and Sustainability Working Group would continue to operate in an evolved form. The Group would consider how best to continue to embed environmental considerations into future decision-making, alongside wider social and economic factors, together with keeping the actions plan under review and identifying new opportunities to address both environmental, climate change and sustainability considerations.

Engaging with the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA), the Council was endorsing the work of the East of England Hydrogen Cluster which would ensure the East was ready to take advantage of opportunities arising from this emerging technology.

Reference was also given to the Net Zero Innovation Fund which provided grants to businesses that had innovative solutions to drive the county towards its net zero target.

- b. **Supporting business:** reported on Government funded grants to aid the growth of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in West Suffolk. The grants would be available to apply for through the New Anglia Growth Hub and were from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.
- c. **Cost of living support:** stated that the Council was from 2 October 2023, carrying out engagement with the public and stakeholders to extend for another year the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to help those eligible on low incomes by giving 100 percent discount on their council tax.
- d. **Community Chest:** reminded members that the deadline of 29 September 2023 for applications to be submitted for the 2024 to 2025 Community Chest round was fast approaching.
- e. **A Louder Voice:** stated that the Local Government Association (LGA) was beginning work on a local government white paper to be published before the next election. It was a bold ambition to develop a plan to form part of the first King's Speech after the next General Election to secure a national local partnership in which local government could work to its full potential for its people, places and planet. The work would be underpinned by the LGA's 'Make it Local' campaign which outlined how local government was key to delivering solutions to the biggest issues faced. West Suffolk intended to play a full and engaged role in this debate.

Councillor Waterman also welcomed the fact that Councillor Shipp was a full member of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board which demonstrated the Council's commitment to these areas and ensured West Suffolk had a voice nationally.

- f. **Their future:** reported that together with various organisations and businesses, the Council supported a recently held 'Skills Escalator Day' initiative. Five schools in and around Newmarket were invited to take part in this career event, which was specifically aimed at younger primary school children of six and seven years of age.
- g. **Out and about:** listed a wide range of partners and organisations that he had met with in recent weeks and several more were in the pipeline. These were all vital and valuable to strengthen relationships to help achieve common aims and goals which made things better for communities and businesses.
- h. **Ward work:** thanked all members for their sterling work undertaken in their wards. He felt members made a real and direct difference, demonstrating a shared goal as a force of good and championing the district's local communities.

The Leader responded to a range of questions relating to:

- a. **Lack of gender balance in the Cabinet:** that he was not content with the gender balance within the Council in general. It was often the

case that working women, particularly those with young children and dependents found it difficult to stand for election and that was reflected in the gender of councillors at West Suffolk.

- b. **Provision of refreshments at the conclusion of Council meetings:** that it was not the Leader's decision to reintroduce refreshments at the conclusion of Council meetings, which were at very little cost in comparison to the Council's overall spending; however, he supported the provision if it meant that councillors could interact on a social footing away from politics.
- c. **Use of glyphosate:** that it had been a previous decision of the Council to cease using glyphosate for weed control as a means for protecting the environment; however, the adverse impacts caused by excessive weed growth on footpaths, verges etc as a result of not using glyphosate had been recognised. Councillor Shipp, Portfolio Holder for Leisure with the responsibility for open spaces, was leading on a working group that together with other matters, was looking into this issue and would report later in the year with its findings and potential recommendations to Cabinet.
- d. **Haverhill:** that it was recognised that there were issues of concern in Haverhill; however, the Leader expressed his enthusiasm for the town acknowledging its positive aspects. Proposals would be brought forward in due course regarding ways to improve the vibrancy of all of the district's towns where required.

### 311. **Public participation**

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

1. **Aaron Leeves**, a resident in the district, made a statement in connection with "net zero emissions and the supposed climate emergency". He felt that some of the issues the Council was addressing to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change should not have been implemented without public consultation, particularly as he felt there was insufficient evidence to support the declaration of a climate emergency. He continued to air his own views on the detrimental impacts to the health and well being of society of the COVID-19 lockdowns and the COVID-19 vaccine; and that in his view, he felt there was over sexualisation of children in the education system.

