

Annual Review and Appointment of the Cabinet’s Joint Committee and Working Groups

Report number:	CAB/WS/24/026	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	21 May 2024
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Decisions Plan: **The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.**

Wards impacted: **All wards**

Recommendations:

- 1. It is recommended that the Leader of the Council nominates:**
 - a. One full member to be appointed to represent West Suffolk Council on the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee in 2024 to 2025.**
 - b. Two substitute members to be appointed to represent West Suffolk Council on the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee in 2024 to 2025.**
 - c. It be noted that on the nomination of the Leader of the Council, the Monitoring Officer may exercise their delegated authority to appoint appropriate Cabinet membership (full and substitute members) to the above joint committee during 2024 to 2025, as necessary.**
- 2. It is recommended that the Cabinet:**
 - a. Continues to operate the Staff Consultative Panel in 2024 to 2025 in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained in Appendix A to Report number: CAB/WS/24/026.**
 - b. Periodical meetings of the above Panel be scheduled as and when required but with regard to the discussion outlined in Section 2.2.2 of Report number: CAB/WS/24/026.**
- 3. Continues to operate the West Suffolk Grant Working Party in 2024 to 2025 in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained in Appendix B to Report number: CAB/WS/24/026.**
- 4. Continues to operate the West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group in 2024 to 2025 in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained in Appendix C to Report number: CAB/WS/24/026.**

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- 5. It be noted that should it become necessary and on the nominations of Group Leaders, the Monitoring Officer may exercise their delegated authority to appoint appropriate membership (full and substitute members) to the above Working Groups during 2024 to 2025 in accordance with their Terms of Reference.**
- 6. It be noted that, subject to resources being available to support them, informal advisory panels can be established by the Leader to consider specific issues as required throughout 2024 to 2025.**

1. Context to this report

1.1 Under Article 6 (The Cabinet) (paragraph 6.5.2) of the Council's Constitution, it states that:

"The Cabinet may carry out its functions:

- d. by delegating power to a joint committee, area committee or another local authority".

1.2 Under Article 9 (Joint Arrangements and Working Groups) of the Council's Constitution, it states that:

"9.2 Joint Arrangements

9.2.3 the Cabinet may only appoint Cabinet Members to a joint committee and those Members need not reflect the political balance of the Council as a whole."

"9.3 Working Groups

9.3.1 The Council, Cabinet or Committees may appoint from time to time such Working Groups as they think fit. The Working Groups which have been appointed are identified in Part 3 of this Constitution."

1.3 The following joint committee and working groups, either report to the Cabinet or exercise executive functions:

- a. **Exercise executive functions on behalf of the Cabinet**
 - Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee
- b. **Report to the Cabinet**
 - Staff Consultative Panel
 - West Suffolk Grant Working Party
 - West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group
 - Other informal working groups / taskforces

1.4 The Cabinet is requested to review and appoint membership in accordance with the terms of reference for its joint committee and working groups for the year 2024 to 2025, as set out in section 2. below.

2. Joint committee and working groups

2.1 Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee

2.1.1 The Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee comprises membership of each of the councils represented on the partnership (West Suffolk Council, Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council and East Suffolk Council). To comply with the

Constitution, the Council's Joint Committee exercises executive functions on behalf of the Cabinet. West Suffolk Council's (WSC) membership of the Joint Committee consists of one full member and two substitute members and is required to comprise of Cabinet members.

