

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 26 March 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 Pat Hanlon

Richard Alecock	Ian Houlder	Marion Rushbrook
Michael Anderson	Janne Jarvis	Jools Savage
Peter Armitage	Gerald Kelly	Ian Shipp
John Augustine	Rowena Lindberg	Andrew Smith
Mick Bradshaw	Jon London	David Smith
Sarah Broughton	Aaron Luccarini	Liz Smith
Tony Brown	Victor Lukaniuk	Karen Soons
Carol Bull	Charlie Lynch	Sarah Stamp
Mike Chester	Birgitte Mager	Frank Stennett
Patrick Chung	Margaret Marks	David Taylor
Nick Clarke	Joe Mason	Don Waldron
Dawn Dicker	Sara Mildmay-White	Cliff Waterman
Paul Firman	Andy Neal	Tracy Whitehand
Susan Glossop	Richard O'Driscoll	Phil Wittam
John Griffiths	Sue Perry	Kevin Yarrow
Donna Higgins	Sarah Pugh	
Diane Hind	Karen Richardson	
Beccy Hopfensperger	Richard Rout	

343. Remembrance

Before commencing business, all members were asked to stand and observe a minute's silence in remembrance of former Forest Heath District Councillor Terry Waters who had sadly died recently. The Chair made a statement of condolence, reflecting on the late councillor's contributions during his time on Forest Heath District Council.

344. Minutes

Councillor Nick Clarke commented that as well as the responses, it would be helpful if the minutes recorded a summary of the questions asked of the Leader during consideration of the 'Leader's Statement'. This would be considered when producing minutes of this and future meetings.

Councillor Sarah Broughton commented that in respect of minute 337. 'Budget and Council Tax setting 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial

Strategy 2024 to 2028', where discussion was held in private session on the Anglian Lane, Bury St Edmunds business case, the 'presentation error' referred to in the minutes was considered to be a material omission.

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2024 were then confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

345. Chair's announcements

The Chair 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 February 2024.

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

- 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 The Athenaeum, Bury St Edmunds at 7pm: The Chair's Civic Dinner.

346. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Drummond, Luke Halpin, Rachel Hood, Andrew Martin, Lora-Jane Miller-Jones, Joanna Rayner, Marilyn Sayer, Andrew Speed, Jim Thorndyke, Julia Wakelam and Indy Wijenayaka.

347. Declarations of interests

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

348. Public participation

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

349. Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/24/007)

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/24/007.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Waterman:

- a. **CPR:** reported on a situation where two members of staff were working on a West Suffolk site when a resident collapsed. Whilst waiting for an ambulance, the two staff members had carried out CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), resuscitating the person more than once, until medics arrived. Councillor Waterman paid tribute to the staff members praising the courageous, decisive, selfless act of human kindness and outstanding, compassionate care. The Council was running CPR courses for staff which had been well attended.

- b. **Elections:** explained that the pre-election period for the Police and Crime Commissioner of Suffolk had begun. Councillor Waterman conveyed his regards to all candidates, thanked those involved in managing the election process, which on this occasion was being led for the whole of Suffolk by West Suffolk Council, and urged members of the public to vote.
- c. **Acting in the best interests of the community:** placed his thanks on record to Councillor Andrew Speed for his recent intervention and compassion shown towards a resident regarding a planning matter within his ward; to Councillor Donna Higgins for setting up the Bury St Edmunds version of Teen Chill; and to Councillors Richard Alecock and Diane Hind for highlighting significantly pot holed roads in Mildenhall and Bury St Edmunds – an issue that many members had been seeking to resolve as well as adverse impacts caused by flooding.
- d. **Newmarket cinema:** was pleased to report that a cinema was now operating in Newmarket following successful partnership working between several organisations, namely the Newmarket Charitable Foundation, Abbeygate Cinema, the local theatre group NOMADS and West Suffolk Council utilising part of its allocation provided by the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). Recognition was given to Councillors Michael Anderson, Andy Drummond, Rachel Hood, Janne Jarvis, Charlie Lynch, Sue Perry and Kevin Yarrow, local ward members that had also been championing the cause and providing contributions from their locality budgets.
- e. **Horseracing:** reported that he was delighted to chair the first meeting of a new partnership between the Newmarket Thoroughbred Racing and Breeding Industry Forum and members of the Cabinet. The meeting brought together senior industry representatives from across the Equine cluster to explore issues ranging from housing to transport to innovation and supporting tourism and business more widely in the town. A series of actions have been agreed to be explored together.
- f. **Streetlights:** stated that Mildenhall High Town Council was the first of many town and parish councils to receive payment following a successful application for a grant from the Council's Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund to convert their streetlights to more energy efficient light-emitting diode (LED) lanterns. Councillor Waterman placed his thanks on record to Councillor Andy Neal regarding his close interest in this subject.