He continued to speak on what he considered were the responsibilities of West Suffolk Council to protect future generations.

At this point, the total five minute time allocation permitted for making a statement under this item, as set out in the Council Procedure Rules of the Constitution, had been reached. The Chair politely asked Mr Leeves to end his statement; however, this request was ignored.

The Chair asked Mr Leeves again to conclude his statement, following which the Chair was interrupted by another member of the public. The Chair asked the two members of the public causing the disturbance to leave the meeting immediately but the situation rapidly escalated with the two members of the public shouting aggressively and moving into the area in which members

were seated. At this point the Chair considered the safety of members was at risk.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 18, the Chair suspended the meeting without resolution or debate at 7.40pm, requesting that all members vacate the meeting room away from the disturbance.

The meeting resumed at 8.25pm.

The Chair determined that this item on the agenda had been concluded and no further public questions were asked, or statements made under this item.

(Councillor Karen Soons left the meeting while the meeting had been suspended and did not return.)

**312. Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report number: COU/WS/23/014)**

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/23/014.

**A. Referrals from Cabinet: 13 June 2023 and 18 July 2023**

There were no referrals emanating from the last meetings of Cabinet held on 13 June 2023 (verbally reported at the last meeting of Council) and 18 July 2023.

**B. Referrals from Cabinet: 19 September 2023**

Following the publication of the agenda and papers for this meeting, which took place before the Cabinet decisions were taken on 19 September 2023, the Chair confirmed that no amendments had been made by the Cabinet to the recommendations contained in the referral report.

**1. Annual Treasury Management and Financial Resilience Report 2022 to 2023**

Approval was sought for the Annual Treasury Management and Financial Resilience Report (2022 to 2023).

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

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

**Resolved:**

That the Annual Treasury Management and Financial Resilience Report 2022 to 2023, as contained in Report number: FRS/WS/23/003, be approved.

## **2. Treasury Management Report (June 2023)**

Approval was sought for the Treasury Management Report (June 2023).

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

Councillor Julia Wakelam asked a question in connection with the ethical standards of those providing the Council's investments, particularly around their environmental impact credentials.

A written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Hind. In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, this response would be circulated to Councillor Wakelam and all members and published on the Council's website.

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

### **Resolved:**

That the Treasury Management Report (June 2023), as contained in Report number FRS/WS/23/004, be approved.

## **3. Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund**

On 19 September 2023, the Cabinet received the report of the West Suffolk Environment and Sustainability Working Group which confirmed the Council's commitment to addressing the Climate and Environment Emergency and to reaching net zero by 2030 in respect of Council operations. In June 2023, the Leader of the Council had also expressed the new Cabinet's wish to consider additional actions the Council could take to support and encourage West Suffolk residents, businesses and partners to address climate change.

Approval was sought to create a £1 million fund to support third parties in pursuing decarbonisation initiatives. An initial priority area for that spending had been identified which could result in a large environmental improvement for the district in keeping with the Council's adopted priorities. Namely, the upgrade of streetlighting owned by town and parish councils.

The Cabinet report (CAB/WS/23/040) provided background to the ownership of the majority of streetlights in the district, including the agreed actions emanating from the audit undertaken in 2022. The proposals for Council's consideration were set out in section 2 of the Cabinet report, which was attached in full to the referrals report.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

In response to questions, Councillor Kelly informed Council that Cabinet wanted to establish the principle of the fund, and set it up flexibly for future use, linking it to the wider climate change action plan.

Other than the grant to upgrade the streetlights owned by town and parish councils' schemes, no other schemes had been considered for its use at this stage. No comparative exercise had been undertaken regarding how different schemes might compare in terms of decarbonisation per pound spent and this would be extremely complex to do at this stage as West Suffolk Council (WSC) did not own the streetlights in question.

