

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Tuesday 6 February 2024** at **6.00pm** in the **Conference Room, Mildenhall Hub**, Sheldrick Way, Mildenhall, IP28 7JX

Present **Councillors**

Chair Cliff Waterman (Leader of the Council)

Vice Chair Victor Lukaniuk (Deputy Leader of the Council)

Donna Higgins

Diane Hind

Gerald Kelly

Ian Shipp

David Taylor

Jim Thorndyke

Indy Wijenayaka

By invitation

Sarah Broughton

(Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

In attendance

Andy Neal

540. **Introduction**

Prior to the start of the meeting, Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, referred to King Charles III recent cancer diagnosis and wished him a speedy recovery and hoped that the release of his diagnosis would help to promote public awareness of the disease. The Chair of the Council would also be writing to Buckingham Palace to send the Council's best wishes and support to the King. The Leader also asked the Cabinet to join him in sending their best wishes to the King and his family at this time.

The Leader also introduced two Officers who were present to observe the Cabinet meeting and who were participating in the Council's Aspiring Leader's Programme.

541. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Richard O'Driscoll.

542. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

543. Declarations of interest

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

544. Open forum

The following non-Cabinet member spoke under this item:

1. Councillor Andy Neal (Ward Member for Mildenhall Queensway)

Councillor Andy Neal addressed the Cabinet in relation to Agenda Item 13 (Community Chest Grants 2024 to 2025) and made specific reference to Mildenhall Town Football Club who had made an application to this fund, but which had been unsuccessful.

Councillor Neal then went on to raise his general concerns in relation to the grant funding process and questioned whether it was fair and equal. In his view, consideration should also be given to ensuring that there was an equal geographical spread of funding across the district of West Suffolk as a whole.

In response to his concerns, Councillor Neal was informed by Councillor Donna Higgins, the Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities, that the application process was open to organisations across the whole of West Suffolk and each application was considered on its own merits. The Portfolio Holder also confirmed that she would seek to ascertain as to why the application from the Football Club had been unsuccessful and would report back to Councillor Neal accordingly.

545. Public participation

There were no members of the public in attendance on this occasion.

546. Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 5 December 2023 (Report number CAB/WS/24/004)

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed members of the following substantive items discussed by the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee at their meeting held on 5 December 2023:

1. Performance report
2. Welfare reform update
3. ARP financial performance
4. ARP Joint Committee partnership budget
5. ARP Joint Committee service plan and risk register support
6. Forthcoming issues

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

Councillor Hind also expressed her thanks to the staff at the Partnership for their continued support to the residents of West Suffolk.

547. Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 18 January 2024 (Report number CAB/WS/24/005)

The Cabinet received this report, which informed Members of the following substantive items discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting held on 18 January 2024:

1. Housing update
2. Cabinet Decisions Plan: 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024
3. Work programme update 2024

Councillor Sarah Broughton, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Cabinet and particularly referred to the housing update which had been provided by Councillor Richard O'Driscoll, Portfolio Holder for Housing, who had also been present at the meeting.

548. Report of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 25 January 2024 (Report number CAB/WS/24/006)

The Cabinet received and noted this report, which informed Members of the following substantive items discussed by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee at their meeting held on 25 January 2024:

1. Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget
2. Internal Audit Report on Bank Mandate Fraud
3. CIPFA Guidance on Audit Committees
4. Co-opting Non-elected Independent Members
5. 2023 to 2024 Performance Report (Quarter Three)
6. Treasury Management Report (December 2023)
7. Annual Financial Resilience Management Statement and Investment Strategy Statements (2024 to 2025)
8. Work Programme Update

The Cabinet also noted that separate reports were included on the Cabinet agenda for Items 1., 6. and 7. above.

549. Recommendations of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 25 January 2024 - Delivering a Sustainable Medium-Term Budget (Report number CAB/WS/24/007)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council, approval of proposals for inclusion in the budget for 2024 to 2025 and medium-term financial plans.