Grant agreements were now in the process of being completed for the other eligible town and parish councils with the aim for all council-owned streetlights in West Suffolk being upgraded to LED by 2025.

- g. **Reverse vending machines:** urged members to see the newly trialled recycling reverse vending machines (RVM) in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket for themselves and the associated rewards received for disposing of applicable recyclables.

This initiative was one of many ideas and initiatives being discussed by the Environment and Sustainability Reference Group. Specific thanks were given to Councillor Janne Jarvis for his role in bringing the RVM idea forward.

- h. **£7.3 million electric vehicle (EV) investment:** reported that Suffolk County Council (SCC) had secured £7.3 million funding to help develop EV charging across the county. Local members and the public were being asked to nominate streets that may benefit from this. Further details were available on SCC's website.
- i. **Grass cutting:** stated that the grass cutting season was now underway; however, the recent spell of wet weather had impacted on the start date. Councillor Waterman gave thanks to members that had worked with Councillor Ian Shipp, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, to look at (amongst other issues) the topic of grass cutting last year. As a result of the review, this had meant the season had commenced with additional staffing capacity.
- j. **West Suffolk Local Plan:** announced that the last of three public consultations on the West Suffolk Local Plan was closed on 12 March 2024. A total of 187 individual participants responded to this round of consultation which generated approximately 1,000 additional representations to the plan and supporting documents.

Examination of the Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate would be forthcoming later in 2024 where the Inspector would make modifications to make the plan sound. Modifications would be subject to public consultation, which was anticipated to be around spring 2025, following which the Inspector would publish their final report. This would then enable the Local Plan to be considered by Council for adoption.

- k. **Cambridge sub-region:** reiterated West Suffolk's importance and prominence in the Cambridge sub-region. The communities and economy of West Suffolk were linked to the wider area beyond the district. Recognising this, the Cabinet was looking at plans for the district's towns, particularly Haverhill's links to the Cambridge area.

The Cabinet was forging stronger links with colleagues from the Cambridge sub-region as well as Government agencies to further develop West Suffolk's working relationship with Cambridge and the surrounding area.

Part A – Questions on the Leader's statement

A range of questions were asked and responded to, as follows:

- a. **Councillor Nick Clarke**, Leader of the Conservative Group, referred to the £7.3 million allocation of Government funding to Suffolk County Council to develop electric vehicle (EV) charging points across the county. Councillor Clarke asked whether West Suffolk Council was able to influence the pricing structure for using public stations to charge

EVs. He quoted that it could cost as little as 7.5 pence per kWh to charge an EV at home whereas some public charging points charged between 45p-75p per kWh.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that West Suffolk Council had little control over pricing structures and this would need representing back to Government. He would raise the matter when he next met with the local MPs.

- b. **Councillor Nick Clarke** commended the opening of the new cinema in Newmarket and acknowledged the positive local involvement of partners to bring the project to fruition. He recognised that West Suffolk Council had allocated a proportion of its REPF funding into the project; however, he asked whether the Council could support the Newmarket Charitable Foundation, who in partnership with Abbeygate Cinema, were running the cinema, with a one-off grant from its own budgets to refurbish the toilet facilities, for example. Councillor Clarke was pleased that several local members were recognised by Councillor Waterman in his opening remarks as supporting the project; however, he felt that former West Suffolk Councillor, James Lay should also be acknowledged for the work he had committed to the scheme.

In response, Councillor Waterman reiterated his support for the project and was delighted that the cinema was now operating. He could not however, commit to providing an additional one-off grant from the Council at this time but he assured Councillor Clarke that Councillor Ian Shipp, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, who was present at the meeting, would have taken his comments on board.

- c. **Councillor Nick Clarke** commented on paragraphs 14. to 18. of the Leader's Statement where a number of companies investing in West Suffolk were listed. He felt that whilst it was commendable to recognise successful companies in West Suffolk, there were also companies that had decided to leave the district as they felt they could operate better elsewhere. He made specific reference to Sofina Foods in Little Wratting, who were looking to expand its workforce by 64 percent as part of a multi-million pound investment in the site, and asked what the Council had done to enable this, and other investments in the district, to happen.

In response, Councillor Waterman was unable to comment specifically on Sofina Foods' investment but acknowledged Councillor Clarke's point regarding net gain investment in the district. The Council's and partners investment in new incubation units to support locally the growth of the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) sector at Suffolk Business Park in Bury St Edmunds was an example of how the Council was encouraging investment in the district.

