

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 20 February 2024** 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

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

329. Remembrance

Before commencing business, all members were asked to stand and observe a minute's silence in remembrance of former Forest Heath District Councillor Bill Bishop, and former St Edmundsbury Borough and West Suffolk Councillor Mary Evans 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.

330. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

331. **Chair's announcements**

The Chair firstly reported that in response to the concerning news that His Majesty King Charles III had been diagnosed with cancer, he had written on behalf of West Suffolk Council to His Majesty to wish him well and a speedy recovery.

The Chair then announced the following forthcoming events and encouraged members to attend:

- Sunday 17 March 2024 at The Apex, Bury St Edmunds at 6.30pm: The Chair's Charity Concert. This would feature a performance by The Voice Squad.
- Monday 8 April 2024 at St Edmundsbury Cathedral at 11am: Memorial service to celebrate the life of the late former Councillor Mary Evans.
- Friday 10 May 2024 at 7pm (venue to be confirmed): The Chair's Civic Dinner.

The Chair subsequently reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 19 December 2023.

Specific attention was drawn to the '819th traditional opening ceremony of the King's Lynn Mart' that the Chair had attended on 14 February 2024.

332. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Anderson, Pat Hanlon, John Griffiths, Andrew Martin and Tracy Whitehand.

Councillor John Augustine was also unable to attend the meeting.

333. **Declarations of interests**

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

334. **Public participation**

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

1. **Mr Aaron Leeves**, a resident of the district, had previously submitted a question in connection with the impacts of achieving carbon net zero in Bury St Edmunds, together with the effects on the local economy.

However, as required by the Council Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution, Mr Leeves failed to ask the question he had submitted and raised matters unrelated to the Council agenda. Despite the Chair politely asking Mr Leeves to ask the question he had submitted, Mr Leeves continued to talk over the Chair.

As Mr Leeves ignored the Chair's requests for the previously submitted question to be asked, in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, the

Chair asked Mr Leeves to leave the meeting. Mr Leeves continued to speak over the Chair and ignored requests to leave so a security officer was required to step in and assist with Mr Leeves' removal from the Conference Chamber.

Once Mr Leeves had left the Chamber, the Chair then welcomed the next registered public speaker to the meeting.

2. **Dr Rachel Wood**, a resident of the district, made a statement in connection with agenda item 10, 'Motion on Notice – West Suffolk Archives'.

Dr Wood's statement was in response to Suffolk County Council's recent decision to close the West Suffolk archive facility in Bury St Edmunds and centralise the service at The Hold in Ipswich.

Dr Wood placed emphasis on the fact that the existing archives office in Bury St Edmunds held historical records for the whole of the western half of Suffolk and provided examples of archives that she felt were of such historical importance that they should remain in Bury St Edmunds. Access to these, and other records currently stored in Bury St Edmunds was considered to be at risk if relocated to Ipswich.

It was acknowledged that some collections may remain in Bury St Edmunds; however, Dr Wood feared that what was being suggested would break up the heritage of western Suffolk.

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, thanked Dr Wood for her detailed and eloquent statement. The motion on notice at item 10 on the agenda broadly addressed the issues she had raised. He urged members to consider what Dr Wood had said when the debate on the motion on the notice was held later in the meeting.

No further questions were asked or statements made. 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.

335. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/24/001)**

Councillor Waterman, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/24/001.

Following the distribution and publication of the agenda and papers for this meeting, a typographical error had been identified in paragraph 13. of the Leader's Statement in respect of the following sentence, which should read, as indicated by emboldened text:

'When the County Council looked at relocating the archive in early 2023, they considered the option of moving to Western Way costing around **£3.5** million or staying at Raingate Street at around **£5** million.'