At its meeting on 23 November 2023, the Committee had been informed of the process and approach to setting the Council's 2024 to 2025 budget and the principles and challenges faced in achieving this. On 25 January 2024, the Committee received an update on key budget assumptions proposed in the development of the 2024 to 2025 budget and medium-term plans.

The proposals, as set out in Section 2 and Appendix A (budget assumptions) and Appendix C (capital programme) of Report number PAS/WS/24/001 had

been incorporated into the budget setting process, the composite report for which was to be considered by Cabinet later in the meeting under Agenda Item 12, for referral to Council on 20 February 2024. Should Cabinet, therefore, not endorse any of the proposals endorsed by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, or suggest alternatives, this would need to be reflected in the subsequent budget setting documentation and recommendations.

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet and also thanked the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee for their role in scrutinising the budget proposals for 2024 to 2025 and beyond.

Recommended to Council (as part of the budget setting process) (20 February 2024):

That:-

1. The proposal as detailed in Section 2 of Report number PAS/WS/24/001 and Appendix A (budget assumption changes) be included in the 2024 to 2025 Revenue Budget.
2. The capital programme, as set out in Appendix C of Report number PAS/WS/24/001, be included in the 2024 to 2025 budget setting process.

550. Recommendation of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 25 January 2024 - Treasury Management Report - December 2023 (Report number CAB/WS/24/008)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council, the approval of the Treasury Management Report from 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet. The total amount invested as at 31 December 2023 was £55,750,000. Interest achieved in the first nine months of the financial year amounted to £2,083,152.79 against a budget for the period of £536,250. This had created a budgetary surplus of £1,546,902.79 due to two main reasons:

- The Council holding higher levels of cash balances than anticipated.
- The rising Bank of England base rate having a knock-in effect on investment returns.

External borrowing as of 31 December 2023 was £9,500,000, a reduction of £250,000 from 1 April 2023 which related to the repayment plan for the recent Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) £10 million, 40-year loan, with the Council's level of internal borrowing being £47,604,200 as of 31 December 2023. The overall borrowing total of both external and internal was expected to increase over the full financial year.

Recommended to Council (20 February 2024):

That the Treasury Management Report (December 2023), as contained in Report number FRS/WS/24/001, be approved.

551. Recommendations of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 25 January 2024 - Financial Resilience - Strategy Statement 2024 to 2025 and Treasury Management Code of Practice (Report number CAB/WS/24/009)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending to Council, the approval of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024 to 2025 and the Treasury Management Code of Practice.

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Cabinet. 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 2024 to 2025 was attached as Appendix 1 to Report number FRS/WS/24/002 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 counter party ratings and interest rate projections.

Recommended to Council (20 February 2024):

That:

1. The Treasury Management Statement 2024 to 2025, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report number FRS/WS/24/002, be approved.
2. The Treasury Management Code of Practice, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report number FRS/WS/24/002, be approved.

552. Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 (Report number CAB/WS/24/010)

The Cabinet considered this report, which presented proposals for the budget and council tax setting in 2024 to 2025 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024 to 2028. This report provided details of the Council's proposed revenue and capital budgets for 2024 to 2025 and in the medium term and the Cabinet was required to recommend to Council, the approval of the 2024 to 2025 budget for the authority, including establishing the level of council tax required to help fund the Council's activities over the next year.

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Cabinet. The budget had been created to invest in West Suffolk's future, improve services and keep charges low. It invested in a fair, thriving and sustainable future for West Suffolk and improved essential services, whilst meeting significant national and local financial challenges.

The budget would support and help drive the delivery of the authority's ambitious strategic priorities. Investment in these areas included:

- Essential services that residents relied on, such as improved grass cutting and grounds maintenance.
- Funding leisure improvements, as well as new equipment and refurbishment of play areas and open spaces.
- Ways to bring more affordable homes to West Suffolk and help prevent people becoming homeless.
- Working alone and with partners to improve and rent out property for businesses to create jobs, improve skills and grow the local economy.
- Helping the town centres, by supporting the markets and parking improvements.
- Backing sustainable communities by supporting crucial groups and volunteers that were the backbone of society and provided vital support.
- Funding commissioning work around Brandon and potential economic benefits on the A11, A1307 and A14 corridors.

