



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Members are invited to a **Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee** to be held in the Conference Room, Riverside, Lowestoft on **Thursday, 22 February 2024 at 6.30pm**

This meeting will be broadcast to the public via the East Suffolk YouTube Channel at <https://youtube.com/live/pc53PRAwiW0?feature=share>

Members:

Councillor Mike Deacon (Chair), Councillor Dan Clery (Vice-Chair), Councillor Edward Back, Councillor Seamus Bennett, Councillor Amanda Folley, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Owen Grey, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Stephen Molyneux, Councillor Sally Noble, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor Ed Thompson.

An Agenda is set out below.

	Pages
Part One – Open to the Public	
1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions	
2 Declarations of Interest Members and Officers are invited to make any declarations of interests, and the nature of that interest, that they may have in relation to items on the Agenda and are also reminded to make any declarations at any stage during the Meeting if it becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.	
3 Minutes To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2023.	1 - 9
4 Matters Arising Update Sheet To note the contents of the Matters Arising Update Sheet from the meeting held on 16 November 2023.	10 - 13
5 Review of East Suffolk Council's Environmental Strategy ES/1860 Report of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment.	14 - 40
6 Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session To receive an update from Councillor Smith-Lyte, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment, on the direction of travel for the services within her portfolio.	

Part One – Open to the Public

Pages

7 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

To receive any updates in relation to the Committee's Work Programme.

Part Two – Exempt/Confidential

Pages

There are no Exempt or Confidential items for this Agenda.

Close



Chris Bally, Chief Executive

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Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Thursday, 16 November 2023 at 6.30pm**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor Dan Clery, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Owen Grey, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor Ed Thompson

Other Members present:

Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Mark Packard, Councillor Lee Reeves, Councillor Kay Yule

Officers present: Kate Blakemore (Strategic Director), Katy Cassidy (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Heather Fisk (Head of Housing), Lorraine Fitch (Democratic Services Manager), Andy Jarvis (Strategic Director), Fern Lincoln (Strategic Lead – Housing Needs), Andrea McMillan (Planning Manager - Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services), Agnes Ogundiran (Conservative Political Group Support Officer), Lynne Thomas-Mead (Strategic Lead – Housing Information and Governance) and Ben Woolnough (Planning Development Manager)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bennett, Folley, Molyneux and Noble. Councillors Reeves, Byatt and Packard attended as substitutes for Councillors Bennett, Folley and Molyneux respectively.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Deacon and Packard declared a non-registerable interest in item 4 on the grounds that they were members of the Planning Committee.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Review of the Provision of Social Housing in East Suffolk**

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing introduced report ES/1735 which it was suggested should be read in conjunction with the Planning Affordable Housing Requirements report considered by the Committee at the last meeting. It was noted that, when East Suffolk Council was created in 2019, it acquired 4404 properties from Waveney District Council, its predecessor authority. The other predecessor authority, Suffolk Coastal District Council had divested its housing stock many years ago to a registered provider now known as Newtide, part of the Flagship Housing Group.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his introduction and invited questions from Committee members.

Councillor Plummer arrived at 6.36pm and declared a non-registerable interest in this item as she was a member of the Planning Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Thompson, the Cabinet Member explained the Government's formula for setting rents for social housing which was capped and, in his view, a very confusing and antiquated system but it provided rent that people could afford and was linked to local earnings - officially it was 60% compared to market rents. He added that there were two broad market areas in East Suffolk for setting Local Housing rents and allowances, one was Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth which also, in his view, strangely included Southwold, and the other was Ipswich. The Council also employed Financial Inclusion Officers to support tenants who were impacted by the cost of living crisis even though social housing remained the cheapest form of accommodation.

Councillor Lynch queried what happened to anyone who did not comply with their tenancy agreement and the Head of Housing responded that notice could be given or a tenancy extended to see if they improved with support being given by the Safe Renters Scheme and if necessary Social Services to try to help them maintain the tenancy. In rare cases, eviction was necessary and individuals would then be supported by the Housing Needs Team. The point was made that, for some people, Council housing was a last resort so if they could not maintain a tenancy with the Council then they were likely to struggle with other providers.

Councillor Jepson queried how the Council was supporting those on the Gateway to Homechoice Scheme in Bands B and C to get housed more quickly if it was not possible for the Council to build enough houses. The Cabinet Member explained that the rise in interest rates and building materials had impacted on all social housing providers who wished to build but if interest rates were lower and rents slightly higher this would enable more to be built. He stated that the demands for temporary accommodation had risen considerably and it was a desperate situation, but a 30 year business plan was currently being developed with options for building more housing. The Head of Housing added that there was a finite amount of money in the HRA which was why other options were being considered. She explained that the Council had a build programme over the next 4/5 years, houses could be purchased as long as they met the Housing Acquisitions Policy criteria and the Council was encouraging Registered Providers to bring more houses forward. She pointed out that a loan for building more

housing had to be serviced and the rent levels would not cover the costs of the loan due to the current interest rates.