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Waterman:

- a. **Budget:** reported that the budget had been formulated within the context of the new recently adopted strategic priorities. A two-year balanced budget had been achieved whilst delivering much needed, quality services to the residents of West Suffolk. Proposals would bring the new priorities to a reality, together with income from investments. Certainty regarding future funding was however imperative, and stringent lobbying of central government to seek that certainty would continue.
- b. **Engagement:** he and his Cabinet had visited the district's towns and engaged with ward members to better understand strengths, issues and challenges within the towns and their communities. Further engagement was planned for visiting the rural areas. Councillor Waterman thanked his Cabinet for their work and commitment to these and for additional hours spent in meetings.
- c. **Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge:** explained that every five years, as part of its membership requirements, the Council was required by the LGA to undertake a peer review. The review, which was due to be undertaken between 23 July 2024 and 26 July 2024, was amongst other criteria, was expected to measure the effectiveness of the Council's ability to deliver against its ambitions. This would be the Council's first review since the creation of West Suffolk Council in 2019.
- d. **Environment:** reported that ten properties at Euston Estates and four Metcalfe Almshouses in Hawstead had been successfully retro-fitted to improve energy efficiency and warmer homes utilising government schemes and private investment. In addition, Suffolk Public Sector Leaders were offering grants for better loft insulation to eligible applicants in Suffolk.

Part A: Questions on the Leader's statement

In accordance with the recently amended Council Procedure Rules, the Leader firstly responded to a range of questions relating to his statement itself:

- a. **Budget gap forecast:** whilst a budget gap of £5.7 million for 2026 to 2027 and £6.28 million for 2027 to 2028 had currently been forecast, this was largely due to uncertainty from government regarding grant levels that may be received in the medium to longer term. Best and worst case scenarios were set out in Report number: COU/WS/24/003, which also explained the level of reserves the Council had which may need to be utilised to bridge the gap, if necessary.
- b. **Staff costs:** the relatively small increase in the staff establishment and associated costs, were set out in Report number: COU/WS/24/003. Some were due to the improvements being made to the grounds maintenance service as a result of the review held recently; however, the majority was largely due to extra burdens being placed upon the Council by central government. £1 million worth of savings had been made in the 2024 to 2025 budget, therefore the Council was continuing

to be financially prudent, which was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve year on year.

- c. **West Suffolk archives:** having met with the Leader and Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council (SCC) within the last week, the issue of SCC's proposal to relocate the West Suffolk archives from Bury St Edmunds to Ipswich had been raised by Councillor Waterman; however, Councillor Waterman reported that the SCC Leader and Chief Executive were not open to discussion on the matter at that time.
- d. **Cabinet visit to Clare:** the purpose of the visit (and to the other towns in the district) was to enable the Cabinet to better understand the assets and challenges of the town so that Cabinet members could make more informed choices when discussing topics affecting the town. Although local ward members were invited to meet with Cabinet on the various town visits, it was not the intention to meet with wider community organisations and groups at that time. Opportunities for wider engagement with the community and others would come forward at the appropriate time.
- e. **Environmental resilience:** deferred to Councillor Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory to respond to a question. Councillor Kelly referred to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) policy paper 'Understanding climate adaptation and the third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3)'. This paper prompted councils, businesses and communities to consider what climate change meant to them and actions they could take locally and collaboratively in some circumstances, to address climate change and how to ensure emergency and business continuity plans needed to be in place to mitigate the effects of climate change.

This matter was due to be considered at the next Town and Parish Forum on 18 March 2024 as a means for identifying potential actions and methods for making suitable adaptations to tackle the effects of climate change, including ways in which to mitigate the effects of flooding which had been of particular impact to communities in recent weeks.

- f. **Markets:** deferred to Councillor Indy Wijenayaka, Portfolio Holder for Growth to respond to several questions connected with the district's markets. The markets were extremely valuable to West Suffolk and efforts were being made to support their viability. External factors, such as the cost-of-living crisis which had influenced people's spending habits had made it increasingly challenging; however, a plan was in place to support and invest in the markets, such as through initiatives like the 'Makers' Markets'. Options for the location and development of Newmarket market were currently being carefully assessed in order to achieve an optimum solution moving forward.
- g. **Small grants to small independent retailers:** spending habits on the 'high street' had changed significantly in recent years, which was a significant challenge nationally. It was recognised that some small independent retailers in West Suffolk were thriving, yet some were

struggling. The request for small grants for small independent retailers was acknowledged; however, confirmation on whether this could be progressed was not forthcoming at the present time.