The Council would continue to invest in initiatives that generated income and wider benefits, such as Solar for Business. In addition, £1million would be made in savings or new local income over the next two years as part of the Council's forthcoming service improvement and behaving commercially programmes. This would be in addition to the £1 million already achieved in the current year's budget to make the Council as efficient as possible.

West Suffolk Council was forecasting a two-year balanced budget despite an additional £5 million in pressures (around 7 per cent of the overall £69 million gross budget). This had been caused by increased inflation, cost of living and higher demand for services, additional demands from Government and traditional reduced funding.

This year the Government had given a significantly below inflation settlement and expected in their calculations that all councils put up Council Tax to the maximum amount available (2.99 per cent). West Suffolk Council was proposing to follow other local authorities and Government guidance, with a rise of 11p a week extra (£5.76 a year increase) to £197.82 for the average Band D property. 70 per cent of properties in West Suffolk were in Bands A to C and, would, therefore pay less than this. The Council Tax paid to West Suffolk Council was only around 11 per cent of the total bill and covered under a fifth of the cost of services. The Council had also agreed to extend up to 100 per cent discount on Council Tax to many low income and vulnerable residents, including those in work.

The 2023 to 2024 budget approved in February 2023, included support for the introduction of a long term empty homes premium after twelve months of a property becoming vacant and this 2024 to 2025 budget included proposals to implement additional powers given to local government to levy a second homes premium within the district from April 2025. These financial levers enabled local councils to use council tax to achieve behavioural changes linked to bringing empty properties and second homes back into general use within the locality.

Members also noted that as part of the budget setting process, the Council had undertaken a review of its fees and charges pricing used in the budget and medium-term. The fees and charges that were changing were detailed in Attachment D, Appendix 6a. As set out in the West Suffolk Fees and Charges Policy and the Constitution, where fees and charges were proposed to be increased by more than five percent, this constituted a Key Decision. This would, therefore, be a decision of Cabinet and would be subject to the call-in process.

Councillor Hind concluded by commending the Finance Team, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, together with Officers and Cabinet colleagues, for their work in being able to secure a balanced budget for 2024 to 2025.

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, expressed his thanks to Councillor Diane Hind, the Cabinet, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee and Officers for all of the work which had been undertaken to produce a balanced and forward looking budget. The Council would also continue to lobby Government for fairer funding for Local Government as its medium term plans could be significantly impacted if the current level of funding continued to reduce. Local Government was at the forefront of delivering the services that residents relied on and the Council must be able to continue to meet the needs of its communities and businesses.

Councillor Victor Lukaniuk, Deputy Leader of the Council, also expressed his support for the budget proposals. This support was also expressed by other members of the Cabinet.

Recommended to Council (as part of the budget setting process) (20 February 2024):

That:

1. The revenue and capital budget for 2024 to 2028, plus 2023 to 2024 capital projects that subsequently require to be carried forward at the year end, attached at Attachment A and as detailed in Attachment D (Appendices 1-6), Attachment E, and Attachment F to Report number CAB/WS/24/010, be approved.
2. Having taken into account the conclusions of the Director's (Resources and Property) report on the adequacy of reserves and the robustness of budget estimates (Attachment C) and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (Attachment D), particularly the Scenario Planning and Sensitivity Analysis (Attachment D, Appendix 5) and all other information contained in Report number CAB/WS/24/010, the Cabinet recommends the level of council tax for 2024 to 2025 be established at £197.82 for an average band D property (the level of council tax beyond April 2025 will be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year).
3. The Director (Resources and Property), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, 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. The Director (Resources and Property) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, be given delegated authority to formulate and implement in full, Government grant, discount or relief schemes (examples include but not limited to those set out in paragraphs 3.14-3.16 and 4.7-4.10 of Report number CAB/WS/24/010), so long as they are as a minimum, revenue cost neutral to the Council.
5. The change to the Second Home Premium, set out in paragraphs 4.7 to 4.10 of Report number CAB/WS/24/010, be approved.