Given the issues town and parish councils were having in respect of funding the conversion of their lights to LED which had already been acknowledged as part of the audit and that the upgrade would create a large impact on decarbonising a public asset quickly and efficiently, Cabinet considered this was an appropriate scheme to allocate an initial tranche of funding.

The evolved Environment and Sustainability Working Group would consider proposals for future use of the Fund and make recommendations to Cabinet, as appropriate.

Other members expressed their support for this Fund recognising the benefits of supporting third parties in pursuing decarbonisation initiatives which in turn, supported the Council's wider commitment for encouraging a reduction in carbon emissions and tackling climate change throughout the district.

Recognition was also given to the potential impact on Abbeycroft Leisure's energy costs should the decision be taken not to pursue the previously approved Western Way project (see item 4. below).

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor David Taylor, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 50 for the motion, none against and one abstention, it was

**Resolved:**

1. A Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund of £1 million be created, funded by the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve.
2. The first call on that fund be a grant scheme for the upgrade of streetlights owned by town and parish councils to light-emitting diode (LED) lanterns on the basis outlined in Report number CAB/WS/23/040.
3. Cabinet be authorised, if applicable, to agree the use of any remaining balance in the Fund for additional decarbonisation initiatives.
4. The Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's prudential indicators.

**4. Western Way Project**

Approval was sought for a number of recommendations emanating from a review undertaken on the future of the Western Way project.

Phase 1 of the current Western Way (WW) project in Bury St Edmunds was approved in principle by Council in December 2022, and its final target budget was approved by Cabinet in March 2023 (approximately £61 million including land acquisition costs). However, approval to sign a contract and deliver the first stage of the project was subject to financial tests being met after the final stage of tendering with the preferred contractor, Morgan Sindall, in summer 2023. A business case for phase 2 of the project had not yet been considered by councillors, but a further budget of up to £10 million had been approved to address the remainder of the site in the meantime.

When the new Cabinet was appointed in May 2023, it announced its intention to review the future of the WW project in the light of changed economic circumstances. Report number: CAB/WS/23/041 was the outcome of those deliberations by the Cabinet and was attached in full to the referrals report.

The report explained that, as things stood, second stage tenders from sub-contractors had been received for the phase 1 scheme and were still being evaluated and value-engineered by the contractor and project team to reduce their cost to a viable level. There was also considerable pressure on the revenue side of the project, for example increased interest rates, which would have to be explored and mitigated if Council decided that the project would still go ahead.

Cabinet felt that work to further adapt the scheme to meet the viability tests would delay not only certainty on the future of leisure services but also improvements to the current leisure facilities themselves (either as a newbuild or refurbishment). Certainty over the other elements of the project (a pre-school, archive and health facility) would also be affected.

Ultimately though, even if the viability test could be met, this would still be a very large capital investment in excess of £50 million for West Suffolk Council (WSC). The project also relied on achieving significant new income streams at a time of great economic uncertainty.

Cabinet had therefore concluded that a project at this scale (with further project costs and time required to both confirm and then maintain its possible viability), carried significant risk to the authority and taxpayers at a time of major financial pressure on local authorities and household budgets. Pressure which had worsened since December 2022. The risk of this financial investment was therefore felt by Cabinet to currently outweigh the potential outcomes of the WW scheme.

Cabinet proposed instead to carry out essential maintenance for the existing leisure centre within existing budgets and explore alternative options for the Olding Road site. In relation to the leisure centre, this approach replaced the risks of a very large and complex capital project, and the revenue risks of it being underwritten by new savings and income, with those of a smaller and simpler capital project, which would be funded entirely within existing revenue budget commitments so as not to put further pressure on the Council's budget. While, at the same time, keeping all options for the future of the Olding Road site open.