- h. **Suffolk County Council (SCC) budget:** felt disappointment regarding the way SCC's budget had been presented, as while recognising the difficult decisions that had needed to be made, Councillor Waterman felt many opportunities for collaborative working and engagement were missed by SCC. Acknowledgement of SCC's withdrawal of £3 million Housing Related Support from its budget was made and it was felt other options could have been explored, particularly working with Suffolk district and borough councils before making this decision. Councillor Waterman reported that Suffolk Public Sector Leaders would potentially in the short term ameliorate this much needed support. While not wishing to comment further on other aspects raised in connection with SCC's budget, Councillor Waterman also expressed his reservations regarding SCC's changes to the way in which Suffolk's arts organisations would be able to seek funding from SCC moving forward.
- i. **New Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy:** together with Councillor Richard O'Driscoll, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Waterman urged members to respond to the consultation on this new strategy before it closed on 18 March 2024.
- j. **Corn Exchange, Haverhill:** agreed that the Corn Exchange in Haverhill was of historical importance and working with partners, investigations would be undertaken into whether an appropriate business case could be devised to safeguard the future of the building.

This concluded questions on Part A of the Leader's Statement. The Chair had exercised his discretion to extend the 30 minute time allocation for this item by quite some length to conclude Part A. He therefore made the decision not to call for questions on Part B, 'Questions to the Leader on any Council matter' so that he could move on with business.

336. **Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report number: COU/WS/24/002)**

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/24/001.

A. Referrals from Cabinet: 6 February 2024

1. Treasury Management Report (December 2023)

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

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, which included thanking the Financial Resilience Sub-Committee and Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee for their work in scrutinising the treasury management report.

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

Resolved:

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

2. Financial Resilience Strategy Statement 2024 to 2025 and Treasury Management Code of Practice

Approval was sought for the Financial Resilience Strategy Statement 2024 to 2025 and Treasury Management Code of Practice.

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

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

Resolved:

That

1. The Treasury Management Strategy 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.

3. Budget and Council Tax setting: 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028

The recommendations emanating from the Cabinet's consideration of this report, together with its approval of the recommendation contained in Report number: CAB/WS/24/007 'Recommendation of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: 25 January 2024 - Delivering a sustainable medium-term budget' were contained within Report number: COU/WS/24/003 'Budget and Council Tax setting: 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028', for consideration as agenda item 8 on the Council agenda.

Members therefore noted that no decision was required at this stage.

337. Budget and Council Tax setting 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 (Report number: COU/WS/24/003)

(Councillor Frank Stennett declared that he was the Chair of Newmarket Cricket Club and left the meeting when it moved into private session and did not take part in the debate on the exempt business cases. He returned to the meeting when back in public session.)

Council 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.

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

- Strengthening essential services such as improving grass cutting and grounds maintenance operation making tidier streets and better biodiversity.
- Funding leisure improvements as well as protecting swimming pools from closing due to high utility costs, better equipment and investment in our leisure centres, play areas and open spaces.
- Ways to bring more affordable homes to West Suffolk and reduce the risk of people becoming homeless.
- Working alone and together with partners to improve and rent out property for businesses to create jobs and help our town centres as well as improve skills.
- Funding commissioning work around Brandon and potential economic benefits on the A11, A1307 and A14 corridors.
- Improving parking facilities across West Suffolk.
- Supporting crucial groups and volunteers that are the backbone of society and provide vital support for local communities.
- Topping up the Net Zero fund totalling now £11.75 million to support further investment in council assets, including the leisure portfolio and the authority's highly successful solar for business scheme.