Councillor Byatt queried if the new administration would revisit Passivehaus builds or similar, how they were encouraging tenants to downsize to free up family homes and if the Council had any legacy interest in the Housing Associations that had acquired Suffolk Coastal's housing stock. The Cabinet Member stated that he was still looking at Passivhaus builds as an option but they were at a very early stage of development and, in the meantime, he wanted to find a way to provide net zero housing as the cost for retrofitting was astronomical. He explained that tenants not wanting to downsize was an issue so the use of modular builds that could be moved might help persuade them as they could stay in their communities. He also expressed concern at Flagship selling off stock and the Head of Housing explained that they had met with Flagship to understand their disposal process but as the stock transfer took place 32 years ago, the Council had no control over them. Flagship had approximately 30,000 properties and wanted to dispose of 0.5% of their stock per year, usually those that were expensive to maintain, but would build 2.5% annually eg 19 properties had been disposed of this year and 34 last year but they would provide 600 new homes in East Suffolk up to 2026 using the sale receipts. She added that they were discussing the location of the new housing as they did not necessarily want them to be built in the same village as the ones sold. She also explained that those tenants wishing to downsize were prioritised as usually it released a large family home and the Council was looking at ways to incentivise them to move eg offering money to redecorate or re-carpet.

Councillor Byatt referred to Mr Aust's comments at the last meeting in relation to the provision of 100% affordable housing and the Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services Planning Manager explained that both Local Plans supported in principle the development of 100% affordable housing on sites where housing would not normally be supported, where there was not the value in the land to deliver market housing this could provide a motivation from a landowner to bring forward affordable housing. Some of those developments did come forward, although the majority of affordable housing delivered through planning was by the percentage of affordable housing required through residential developments coming forward, but those policies were in place to support the proposals.

Councillor Reeves asked if there was anything that could be done to level up provision of Council stock between the north and the south of the district. The Head of Housing explained that the stock transfer to a housing association in the south did not mean there was no stock it just meant that the Council had no control over it. She added that there were other providers in the south and in Felixstowe, for example, the Council was building new housing and was looking to buy suitable properties when they came up for sale. She cautioned, however, that the Council did not have infinite funding so would never be able to provide the same level of housing in the south as the 4,500 stock in the north but they continued to work with the Registered Providers through the Gateway to Homechoice Scheme. Councillor Beavan added that not having Council stock in the south caused problems with providing temporary accommodation but they were looking at solutions for this.

In response to Councillor Reeves' query about how many properties the Council had purchased since 2019 and if any of them were still empty, the Head of Housing stated

that she was not aware that any were empty but would investigate and report back to the Committee.

Councillor Packard queried what the Council did regarding homeless people and the Head of Housing reported that it was the landowners responsibility to deal with as the Council could not enforce anything, however, support was provided for those that wanted it, unfortunately, some people did not want any. The Cabinet Member explained that the Council in conjunction with other partners was targeting support for a group of rough sleepers.

Councillor Gooch asked how the Council ensured people understood the perils of becoming intentionally homeless even though they might think they were making the right decision at the time. The Head of Housing stated that it was complicated but the legislation was very clear on eligibility to determine if someone was actually homeless and the Council could provide advice and guidance if they asked for it. She added that, if someone was deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless, the Council never evicted them immediately but would work with them for 28 days by supporting them to find alternative accommodation and, if necessary, involving Social Services. Also, if a review request was received, the Council could refer cases to an external specialist legal team and they could uphold the Council's decision or say it needed to be changed which was then binding. She stressed that demand was so high the Council had to make sure those given properties had a legal right to one. She concluded that all things were taken into consideration but stressed that the Council had to follow the legal test to check eligibility. The Cabinet Member added that the advice was not to leave a property but to speak to the team straight away. The Head of Housing echoed the Cabinet Member's comment that the sooner people came to the Council the better and Officers would provide support including liaising with the landlord to see if they could remain in their home. She stressed that people had a legal right to remain until the landlord received a Court order to evict them.

In response to Councillor Back's query regarding supporting St Peter's Court tenants to be rehomed to allow for the building to be demolished, the Head of Housing stated that all the tenants were being actively worked with to find alternative accommodation and it was hoped that the property would be empty by October 2024. It was noted that five tenants had already accepted offers and another three were waiting to view properties. A Liaison Officer was on site to work with the tenants and the Council was working with other Registered Providers to provide housing. The Cabinet Member stated that he had committed to getting all the tenants re-homed in the Lowestoft area.