- 2.1.2 The constitution, partnership agreement and terms of reference for the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee was last fully reviewed and approved by the partner councils in January 2020 and can be viewed electronically at [CAB.WS.20.003 Appendix 1 - Review of the ARP Constitution.pdf \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](#)
- 2.1.3 The Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee continues to work effectively, with the member representation from each partner authority jointly managing the administration and performance of the five councils' respective statutory functions relating to the collection of council tax and non-domestic rates, and the payment of housing and other relevant benefits.
- 2.1.4 It is **recommended** that:
- 1. One full member, be appointed to represent West Suffolk Council on the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee in 2024 to 2025.**
 - 2. Two substitute members be appointed to represent West Suffolk Council on the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee in 2024 to 2025.**
 - 3. It be noted that on the nomination of the Leader of the Council, the Monitoring Officer may exercise their delegated authority to appoint appropriate Cabinet membership (full and substitute members) to the above joint committee during 2024 to 2025, as necessary.**

2.2 **Staff Consultative Panel**

- 2.2.1 The Staff Consultative Panel provides a positive environment through which to engage on the development of employment policies and practices. Some of the policies are referred to Cabinet or Council (as appropriate) to approve, whilst other papers are presented to the Panel to keep them informed on employment related matters within the Council. Panel members may also be consulted on / informed of items through e-mail notification.
- 2.2.2 The Panel is made up of councillors and representatives of the staff (usually through representatives from Unison, the Council's recognised staff union). The Panel has its own work programme, but additional items or meetings can be called on request. The terms of reference are attached as Appendix A.

2.2.3 Agendas and non-exempt papers are published on the West Suffolk Council website; however, as a non-decision-making body, meetings are held informally and are not accessible to the public.

2.2.4 Following the Council meeting on 26 March 2024 where proposed amendments to the West Suffolk Council Constitution were considered and resolved ([Report number COU/WS/24/008](#) refers), the following amendments have now been incorporated into the Terms of Reference for the Staff Consultative Panel, as set out in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/24/026:

- To provide clarity to the duty set out in paragraph 2.6.
- The Council also resolved that the Health and Safety Sub-Committee be disbanded and that the oversight and scrutiny of the health and safety function would now be undertaken by the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee and the Staff Consultative Panel. Therefore, this element is now reflected in paragraph 3.2(f) of the Terms of Reference for the Panel.

2.2.5 It is **recommended** that:

- 1. The Staff Consultative Panel continues to operate in 2024 to 2025 in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/24/026.**
- 2. Periodical meetings of the above Panel be scheduled as and when required, but with regard to the discussion outlined in Section 2.2.2.**

2.3 **West Suffolk Grant Working Party**

2.3.1 The primary function of the Grant Working Party is to consider applications to the Council's Thriving Communities grant fund and make recommendations to Cabinet on the level of funding (if any) that should be granted to applicants.

2.3.2 The Working Party is a non-decision-making body that comprises seven councillors and respects the political balance of the Council. It primarily meets on three occasions a year to consider the Thriving Communities applications. Agenda papers and meetings are not accessible by the public; however, the Working Party's composite report and recommendations are published when presented to the subsequent publicly accessible Cabinet meeting.

- 2.3.3 Due to the significant number and quality of applications received, difficult decisions often need to be made within the eligibility and selection criteria, and the budgetary constraints of the Thriving Communities fund. The Grant Working Party thoroughly considers the applications and effectively supports the Cabinet in making these decisions by providing the rationale behind their recommendations. The Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities, who has the responsibility for the awarding of grants, is invited to attend each meeting of the Working Party to ensure the Cabinet remains closely involved in the process. The terms of reference are attached as Appendix B.
- 2.3.4 Minor amendments are proposed to be made to the Terms of Reference, as set out in Appendix B to Report number CAB/WS/24/026:-
- To reflect the wording used within the Council’s Strategic Plan to refer to Thriving Communities funding.
 - To clarify the Officer Support which would be available to the Grant Working Party.
- 2.3.5 Without a Grant Working Party, an alternative mechanism would be needed to consider the Thriving Communities grant awards. This could take the form of a portfolio holder or officer-led process, or consideration by Cabinet. These options are not considered to be proportionate either in terms of the level of accountability involved, or the time needed to consider a large number of applications, respectively.
- 2.3.6 **It is recommended that the West Suffolk Grant Working Party continues to operate in 2024 to 2025 in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained in Appendix B to Report number: CAB/WS/24/026.**
- 2.4 **West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group**
- 2.4.1 The Working Group is a non-decision-making body that comprises ten councillors and respects the political balance of the Council. Where possible, on the nominations of Group Leaders, representation is drawn across the geography of the West Suffolk district. Agenda papers and meetings are not accessible by the public; however, the Working Group’s recommendations and the rationale behind them are published when presented to subsequent publicly accessible Cabinet meetings. The terms of reference are attached as Appendix C.
- 2.4.2 The Working Group has helped develop and progress the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan. Its primary function was to deal with the detail of policy development, monitoring and best practice covering the Local Plan preparation, public engagement, and responses to consultations.
- 2.4.3 The West Suffolk Local Plan has now been submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination on Public, as per the decision of Council on 19