The Council would continue to invest in initiatives that generated income and wider benefits, such as Solar for Business. In addition, £1 million 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 six per cent of the overall £78 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 Government had given a settlement that did not meet the costs of running services and expected in their calculations that all councils put up Council Tax to the maximum amount available (2.99 per cent). On 6 February 2024, the Cabinet recommended to Council that the level of Band D council tax for 2024 to 2025 be set at £197.82, which represented a Band D weekly increase of 11 pence. Noting that 70 percent of West Suffolk residents were in bands A to C, these would actually see a lower increase. The Council Tax paid to West Suffolk Council was only around 11 percent of the total bill and

covered under a fifth of the cost of services. The Council had also agreed to extend up to 100 percent 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.

The budget process had also given the opportunity to listen to residents, businesses and car park users by simplifying some parking charges and abolishing others. This was part of a common sense review of charges and tariffs for services the Council delivered to tailor them so they remained in line with their true costs, following high inflation and price rises but avoided blanket rises. Equally charges had been frozen in some areas, such as cost of market stalls, to help local traders and encourage markets and vitality of local town centres.

Members considered the report in detail, which included the following issues for securing a balanced budget for 2024 to 2025 and plans for the medium term from 2024 to 2028, together with corresponding detailed appendices:

- Section 1: Summary: as provided above.
- Section 2: Context: which included reference to the Council's robust financial planning and management enabling the Council to deliver both services and the strategic aims of West Suffolk. This was, despite previous reductions in national funding as well as the severe impact of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis on finances, the Council could put forward a balanced budget for 2024 to 2025 and an indicative balanced budget for the following year 2025 to 2026. Details were also provided on the Council's 'Investing in our Growth Agenda'; innovation in service delivery; the ambition for the Council to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030; and the implications of 'Simpler Recycling'.
- Section 3: Provisional local government finance settlement: which included reference to the Revenue Support Grant; Rural Services Delivery Grant; Services Grant; the future of New Homes Bonus; Funding Guarantee Grant; business rates estimate for 2024 to 2025; Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief and council tax referendum limits.
- Section 4: Council tax for 2024 to 2025: which included reference to the recently approved West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024 to 2025; changes to the Long Term Empty Property Premium and Second Homes arrangements.
- Section 5: Setting the budget – 2024 to 2025 and across the medium term to 2027 to 2028: which included reference to inflation assumptions assumed in the MTF5; fees and charges (as approved by Cabinet on 6 February 2024); and delivering a sustainable future beyond 2024 to 2025.

- Section 6: Capital programme 2024 to 2028: which included reference to the planned capital expenditure over four years to 2027/2028; disposal of surplus assets; and estimated income from asset disposals 2024 to 2028
- Section 7: Minimum revenue provision (MRP)
- Section 8: General fund balance
- Section 9: Earmarked reserves
- Section 10: Strategic priorities and MTFS reserve, which included details of the grant receipts put into this reserve from New Homes Bonus (including Funding Guarantee from 2023 to 2024)
- Section 11: Adequacy of reserves
- Section 12: Calculation of the council tax

Councillor Hind commended 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 before moving approval of all six recommendations set out in the report. The motion was duly seconded by Councillor Cliff Waterman, who reserved his right to speak until the end of the debate.

A detailed debate ensued which included a number of comments, observations and questions, including:

- a. **Exempt papers:** to promote openness and transparency it was questioned whether it was absolutely necessary for the three business cases (exempt Attachment D, appendices 2d, 2e and 2f) to be exempt. These had not been published in the public domain due to their commercial sensitivity.
- b. **Budget pressures:** whilst external factors, such as inflation were acknowledged for creating budgetary challenges, some budget pressures were considered to have been as a result of political decisions. Together with other examples, the £1 million Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund, which had initially allocated funds towards the upgrading of town and parish council-owned streetlights to LED was given, as well as referring to the proposed investment in industrial units rather than say, for example, leisure centres. It was questioned whether these were the most appropriate use of monies in challenging times.

During her right of reply, Councillor Hind stated that the upgrading of street lighting was supporting town and parish councils to deliver both energy and cost efficiencies which accorded with the Council's own strategic environmental resilience priority; and the Council remained committed to and was continuing to invest in growth as well as its leisure centres across the district.