More rationale for the proposal was contained in the press statement released by Cabinet on 8 September 2023, which was attached as Appendix 1 to Report number CAB/WS/23/041.

The remainder of Report number CAB/WS/23/041 set out the practical implications and risks of this new proposal and sought new authorities to take the project forward accordingly. This was divided into the various different elements of the project.

In addition, a summary of the identified opportunities, risks and financial implications contained in an addendum to Report number CAB/WS/23/041, was attached for Council's consideration. This analysis had been undertaken by the Council's statutory officers and was circulated to Cabinet prior to its meeting on 19 September 2023 for consideration in conjunction with the full report.

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council. He reiterated the key factors that had been considered and the earlier rationale which had led to the proposal for progressing the WW project in its current form. He and his Cabinet felt that in the present economic climate and the financial risks associated with that, and given how the scheme for a variety of reasons had already evolved from a very different ambition to a much smaller project, the decision to revise the project further was deemed to be the most sensible and pragmatic way forward.

Councillor Waterman was confident that a refurbishment of the existing Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre within already available budgets for the centre would provide very good quality leisure facilities moving forward. He enthused about the possibilities and potential uses for the existing Olding Road site, options for which would be provided in an initial business case early in 2024.

Councillor Waterman moved the motion to accept the recommendations set out in the report, which was duly seconded by Councillor Ian Shipp.

The debate ensued on the substantive motion, which commenced with Councillor Andrew Smith, deputy leader of the Conservative Group, expressing concern that the proposal to cancel the WW project in its current form was premature. Similar concerns regarding the financial risks were shared; however, it was felt these could be satisfactorily mitigated. He expressed his disappointment that the ambition to provide a new, fit-for-purpose leisure centre coupled with the delivery of other services by trusted partners which was considered to enhance the vibrancy of Bury St Edmunds and surrounding communities would not be met. A period of reflection to further consider the implications of the proposals was urged to be sought.

Councillor Joanna Rayner, former Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Community Hubs, who under the previous administration had been the lead member for the Western Way project, felt there was a lack of clarity regarding the proposed budget for the revised scheme with no clear commitment on what would be spent including how the future of the leisure centre would be secured. She subsequently moved an amendment to the substantive motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Andrew Speed.

The amendment was as follows, with the relevant changes shown in bold text and strike-through:

That:

1. **A decision on** the delivery of the Western Way project in Bury St Edmunds be **paused** ~~revised as set out in this report~~ and in accordance with the following resolutions;
2. ~~Officers be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Leisure and Resources,~~ **to bring back to Council a detailed plan to** deliver a refurbishment of the existing Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre **and details of the spend committed to deliver these works;** ~~provided that the total cost of these works is fully met by the Council's already available budgets for the centre and any new third party funding that can be obtained, as set out in section 3 of this report;~~
3. A budget of £75,000, funded from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve, be approved to develop an initial business case for alternative options for the Olding Road site **and an options appraisal brought back to Council alongside recommendation 2;**
4. The existing allocation of up to £1 million from the original West Suffolk Operational Hub project towards remediation of the former council depot be retained on an invest-to-save basis in the Council's Capital Programme to cover the cost of any immediate works to the existing Olding Road site which will add value to this asset and/or reduce holding costs irrespective of which future option for its use is adopted; any expenditure from this allocation to be approved by the Council's section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources;
5. ~~A provision of up to £2.4 million from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve is approved to fund any abortive costs arising from the new approach to the Western Way project;~~
6. The current Section 73 planning application to allow phasing of the original planning consent for Western Way remain on hold until a new decision is reached by Council on the future of the Olding Road site;
7. ~~Officers be authorised to appoint a new external project team and contractor(s) to progress the new approach, within the new spending~~
8. authorities set out above and in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules; and the Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's prudential indicators.

The debate ensued on the amendment to the substantive motion.