Councillor Clery referred to a Community Land Trust in Bawdsey and asked if there was more opportunity to work with community led groups to increase the social and affordable housing stock. The Cabinet Member stated that he was very keen on Community Land Trusts and Community Action Suffolk was bidding for new Government funding to encourage people to set them up. He explained that it was positive that they were not subject to Right to Buy but the Trust did have to put something in and buildings needed to be maintained. He hoped these might be part of the solution especially for rural areas. The Head of Housing added that there was a lot of information on the Council's website regarding community led housing and funding was available for community groups to help them deliver housing.

Councillor Lynch referred to page 16 of the report which stated that the biggest need in East Suffolk was for one bed properties and he queried if a HMO had been considered. The Cabinet Member stated that Southwold Town Council had a house that might be able to be let for three people. He acknowledged that HMOs could work especially for single or older people and it could reduce isolation for people to live together in a shared space.

In response to Councillor Jepson's query, the Head of Housing confirmed that it could be complicated if the person was homeless but if a tenant was evicted with rent arrears and they applied to go back on the Housing Register the Council would try to recover the arrears with a structured payment plan.

The Head of Housing responded to Councillor Gooch's queries by explaining that, whilst it was rare, Deliberate Deprivation of Assets did happen, and generally applicants were housed in the location they wanted because they bid for the properties but if they repeatedly turned down offers and wasted time then action could be taken against them. The Cabinet Member added that generally the applicants on the list the longest were also the highest.

In response to Councillor Byatt's question, the Head of Housing confirmed that no housing stock had been lost to provide accommodation for refugees but there was one property that was used and external organisations were looking to purchase others. The Cabinet Member pointed out that this was funded by the General Fund not the HRA.

The Chair queried the number of people on the Register and the Head of Housing responded that there were 4591 at the beginning of the month although over 2500 of these were in Band E so were adequately housed. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that a lot of people did not apply and it was clear from the Housing Needs Survey that there was more need.

The Chair also referred to 2.26 of the report which asked if there were any guidelines on the amount of social housing needed and the response that referred to affordable housing. The Planning Manager (Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services) explained that, other than where Neighbourhood Plans set alternative policies, the Local Plan Policies did not differentiate between every different town or village in terms of the need for affordable housing and also did not differentiate between the need for social and affordable rent but they did set out the proportion of rented properties that would be required as part of a development coming forward.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Head of Housing for their contribution to the review and asked Councillor Yule, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, if she wished to add anything.

The Cabinet Member explained that there were policies in the Council's two Local Plans to secure affordable housing on residential developments. The policies were informed by evidence including both the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, which set out the needs for affordable housing including for different tenures, and also Whole Plan Viability Assessments. The site size thresholds above which affordable housing could be

sought were informed by national policy. In principle, developments with a greater percentage of affordable housing, or even 100%, could come forward, such as sites which might be put forward by the Council itself. However, the Council could not require a greater amount than was set out in the policies. The Local Plans also contained 'exception site' policies under which affordable housing could come forward in certain circumstances as an exception to planning policies for housing. The East Suffolk Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document was adopted in May 2022 and set out detailed guidance to support the delivery of the policies. The Housing and Planning teams worked closely to secure the right affordable housing - the Housing team was consulted by the Planning team on the affordable housing required for individual planning applications. A local connections cascade was applied to prioritise allocation of affordable housing secured as part of a planning application to those with a local connection to the location of the new development. The report to Scrutiny Committee in October showed that the Local Plan policies were delivering affordable housing, and paragraph 2.36 of the report before Scrutiny Committee today set out that 949 new affordable houses had been completed between April 2018 and March 2023 (around a quarter of all new houses). Although provision of new social rented properties was low, provision of new affordable rented properties was much more sizeable, with for example 166 completed in 2021/22. Applicants for planning permission could put forward a case to claim that sites were not viable for affordable housing, however such claims would be very carefully scrutinised. The policies of both Local Plans would only allow the amount of affordable housing to be varied in exceptional circumstances. As set out in the report to October Scrutiny Committee, there had been eight applications in the past two years which sought to reduce the amount of affordable housing (in four a reduction or loss was agreed, four were still under consideration). Through the planning process, commuted sums were also collected in some circumstances in lieu of provision on site, now usually limited to instances where otherwise a fraction of an affordable house would be required. The sums collected could be spent by the Council or by a Registered Provider on the provision of additional affordable housing. The planning system could not meet all needs for affordable housing in the district – in particular in the Waveney area to meet all of the needs identified in the SHMA would not have been viable, and trying to do so would likely stifle housing development coming forward. In addition to the Local Plan policies and the Supplementary Planning Document, through planning the Council could further support and encourage affordable housing development through for example Neighbourhood Plans. These might for example plan for additional housing growth including affordable housing. Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning groups on this topic was currently being prepared.