- c. **Comments relating to the forecasted budget gaps for 2026/2027 and 2027/2028; the robustness of the exempt business cases; increases in capital expenditure and external borrowing; and the depletion of the Council's reserves:** these comments were acknowledged by Councillor Hind during her right of reply.

- d. **Premium on second homes:** whether it was appropriate to impose up to a 100 per cent Council Tax premium on second homes (furnished properties which are unoccupied or occupied periodically). Council was being asked to support the implementation of the second home premium with effect from April 2025, noting that a decision to revoke this determination could be made at any point up to 31 March 2025. Some members felt that this proposal would not release much-needed housing which appeared to be the aim of the premium.

During her right of reply, Councillor Hind stated that the implementation of the Council Tax premium on Long Term Empty and Second Homes aimed to bring properties back into use to help relieve pressure on existing housing stock. She quoted that as at 1 February 2024, 2,548 were currently on the Housing Register in need of affordable housing to rent. 550 homes could be brought back into much needed use to support those on the Register and to help enable people to remain resident within their own locality.

- e. **Attachment G - 'Net Zero Decarbonisation Fund – January 2024 Update':** Councillor Charlie Lynch made specific reference to the figures quoted under the fleet intervention at Table G1, namely that for an investment of £1,160,000 to upgrade the fleet to electric vehicles, this was currently projected to provide a net return figure of minus £155,000, and a carbon saving of 85 tonnes of CO₂e, which he felt was disappointing. Following reference to alternative suggestions that may provide better carbon, public health and financial savings, he requested that the above be reanalysed to ensure the proposed investment in the electric vehicle fleet was good value for money and would achieve sufficient carbon savings and benefit to public health.

During her right of reply, Councillor Hind stated that a written response would be provided to the issue outlined above and in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, this would be circulated to all members and published on the Council's website.

In addition to the above, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders spoke in support of the budget, with particular reference given to how it would benefit the delivery of priorities, services, aims and ambitions within their own portfolios, where applicable.

In summary, the majority of members acknowledged that despite the significant financial challenges being faced, the Council had achieved a positive and robust budget that invested in West Suffolk's future, improved services, moved forward with its 'greener' ambitions and kept charges low. Investments would continue to be made in essential services and initiatives that would drive the Council's strategic priorities within a context of national financial challenges.

As it had previously been indicated that members wished to discuss the specific content of the exempt appendices, at this point, Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, proposed that the meeting move into private session.

The motion was duly seconded by Councillor Andrew Smith. The motion was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the following items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt categories of information as prescribed in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and indicated against each item and, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Discussion was held on the following three business cases detailed in the exempt appendices:

- A £1.2 million investment in the commercial unit at Anglian Lane site in Bury St Edmunds to regenerate the asset whilst increasing its rental income – exempt business case at Appendix 2d.
- A £1.1 million investment in the commercial unit at 2 Hollands Road in Haverhill regenerate the asset whilst increasing its rental income – exempt business case at Appendix 2e.
- A £2.0 million investment towards a total £4.0 million capital project delivering a new sport and leisure provision at the St Felix site in Newmarket – exempt business case at Appendix 2f.

During the discussion in private session on the Anglian Lane business case, Councillor Diane Hind confirmed to Councillor Sarah Broughton that there was a presentational error in the exempt appendix. Subsequent to the meeting, written clarification was given to Councillor Broughton in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, this would be circulated to all members and placed on the Council's intranet for restricted access only.

Following due consideration, the meeting returned to public session, where Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council spoke at seconder of the motion. He felt extremely proud of the budget and had no hesitation commending its approval by Council.

The motion was then put to the statutorily required recorded vote. With 58 members present, the votes recorded were 33 votes for the motion, 3 against, and 22 abstentions; the names of those members voting for, against and abstaining, being recorded as follows:

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Councillors Mager, Speed and Stennett.

Abstentions:

Councillors Broughton, Bull, Chester, Chung, Clarke, Drummond, Glossop, Hood, Hopfensperger, Houlder, Lynch, Marks, Mason, Mildmay-White, Pugh, Rayner, Richardson, Rout, Rushbrook, Andrew Smith, Soons and Stamp.