Several members of the Conservative Group spoke in support of the amendment which included the following comments:

- That there was insufficient information and detail in the report to make an informed decision on the new proposals. It was therefore felt

appropriate to pause the existing project while the full implications of the revisions were properly worked through.

- The potential impact on the renewable energy income stream that formed part of the current scheme, including the immediate impact on the Council's carbon footprint.
- A lack of clarity regarding a longer term commitment for the delivery of leisure services in Bury St Edmunds.
- Recognition and a shared concern regarding the potential financial risks; however, it was felt that greater consideration should be given to the mitigation measures and the longer term benefits. Examples of other significant projects were given with the difficulties that had been experienced and overcome to enable them to come to fruition.
- That it was difficult to provide details of the proposed revisions to the scheme with residents as the plans had not been shared within the report. It was felt that given the significance of the project and the financial spend involved, the detailed plans to deliver a refurbishment of the leisure centre should come back to Council for a decision and not delegated to officers, in consultation with portfolio holders.

Other members spoke on the amendment to the substantive motion, which included:

- Other costs were likely to be incurred if the present scheme was paused and these may rise in the current economic climate.
- Detailed plans for the revised scheme were available, which included costings for delivery.
- The principle of the amendment was understood; however, the majority of members felt that should the present scheme be paused, this would create further uncertainty for residents, particularly for those that used the leisure facilities.

Following Councillor Waterman's right of reply on the amendment, the amendment to the substantive motion was put to the vote and with the vote being 18 for the motion, 33 against and one abstention, the amendment was lost.

The debate returned to the substantive motion. The rationale for the proposals were reiterated, including highlighting the financial risks in the present economic climate which were considered to be too significant to outweigh the continuation of the current scheme. The importance and benefits of delivering quality leisure provision was recognised and plans would be progressed to work with Abbeycroft Leisure to meet this provision across the district within budget. Longer term budget provision would be made for all West Suffolk leisure centres to address ongoing maintenance needs which in turn should prolong their longevity.

Potential alternative options for generating income from renewable energy throughout the district by alternative methods to those proposed in the current scheme were also highlighted, together with the initial impact the build of a new leisure centre would have on the district's carbon emissions.

Other members expressed their concerns should the decision be taken as proposed in the substantive motion. These included:

- reiterating the rationale and benefits for replacing the Bury St Edmunds leisure centre.
- The perceived lack of detail and evidence in the report to make an informed decision.
- The potential impact on the reputation of the Council.
- The perceived adverse impact on West Suffolk's residents, users of the leisure facilities and the potential other service providers and commercial opportunities proposed in the current scheme.
- The proposals for the revised scheme potentially intimated that West Suffolk Council was not forward thinking, visionary, aspirational or ambitious and that the district was not worthy of investment.
- Whilst the difficulties faced in the current economic climate were recognised, it was felt that payback of the borrowing over the long term would still be satisfactorily achievable at an affordable rate of interest.

A request was made for a recorded vote, which was duly supported by more than the Constitutionally required ten members.

Following Councillor Waterman's right of reply, the substantive motion was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:

**For the motion:**

Councillors Alecock, Armitage, Anderson, Bradshaw, Brown, Dawn Dicker, Roger Dicker, Firman, Halpin, Hanlon, Higgins, Hind, Kelly, Lindberg, London, Luccarini, Lukaniuk, Miller-Jones, Neal, O'Driscoll, Savage, Sayer, Shipp, David Smith, Liz Smith, Stennett, Taylor, Thorndyke, Wakelam, Waldron, Waterman, Wijenayaka, Wittam and Yarrow.

**Against the motion:**

Councillors Broughton, Bull, Chester, Chung, Glossop, Griffiths, Hopfensperger, Houlder, Lynch, Mager, Marks, Mason, Mildmay-White, Rayner, Richardson, Andrew Smith, Speed and Stamp.