(At this point, Councillor Clarke asked questions relating to Part B, 'Questions on any Council matter' and these, together with Councillor Waterman's responses, are listed under the relevant heading below.)

- d. **Councillor Joe Mason** asked what measures and initiatives were being put in place for local residents, businesses and market traders that would encourage greater footfall in Haverhill High Street.

As part of this, Councillor Mason referred to some car parking charges being simplified or being abolished in Bury St Edmunds and other smaller towns in the district; however there had been no changes made to car parking charges in Haverhill. He asked whether ideas such as a 'free for the first hour' initiative throughout the week could be introduced to encourage shoppers into the town. Councillor Mason felt that the 'free from three' on a Friday initiative was no longer an incentive.

In response, Councillor Waterman acknowledged the challenges currently presented in Haverhill and shared Councillor Mason's ambition for a thriving high street. Further detail to respond to Councillor Mason's question would be provided in a written response.

- e. **Councillor Birgitte Mager** referred to the Government's future plans to encourage greater recycling by individuals as part of the 'Simpler Recycling' measures and clarification was sought on whether the Council's Operations team had been consulted by the private company principally responsible for the installation and operation of the two new reverse vending machines in Bury St Edmunds.

In response, Councillor Waterman confirmed that the Operations team had been involved to a limited level with this relatively small trial for introducing reverse vending machines in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket. These machines were understood to be relatively commonplace in mainland Europe and Councillor Waterman supported this initiative if it encouraged more recycling, where possible (as summarised in his introductory remarks above). The measures to be introduced under the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' regime were separate to this.

Part B: Questions on any Council matter

- a. **Councillor Nick Clarke** asked whether the Leader was in a position to update on the costs, timescales and proposition for the Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that a written reply would be provided.

- b. **Councillor Nick Clarke** asked whether he could provide an update on the security of Bury St Edmunds bus station; the costs involved and what the final outcome was envisaged to be.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that a meeting was due to be held shortly regarding the challenges associated with the bus station. Costs to the Council regarding the security measures in place were not presently available. The anti-social behaviour issues appeared to have presently abated in this location.

- c. **Councillor Sarah Pugh** asked whether smaller 'pots' of funding could be made available by West Suffolk Council to support the survival of small, independent businesses.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that a written reply would be provided.

- d. **Councillor Carol Bull** referred to the Cabinet's recent tours of the district's towns and asked whether the Cabinet would be visiting the rural wards and if so, when.

In response, Councillor Waterman stated that the rural wards would be visited to gain a better understanding of the strengths, issues and challenges within the villages and their communities; however, a schedule detailing the visits had yet to be finalised.

- e. **Councillor Susan Glossop** sought the Leader's support for the staff involved with the arts, heritage and culture service provided by the Council. She commended the tireless efforts and positivity of the staff working for this outstanding service, specifically mentioning those working at The Apex, Bury St Edmunds and at West Stow Country Park.

Following a round of applause from all members, thus reinforcing Councillor Glossop's comments, Councillor Waterman also expressed his wholehearted support for the staff involved with the arts, heritage and culture service.

- f. **Councillor Andrew Smith** referred to the forthcoming national 'Simpler Recycling' arrangements with particular reference to the anticipated termination of glass bottle banks in rural areas (and within other communities). Under the new arrangements, it was expected that glass would be collected by the kerbside.

Councillor Smith expressed concern that for many parishes, the loss of bottle banks would have a relatively significant impact on the finances of those that managed them, namely village halls and similar organisations. In addition, village halls and similar premises were usually required to pay for a commercial waste collection service and therefore, these organisations would be required to have their own glass bottles (and those that may have been littered in the area) collected at a cost.

Councillor Smith sought support from the Leader and Cabinet to ascertain whether there was any flexibility around whether the provision of glass bottle banks, particularly in rural areas, could be retained under the national 'Simpler Recycling' regime.

Councillor Waterman deferred to Councillor David Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Operations to respond. Councillor Taylor acknowledged the significance of this issue and he was having discussions with the Director for Operations regarding potential options moving forward.

Councillor Taylor would share further information with Councillor Smith and other members when it was forthcoming.

- g. **Councillor Margaret Marks** asked whether support could be given to lobby Government regarding the provision of low cost housing, particularly as a means to support young people that could not afford to get on the housing ladder.