It was therefore

Resolved:

That

1. having taken into account the information received by Cabinet on 6 February 2024 (Report number: CAB/WS/24/010) including the report by the Director (Resources and Property) (Section 151 Officer) set out in Attachment C, together with the up to date information and advice contained in Report number: COU/WS/24/003, the level of West Suffolk Council's band D Council Tax for 2024 to 2025 be set at £197.82 (the level of Council Tax beyond 2024 to 2025 will be set in accordance with the annual budget process for the relevant financial year).
2. Subject to recommendation 1 above, the following formal council tax resolutions be adopted:
 - a. 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 to Report number: COU/WS/24/003, and as detailed in Attachment D (Appendices 1 to 6), Attachment E and Attachment F, be approved.
 - b. A general fund balance of £5 million be agreed to be maintained, as detailed in paragraph 8.2.
 - c. The statutory calculations under Section 30 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, attached at Attachment I, be noted.
 - d. The Suffolk County Council and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk precepts issued to West Suffolk Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and outlined at paragraphs 12.6 and 12.7 below, be noted.
 - e. In accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the amounts shown in Schedule D of Attachment H be agreed as the amount of Council Tax for

the year 2024 to 2025 for each of the categories of dwellings shown.

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. Approval be given to delegate authority to the Director (Resources and Property) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources 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 to 3.16 and 4.7 to 4.10), so long as they are as a minimum, revenue cost neutral to the council.
5. Approval be given to the change to the Second Home Premium set out in paragraphs 4.7 to 4.10.
6. Approval be given to the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy (as set out in Attachment F).

At this point at 9.20pm, it was proposed by Councillor Cliff Waterman, seconded by Councillor Carol Bull, that the meeting be adjourned for a short comfort break. The motion was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That the Council meeting be adjourned immediately for a short comfort break.

The meeting resumed at 9.27pm.

(During the comfort break, Councillors Sarah Broughton, Andy Drummond, Paul Firman, Susan Glossop, Rachel Hood, Ian Houlder, Sara Mildmay-White, Sarah Pugh, Richard Rout, Karen Soons, Andrew Speed and Frank Stennett left the meeting and did not return.)

338. Calendar of meetings 2024 to 2025 (Report number: COU/WS/24/004)

Council considered this report, which sought approval for the proposed calendar of meetings for West Suffolk Council in 2024 to 2025.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the calendar took into account known events which could have a widespread impact on attendance such as school holidays.

No venues were stipulated on the calendar as this allowed for meetings to be held at West Suffolk House, Mildenhall Hub or other venues as appropriate

and in liaison with the relevant Chair. Under current legislation some meetings were also able to be operated entirely virtually (for example, Staff Consultative Panel, Financial Resilience Sub-Committee) and it was envisaged that would continue and would be at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting.

The practice of scheduling two additional reserve meetings of Council and three additional reserve meetings of Cabinet had been continued and those meetings would be held if needed. The meetings would continue to be publicised as normal, and members would receive notification of these in accordance with current processes.

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

Resolved:

That the Calendar of Meetings 2024 to 2025, as attached at Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/24/004, be approved.

339. Motion on notice - West Suffolk archives (Paper number: COU/WS/24/005)

(For openness and transparency, Councillor Patrick Chung declared that he was a trustee of the Bury St Edmunds Society. He remained in the meeting and voted on the motion.)

Under section nine of the Council Procedure Rules detailed in the Constitution, Council had been given written notice of a motion submitted by Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, as set out in Paper number: COU/WS/24/005 accordingly.

As previously advised, the Chair called upon Councillor Julia Wakelam to introduce and move the motion. Councillor Wakelam drew attention to a number of issues relating to Suffolk County Council's (SCC) proposal to close the West Suffolk archives branch in Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds and centralise this service to The Hold in Ipswich.