Councillor Plummer asked if there was a cross over between affordable housing and social housing bearing in mind the former had a noticeably higher rent. The Head of Housing explained that affordable housing came into a number of categories eg shared ownership, rental tenure eg affordable rent, intermediate or social rent which was the cheapest. Affordable rents were normally 80% of a market rent but a large number of Registered Providers, including the Council, capped their rents at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rent which was significantly less than market rent. Social rent was not built that much these days and sometimes Homes England would say it had to be built at affordable rent. East Suffolk had a large proportion of social rents and a small number of affordables and there were only two Registered Providers that did not cap their rents at LHA level so it made it affordable including for anyone on benefits.

Councillor Lynch referred to Mr Aust's comment at the last meeting that affordable and social housing was more expensive to build because they were built at a higher standard and he queried why they were not built at the same levels as private housing to bring build costs down and provide more housing. The Head of Housing stated that she was not sure it was more expensive to build but perhaps it was more that it would not generate the same level of return eg if building for open market sale you would get a large capital receipt and S106 but if you were a registered social landlord based on the level of rent charged they would not get the same return which impacted on the number of units that could be built. She added that Registered Providers were now trying to build to the highest possible energy efficiency level to avoid retrofitting in future. The Planning Development Manager explained that Mr Aust had commented at the last meeting that the expectations of Registered Providers, who purchased S106 properties from developers, could be quite high in terms of the standard of build and the way they were fitted out. They were buying properties in a finished form ready to let out to tenants so there was a certain level of durability and standard of construction that was expected which had a cost. He clarified that he did not think this affected the number of S106 properties being built in developments and pointed out that making properties cheaper in construction could end up costing more in the long run. The Cabinet Member added that the Council also had to comply with the Government's Decent Homes Standard. The Head of Housing explained that Social Housing Regulations Act would be implemented in April and consultation had just finished on the proposed new consumer standard. The Government was also doing a fundamental review of the Decent Homes Standard which was likely to be very different from the current Standard and the cost implications of that were unknown at this stage. It was noted that the Renters Reform Bill, which mainly covered the private sector, was also likely to require properties to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

There being no further questions, the Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and Officers for their attendance and clarified that the Committee was deliberating on recommendations for the Review of Social Housing and also on the Review of Planning Affordable Housing Requirements which was undertaken at the last meeting. He also reminded Members of their comments made during the debate at the last meeting as detailed in the minutes. Members debated and made the following points:

- There was a need to investigate innovative ways to increase the social housing provision within East Suffolk including revisiting modular housing.
- The banding of existing tenants and applicants could be reviewed to ensure they were in the right sized properties and to get them to a Band A more quickly.
- There should be more exploration at design stage of ways to create flexible dwellings that enable occupants to downsize but stay within the same community.
- More single occupancy dwellings within communities were needed either at an early design stage within new developments or utilise flats above shops.
- Scrutiny Committee might wish to scrutinise the Gateway to Homechoice Scheme in the future.
- Cabinet and Senior Officers should stake every opportunity to encourage and support Housing Associations to build in East Suffolk.

On the proposition of Councillor Grey, seconded by Councillor Plummer, it was

RESOLVED

1. That Cabinet

- (a) explore innovative and creative ways to provide more affordable, efficient and environmentally friendly housing within East Suffolk.
- (b) review the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Local Plan documents in relation to affordable housing supply sooner rather than later and include environmental sustainability.
- (c) increase the target for providing Council housing stock from 50 to 100 units per annum.
- (d) lobby Government on changing the Right to Buy Scheme so that a higher percentage of the receipts can be made available to supply more housing stock.

2. That Officers provide a response to the following queries raised by the Committee at this and the last meeting:

- (a) how many properties had been purchased by the Council since 2019 and how many remained empty?
- (b) the options, challenges and risks for providing 100% affordable housing developments in the district?

5 Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session

The Chair invited Councillor Beavan, Cabinet Member for Housing to give details of his direction of travel for the services within his portfolio.