December 2023 ([Council on Tuesday 19 December 2023](#)). As a result, the West Suffolk Local Plan has been handed to an Independent Inspector who will conduct, lead and direct the examination. Therefore, no meetings are planned or expected to be required of the Working Group. However, it is proposed that until adoption, the Working Group remains in place should any exceptional circumstances arise e.g. the Local Plan is found to be unsound.

2.4.4 It is recommended that the West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group continues to operate in 2024 to 2025 in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained in Appendix C to Report number: CAB/WS/24/026.

2.5 Delegated Authority

2.5.1 During 2024 to 2025, there may be a requirement to change the current membership of each of the above bodies. The Constitution's scheme of delegation to officers already allows the Monitoring Officer to appoint to the various bodies of the Council on the nominations of Group Leaders.

2.5.2 It should therefore be noted that should it become necessary and on the nominations of Group Leaders, the Monitoring Officer may exercise their delegated authority to appoint appropriate membership (full and substitute members) to the above Working Groups during 2024 to 2025 in accordance with their Terms of Reference.

2.6 Other advisory panels

2.6.1 The Cabinet may also during 2024 to 2025 set up informal member/officer advisory panels to consider specific issues, which would usually be on a task-and-finish basis. Such panels would make recommendations directly to Cabinet or the appropriate committee in the form of reports. It is proposed that such panels would be formed as required on the direction of the Leader.

2.6.2 It should therefore be noted that, provided the resources are available to support them, informal advisory panels be established to consider specific issues as required throughout 2024 to 2025.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

3.1 Not to undertake an annual review; however, it is prudent to do so to ensure the Cabinet's groups remain effective and fit-for-purpose.

4. Consultation and engagement undertaken

- 4.1 Appointments to the joint committee and working groups detailed in this report will be made on the nominations of the Leader of the Council and /or Group Leaders, as applicable.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 The Council could consider the creation of joint committees with partner authorities to maximise opportunities for joint working.
- 5.2 To avoid duplication of effort between member bodies, undertaking reviews of its working groups etc is considered prudent to ensure they are still relevant, adding value and do not cross over with other activities or other bodies, for example scrutiny committees or task and finish groups.
- 5.3 To ensure meetings and reviews are accommodated with available member and officer time and resources, it is considered prudent to carry out reviews and disband any groups no longer required, and to optimise frequency of meetings.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

- 6.1 Financial implications:

The review has been undertaken within existing resources. Any changes required as a result of the review will also be borne from existing budgets.

Constitutional compliance: See sections 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 above.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

- 7.1 Appendix A – Staff Consultative Panel Terms of Reference
Appendix B – West Suffolk Grant Working Party Terms of Reference
Appendix C – West Suffolk Local Plan Working Group Terms of Reference

8. Background documents associated with this report

- 8.1 Cabinet: 14 January 2020 – Report number [CAB/WS/20/003 Appendix 1](#)
- 8.2 Council: 26 March 2024 – Report number [COU/WS/24/008](#)
- 8.3 Council: 19 December 2023 [Council - Tuesday 19 December 2023](#)