While recognising the severe financial pressures faced by the County Council, Councillor Wakelam expressed her deep sadness regarding this proposed closure. She felt that the anticipated revenue savings of around £140,000 a year for SCC as a result of the consolidation of Suffolk archives was a relatively insignificant sum within the context of SCC's entire budget and considered an alternative solution could be found. She urged members to support the motion which called for SCC to suspend the implementation of the change and work with all local stakeholders, including West Suffolk Council and Bury St Edmunds Town Council, to explore all alternative options within the County Council's available capital and revenue budgets for keeping access to local historical records within West Suffolk.

Councillor Wakelam thanked Dr Wood, the registered public speaker that had spoken on this matter earlier in the meeting, and others that wished to keep the archives in West Suffolk.

Councillor Wakelam provided a history of the West Suffolk archives, examples of records stored at the Raingate Street branch and the rationale for keeping them in West Suffolk, as set out in the paper. She felt gravely disappointed that no public consultation on SCC's proposal had been held and the impact on residents regarding accessibility to the archives not only in terms of travel costs inflicted for visiting The Hold in Ipswich but also the ease in which to find a specific record. Concern was also expressed that The Hold had insufficient storage provision to accommodate the West Suffolk archives.

Councillor Wakelam encouraged members to support the motion and hoped that if sufficient pressure was put on SCC, it would rethink its proposal and engage with stakeholders to explore alternative options.

The motion was duly seconded by Councillor Victor Lukaniuk.

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules regarding the debating motions on notice, the Chair reminded members that only five other members may speak on the motion for a maximum of three minutes each. The Chair exercised his discretion and permitted six members to speak.

The majority of members that spoke on the motion were in support and echoed Councillor Wakelam's concerns.

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

Councillor Nick Clarke, Leader of the Conservative Group expressed his support for keeping the West Suffolk archives in Bury St Edmunds; however, he did not feel approval of this motion was the most appropriate way to achieve that and suggested the motion be withdrawn.

Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, member of both West Suffolk Council and Cabinet member at Suffolk County Council (SCC) considered that approval of the motion would not add anything meaningful to the solution. At its budget meeting on 15 February 2024, SCC had resolved not to commit any additional expenditure to the archives located in Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft. As well as the revenue savings to be made, it was anticipated that it would cost over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. She added that it had been a difficult decision to relocate the archives to The Hold in Ipswich; however, SCC needed to reconsider its options following West Suffolk Council's decision to cancel the Western Way project where it had previously been proposed to relocate the West Suffolk archives service. She felt this motion should have been raised at that time when SCC's options were being considered.

Councillor Hopfensperger noted the request in the motion for SCC to engage with stakeholders and informed that she had received confirmation from the SCC Cabinet member with the responsibility for the archives, had agreed to meet with Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of West Suffolk Council (WSC). In addition, and recognising the importance of local historic records and enabling access to them, the SCC Cabinet member had committed to

engaging with local stakeholders, including WSC with a view to agreeing a suitable solution moving forward.

Following Councillor Wakelam's right of reply, which included welcoming stakeholder engagement with SCC, the motion was put to the recorded vote. With 46 members present, the votes recorded were 32 votes for the motion, none against, and 14 abstentions; the names of those members voting for and abstaining being recorded as follows:

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

None

Abstentions:

Councillors Bull, Chester, Chung, Clarke, Hopfensperger, Lynch, Mager, Marks, Mason, Rayner, Richardson, Rushbrook, Andrew Smith and Stamp.

It was therefore

Resolved:

That

1. recognising the severe financial pressure faced by Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council nonetheless expresses its sadness at the County Council's proposal to close the West Suffolk archive and centralise this service to Ipswich; and therefore
2. calls upon Suffolk County Council to suspend the implementation of this change until such time as it has worked with all local stakeholders, including West Suffolk Council and Bury St Edmunds Town Council, to explore all alternative options within the County Council's available capital and revenue budgets for keeping access to local historical records within West Suffolk.

340. Any other urgent business

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

341. Exclusion of press and public

See minute 337. above.

342. Exempt appendices: Budget and Council Tax setting 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 (paragraph 3)

See minute 337. above.

The meeting concluded at 9.56 pm

Signed by:

Chair