**Abstentions:**

None

It was therefore

**Resolved:** That

1. The delivery of the Western Way project in Bury St Edmunds be revised as set out in this report and in accordance with the following resolutions.
2. Officers be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Leisure and Resources, to deliver a refurbishment of the existing Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre provided that the total cost of these works is fully met by the Council's already available budgets for the centre and any new third-party funding that can be obtained, as set out in section 3 of this report.

3. A budget of £75,000, funded from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve, be approved to develop an initial business case for alternative options for the Olding Road site.
4. The existing allocation of up to £1 million from the original West Suffolk Operational Hub project towards remediation of the former council depot be retained on an invest-to-save basis in the Council's Capital Programme to cover the cost of any immediate works to the existing Olding Road site which will add value to this asset and/or reduce holding costs irrespective of which future option for its use is adopted; any expenditure from this allocation to be approved by the Council's section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.
5. A provision of up to £2.4 million from the Strategic Priorities and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reserve is approved to fund any abortive costs arising from the new approach to the Western Way project.
6. The current Section 73 planning application to allow phasing of the original planning consent for Western Way remain on hold until a new decision is reached by Council on the future of the Olding Road site.
7. Officers be authorised to appoint a new external project team and contractor(s) to progress the new approach, within the new spending authorities set out above and in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules.
8. The Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's prudential indicators.

(At this point, the Chair adjourned the meeting for a short comfort break during which Councillors Bradshaw, Firman, Glossop, Griffiths, Luccarini, Mager, Marks, Mason, Rayner, Richardson and Stamp left the meeting and did not return. The meeting resumed at 10.32 pm).

**313. Appointment of Independent Remuneration Panel (Report number: COU/WS/23/015)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for appointing members to the 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 Council, although the Council may wish to agree alternative proposals proposed by its own members. A new scheme must be adopted by December 2023 before the current scheme expired in February 2024. The scheme would then be subject to annual review.

On 20 June 2023, Council agreed the process for appointing a minimum of three members to the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), together with an advisor to the panel, for a period of up to four years. The appointment process included forming a selection panel that would interview shortlisted applicants and would make recommendations to the Council on whom to appoint, as summarised in paragraph 1.5 of the report.

Section 2 of the report provided details of the interview process and the rationale behind the selection panel's consideration of whom to appoint to the IRP. Short biographies of each of the recommended four individuals were contained in Appendix A.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including the reasons for not recommending the appointment of an advisor to the Panel, as set out in section 2.3 of the report.

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

**Resolved:** That

1. the four individuals listed in Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/015 be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel for a term of up to four years.
2. No appointment be made to the role of advisor to the Independent Remuneration Panel for the reasons set out in section 2.3 of Report number: COU/WS/23/015.

314. **Review of polling districts and polling places (Report number: COU/WS/23/016)**

Council considered this report which sought approval for the compulsory polling district and places review to commence from 2 October 2023, together with the proposed approach and timetable for the review.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years. The next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

As a result of this and other matters explained in paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4 of the report, it was important that the polling district and places review was carried out as early as possible so that the Council had agreed polling districts and polling places to be used for the next parliamentary election, which must take place before 28 January 2025, as well as the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner elections which would be held in May 2024.

Set out in section 2 of the report was the proposed approach to the review, together with an outline timetable setting out each stage. Attached at Appendix A was the draft schedule of polling districts and polling places,

including electorate and recent polling station turnout figures and comments regarding potential changes and/or areas to be considered as part of the review.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the review was expected to be completed in January 2024, prior to which on 19 December 2023, Council would be asked to consider and approve the revised polling districts and polling places.

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

**Resolved:** That

1. The compulsory polling district and places review be approved to commence on Monday 2 October 2023.
2. The outline timetable and approach to the review as set out in Report number: COU/WS/23/016 and at Appendix A, be approved.

315. **Mildenhall Parish - change of name (Report number: COU/WS/23/017)**

Council considered this report which sought approval to formalise a change in name of the Mildenhall parish area so that the parish would be known as Mildenhall High.