Resolved:

That:

6. The fees and charges price increases (as set out in Attachment D, Appendix 6a of Report number CAB/WS/24/010) be approved.

Recommended to Council (as part of the budget setting process) (20 February 2024):

That:

7. The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy (as set out in Attachment F of Report number CAB/WS/24/010), be approved.

553. Community Chest Grants 2024 to 2025 (Report number CAB/WS/24/011)

The Cabinet considered this report, which sought approval for the recommendations of the Grant Working Party, following its consideration of applications for Community Chest funding in the 2024 to 2025 financial year.

Councillor Donna Higgins, Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet and explained that the Community Chest had £466,733 available for allocation for 2024 to 2025, subject to the funding targeting organisations supporting vulnerable individuals/families with cost-of-living challenges.

A total of 46 applications were considered by the Grant Working Party, totalling £1,319,843.12. Each application had been summarised within the appropriate category as listed in Appendix 1 to Report number CAB/WS/24/011. Each application was required to be evaluated in accordance with the eligibility and selection criteria provided to the Grant Working Party. The Grant Working Party had considered, in detail, each of the applications which had been received. Officers would also endeavour to signpost those applicants that were unsuccessful or needed additional funding to other opportunities.

Councillor Higgins wished to commend the Grant Working Party for the work involved and thanked the Officers that had supported the process.

The Cabinet noted that the Grant Working Party had considered, in detail, each of the applications which had been received and agreed that those that had been recommended for funding, satisfactorily met the eligibility and selection criteria.

Resolved:

That:

A. The allocation of Community Chest funding for 2024 to 2025, be approved, namely:

	Reach Community Projects, Haverhill and Newmarket	£6,600
2.	West Suffolk Citizens Advice, West Suffolk	£245,000
3.	Haverhill Community Trust – Signpost Project, Haverhill	£5,000
4.	Haverhill Men’s Shed Haverhill	£10,052
5.	Haverhill Scout and Guide Management Committee	£5,000
6.	The Offshoot Foundation, West Suffolk	£3,000
7.	The Racing Centre, Newmarket	£5,100
8.	Bridge Community Church, Bury St Edmunds	£5,000
9.	Rural Coffee Caravan, West Suffolk	£6,812
10.	Suffolk Accident and Rescue Service (SARS), West Suffolk	£10,000
11.	The Stable Café and Community Space, Newmarket	£5,000
12.	Bury St Edmunds Women’s Aid, West Suffolk	£20,300
13.	HOPE after Suicide Loss, West Suffolk	£10,000
14.	St Nicholas Hospice Care, West Suffolk	£10,000
15.	Suffolk Rape Crisis, West Suffolk	£10,000
16.	Brave Futures, West Suffolk	£10,000
17.	EPIC Dads, Mildenhall	£2,500
18.	Home-start in Suffolk, West Suffolk	£7,000
19.	Still Good Food CIO, Bury St Edmunds	£8,672
20.	Suffolk Family Carers, West Suffolk	£2,500
21.	The Befriending Scheme, Haverhill	£5,000
22.	Second Chance Stroke Association, Bury St Edmunds	£2,500
23.	Suffolk Mind, West Suffolk	£6,000
24.	Bury Drop In, Bury St Edmunds	£9,916
25.	Free Food in Haverhill, Haverhill	£7,481
26.	Gatehouse Caring, Bury St Edmunds	£10,000
27.	Lyward Colley Trust CIC, West Suffolk	£6,000

28.	Music Prescription CIC, Bury St Edmunds	£2,500
29.	Our Special Friends, West Suffolk	£9,000
30.	Lightwave CIO, Red Lodge and Beck Row	£5,000
31.	The Voluntary Network, West Suffolk	£10,000
32.	West Suffolk Vineyard Church, Bury St Edmunds	£5,800