Councillor Marks referred to enabling greater provision of sectional housing which was offered more commonly in other countries rather than building new traditional brick-based homes that were often unaffordable to young people. She urged the Council to lobby Government to analyse other countries' housing developmental programmes to see what could be achieved in the UK.

In addition, Councillor Marks expressed concern regarding the cost of servicing residential air source heat pumps and that there were insufficient numbers of professionals able to undertake such a service.

Councillor Waterman deferred to Councillors Gerald Kelly and Richard O'Driscoll, Portfolio Holders for Governance and Regulatory, and Housing respectively, to respond.

Councillor Kelly explained that presently there were insufficient numbers of professionals to undertake services on residential air source heat pumps; however, Octopus Energy, a leading energy provider, was looking to establish a training school to mitigate to an extent, the shortfall and to retrain existing heating engineers to cover servicing of air source heat pumps. West Suffolk College was potentially looking to work with Octopus regarding this.

In response to Councillor Marks' question on low cost housing provision, Councillor O'Driscoll stated that consultation had begun on the Council's new West Suffolk Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 to 2029 and the sectional housing option would potentially be built into the strategy. He thanked members for their contributions to the consultation thus far.

Councillor O'Driscoll supported Councillor Marks' comments and felt that councils should work together to do what they could to address the national housing crisis, which included lobbying Government on options such as those suggested by Councillor Marks.

With regard to the written responses referred to above, in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, these would be circulated to all members and published on the Council's website in due course.

(Councillor Birgitte Mager arrived during the consideration of this item at 7.18pm)

350. **Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet**

Council noted that there were no referrals emanating from the Cabinet meeting held on 12 March 2024.

351. **Pay Policy Statement 2024 to 2025 (Report number: COU/WS/24/007)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for the Pay Policy Statement 2024 to 2025.

The Localism Act 2011 and supporting guidance provided details of matters that must be included in this statutory pay policy, but also, emphasised that each local authority had the autonomy to take its own decisions on pay and pay policies. The Pay Policy Statement must be approved formally by Council each year. The statement could be amended in year, must be published on the Council's website and must be complied with when setting the terms and conditions of Chief Officers.

Set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report, were details of what was included in the Pay Policy Statement 2024 to 2025, which was attached at Appendix A.

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

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

Resolved:

That the Pay Policy Statement for 2024 to 2025, as contained in Appendix A to Report number COU/WS/24/007, be approved.

(Councillor Tracy Whitehand left the meeting during the consideration of this item at 7.57pm.)

352. **West Suffolk Council Constitution: proposed amendments (Report number: COU/WS/24/008)**

Council considered this report which sought approval for several amendments to the Council's Constitution.

The Constitution Review Group (CRG) periodically met to review the effectiveness of the Constitution, identifying any areas that could be developed further to improve the way the Council made decisions, ensuring that processes were efficient and transparent.

The CRG had met on three recent occasions to consider areas within the Constitution to recommend for amendment. These were detailed in section 2 of the report together with the rationale for making the proposed amendment.

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

Councillor Mike Chester suggested whether the proposed two non-voting non-elected independent co-optees to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, as detailed in paragraphs 2.20 to 2.22 of the report, should be residents of Suffolk. Councillor Chester stated that he was appointed to the Police and Crime Panel by this council and that the Panel had a co-opted member who was required to be a Suffolk resident. He felt this appeared to work well and considered a similar approach should be taken in this instance.

In response, Councillor Kelly agreed this was reasonable request for the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee to consider as part of the recruitment process.

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor David Smith, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 51 for the motion, none against and one abstention, it was

Resolved:

That, as referenced in Report number: COU/WS/24/008:

1. The revised role order and wording for the Member Role Descriptions in Part 3; Section 6 of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.3 and Appendix 1, be approved.
2. The amendments to the appointment of substitutes in Part 4a and Part 4b of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.6 and Appendix 2, be approved.
3. The amendment to Staff Consultative Panel: Terms of Reference in Part 3; Section 2: Responsibility for Council (Non- Executive) Functions of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.9, be approved.
4. The amendment to Council Procedure Rules regarding the recording of meetings in Part 4 of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.12, be approved.
5. The amendments to Council Procedure Rules on Motions on Notice in Part 4 of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.15, be approved.
6. Amendments to the granting of dispensations in Part 3; Section 2; Responsibility for Council (Non-Executive Functions) of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.19, be approved.
7. Amendments to the Scrutiny Procedure Rules in Part 4; Section B. Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.22, be approved.
8. The disbandment of the Health and Safety Sub-Committee, as set out in paragraph 2.25, be agreed.

353. **Any other urgent business**

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

The meeting concluded at 8.03 pm

Signed by:

Chair