Changing the name of a parish area could be achieved through a Community Governance Review process in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. However, such a change may also be progressed under section 75 of the Local Government Act 1972 at the request of the relevant Parish or Town Council.

Section 1.2 of the report explained the process that must be followed to a make a change in name, which started with a decision being required by the Council approving the proposed change.

A request had been received from Mildenhall Town Council to formalise a change in the name of the parish area so that the parish would be known as Mildenhall High. The Town Council had advised that the Town had historically been known as Mildenhall High and the Town Council had, since May 2019, operated informally under the name of Mildenhall High Town Council. However, no order had been made to formalise the change of name of the parish area from Mildenhall to Mildenhall High.

With the agreement of the Chair and the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, Councillor Richard Alecock, ward member for Mildenhall Great Heath, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council and subsequently moved the motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Andy Neal, ward member for Mildenhall Queensway.

On the motion of Councillor Alecock, seconded by Councillor Neal, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**Resolved:** That

1. The request from Mildenhall Town Council to change the name of the parish of Mildenhall, be noted.
2. The name of Mildenhall Parish be changed to Mildenhall High Parish.
3. The Director (HR, Governance and Regulatory) be authorised to make the necessary legal order to enact the change to the parish name.

**316. Any other urgent business**

On this occasion, and by reason of special circumstances, the Chair allowed two separate items of urgent business to be considered under this item.

Tabled before each member was a paper outlining the two items of business to be considered.

**1. Dispensation sought for non-attendance of Councillor Sarah Pugh at meetings for a period in excess of six consecutive months**

Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 required councillors to attend at least one meeting of the Council or act as an appointed representative of the Council every six month period, unless the failure to attend was due to a reason pre-approved by the authority.

Councillor Sarah Pugh last attended a meeting of Council on 23 May 2023. She was planning on attending this meeting; however, due to unforeseen personal circumstances was unable to attend and had given her apologies for absence.

If the 'reserve' Council meeting was not convened on 21 November 2023, Councillor Pugh may face automatic removal from office due to failing to attend a council meeting within six consecutive months. She was not appointed to any other statutory committees and it was not known whether she would be required to attend a meeting of the outside body she had been appointed to within this timeframe.

On the motion of Councillor Roger Dicker, Chair of the Council seconded by Councillor Pat Hanlon, Vice Chair of the Council, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

**Resolved:**

That in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, a dispensation for the non-attendance of Councillor Sarah Pugh at meetings for a period in excess of six consecutive months by reason



of unforeseen personal circumstances be approved and that the situation be reviewed at the next ordinary meeting of Council, as necessary.

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee**

As required by the Constitution, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) were appointed at the Annual Meeting of Council for the ensuing year.

On 23 May 2023, Councillor Andy Neal was elected Vice-Chair of PASC for the 2023 to 2024 municipal year. Whilst he would remain a full member of the Committee, Councillor Neal had within the last few days before the Council meeting decided to resign from the role of Vice-Chair.

Under Part 4d, paragraph 5.3 of the PASC section of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules within the Constitution, the Council was required to fill the vacancy at the next ordinary meeting of Council. Nominations were therefore sought at this meeting to appoint a new Vice-Chair of PASC.

The Chair called upon Councillor Victor Lukaniuk, Deputy Leader and Leader of the Independents Group to make his nomination for the appointment of Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Lukaniuk duly nominated Councillor Frank Stennett. The Chair sought further nominations and Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger nominated Councillor Ian Houlder.

There being no further nominations, a vote was taken on each nomination. With the votes being 31 votes for Councillor Frank Stennett and 9 votes for Councillor Ian Houlder, with no abstentions, the Chair

**Declared:**

That Councillor Frank Stennett be elected Vice-Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2023 to 2024 municipal year.

The meeting concluded at 10.38 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chair**

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