B. For the reasons set out in paragraph 3.4.3 of Report number: CAB/WS/24/011, no Community Chest funding for 2024 to 2025 be awarded to:

1. Abbeycroft Leisure – Family Park Cooking, West Suffolk
2. Jiggins Memorial Village Hall and Playing Field, Ixworth
3. Theatre Royal, Outreach Project in Haverhill
4. Vogue Athletics, Newmarket
5. Brandon in Bloom, Brandon
6. Haverhill Community Trust, Volunteer Centre, Haverhill
7. St Mary' Church Community Project, Kennett and Kentford
8. Moreton Hall Youth Action Group Ltd, Bury St Edmunds
9. Cruse Bereavement, West Suffolk
10. Families Together, West Suffolk
11. Zebras Children and Adults Charity CIO, Brandon
12. Art Branches CIC, West Suffolk
13. Boomerang Pet Food Bank, Haverhill
14. British Red Cross, West Suffolk

554. Great Barton Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) (Report number CAB/WS/24/012)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending the adoption of the proposed update of the Great Barton Air Quality Action Plan for the period to January 2029 (as set out in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/24/012).

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of the Cabinet and explained that in accordance with legislation, West Suffolk Council was required to have an Air Quality Action Plan for Great Barton, which stipulated the actions that would be taken to improve air quality in this area, setting out the target to show consistently reduced levels of pollution over the course of five years. The Great Barton Air Quality Action Plan had been in place since 2018 and had registered a consistent reduction in air pollution, but not for the requisite five-year period.

The proposed Action Plan covered three main priorities:

1. To reduce the number of heavy good vehicles (HGVs) and light goods vehicles (LGVs) travelling through Great Barton, where possible.
2. To improve the flow of traffic along the A143.
3. To ensure that new developments contributed positively to local air quality.

Therefore, the Council must renew and update the Great Barton Air Quality Action Plan for a further five year period.

Resolved:

That the proposed update of the Great Barton Air Quality Action Plan, for the period January 2024 to January 2029, as set out in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/24/012, be adopted.

555. West Suffolk Council Contaminated Land Strategy 2024 to 2029 (Report number CAB/WS/24/013)

The Cabinet considered this report, which was recommending adoption of the West Suffolk Contaminated Land Strategy for the period to January 2029 (as set out in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/24/013).

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Cabinet and explained that the proposed Strategy would form part of a framework affecting the quality and use of land locally. It followed the principles of sustainability, aiming to achieve a balance between social, economic and environmental concerns, whilst meeting the authority's statutory obligations and corporate responsibilities to protect and improve human health and the local environment.

Following a review of the Strategy, it was found to continue to meet the Council's responsibilities. A few minor amendments were made to ensure the document was up to date (as set out in paragraph 2.2 of Report number CAB/WS/24/013).

The priorities by which West Suffolk Council would continue to deal with contaminated land were also outlined within the Strategy and included:

- Protecting human health, controlled waters, designated ecosystems and damage to property from existing land pollution.
- Encouraging sustainable clean-up practices to return land to a condition that was fit for use.
- Encouraging re-use of previously developed and/or brownfield land.

Resolved:

That the draft West Suffolk Contaminated Land Strategy for the period January 2024 to January 2029, as set out in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/24/023, be adopted.

556. **Decisions Plan: 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024 (Report number CAB/WS/24/014)**

The Cabinet considered this report which was the Cabinet Decisions Plan covering the period 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024.

Members took the opportunity to review the intended forthcoming decisions of the Cabinet. However, no further information or amendments were requested on this occasion.

557. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

See minute number 558. below.

558. **Exempt Appendices: Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 (paragraph 3) (Report number CAB/WS/24/010)**

The Cabinet considered the exempt Appendices to this report. However, no reference was made to specific detail and, therefore, this item was not held in private session.

The meeting concluded at 6.55 pm

Signed by:

Chair