Councillor Beavan stated that he really welcomed any ideas to increase the provision of housing for residents but asked Members to bear in mind that Officer time was limited because there was a lot of compliance work and little funding from central government. He referred to the earlier discussion regarding modular housing and stated that he was very interested in this but did not want to jump in too soon as it was still a new industry. In relation to Right to Buy, he pointed out that there were ways to get round it for example using an arms-length company, Community Land Trusts and in AONBs the resale of properties as second homes could be stopped. He cautioned that fraud was an issue, particularly for areas such as Walberswick where people were being helped to finance their Right to Buy and then sold them on.

Councillor Beavan reported that the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) had been frozen for four years and was based on average rents in 2019, however, with rents rising this meant those in the private rented sector had to find the difference leading to more homelessness. He urged all parties to campaign for the LHA to be unfrozen.

Councillor Beavan explained that 75% of tenants were on Universal Credit and although most were working and could afford social rents, they could not afford market rents. Officers were, therefore, looking into whether the Council could charge slightly higher rents to enable more Council housing to be built, perhaps by using the Council's arms-length company to escape the rules and regulations involved in the Housing Revenue Account. He stressed that he and Officers were looking at many different ways to provide more social housing. He added that the demand for affordable

housing was increasing all the time because rents were increasing so more people needed affordable housing. He gave an example in Southwold where even with 80% shared ownership, people still needed £50K income per year to afford the rent and mortgage for one of the houses so it was just too expensive. He stated that the social rent being pushed for was usually about 50% on planning applications so that was what was being aimed for in high land value areas like Southwold.

Councillor Beavan stated the cost for retrofitting existing stock was approximately £1M and, although there were benefits in the long run to doing it now, it looked like the Council could not raise any further income from tenants once the works had been completed. He also pointed out that the inclusion of social housing reduced the residual land value and that building costs had risen. He concluded that a business plan was currently being drawn up and he would build as many sustainable houses that he could.

In response to the Committee's questions, the Cabinet Member explained that:

- Having intermediate rents through an arms length company rather than the HRA could then help to build more Council housing.
- East Suffolk Lettings was encouraging landlords to stay in the market and perhaps in the longer term an arms length company could purchase properties from them if they did want to sell.
- Officers were exploring if there were any opportunities for acquiring houses built during Sizewell C construction.
- Inward investment was being encouraged to boost the number of businesses in the district and invest in housing.
- There were limitations with the Right to Buy Scheme in terms of losing the stock and not having enough of the receipts to build more housing.
- The licensing of holiday lets and Air BnBs was being considered to restrict the number and ensure they were not being used as HMOs.
- Ward Councillors should talk to their Parish Councils to support the use of rural exception sites to build housing which helped people stay in their villages.

The Cabinet Member reiterated that he and Officers were always looking at ways to increase and retain Council housing stock so if Members had any proposals where the finances stacked up he was happy to listen.

6 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Chair reminded Members that they would review the Approach to Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour in East Suffolk at the next meeting on 21 December 2023. In addition, there would be a Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session with Councillor Candy, Cabinet Member for Community Health.

The meeting concluded at 8.50pm.

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Chair

MATTERS ARISING UPDATE SHEET

FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING ON

16 NOVEMBER 2023

Updates		
Minute Item Number	Member Query Raised	Cabinet Member/Officer Response (no more than a paragraph required)
4	How many properties had been purchased by the Council since 2019 and how many remained empty?	<p>The Housing Revenue Account has purchased 59 properties since 2018/19, of which 52 are tenanted and 7 are vacant.</p> <p>Of the 7 that are vacant, 5 are part of the development programme, 1 is currently having adaptations completed, and the other 1 is due to be allocated shortly.</p>
Briefing Note		
<p>4. The options, challenges and risks for providing 100% affordable housing developments in the district? (please provide as much information as necessary to answer the question)</p> <p>Definition of affordable housing –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are different types of affordable housing broadly split into two groups – affordable housing for rent and affordable housing to buy. • Types of affordable housing include affordable rent (which should be provided by a Registered Provider), Shared Ownership, Shared Equity, Discounted ownership, Rent to Buy, and First Homes. Detailed definitions are provided in the East Suffolk Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document. • The Suffolk Coastal Local Plan policy SCLP5.10 ‘Affordable Housing on Residential Developments’ sets out the required tenures where affordable housing is required on sites of 10 or more dwellings or of 0.5ha or more. • The Waveney Local Plan policy WLP8.2 ‘Affordable Housing’ sets out the required tenures where affordable housing is required on for sites of 11 or more dwellings. <p>Options for delivering 100% affordable housing –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Suffolk Coastal Local Plan policy SCLP5.3 ‘Housing in the Countryside’ permits “affordable housing to meet identified local needs on exception sites adjacent to, or well related to, Settlement Boundaries or clusters of housing in the countryside.” Exception sites policies allow affordable housing development where market housing development would 		

not be support by policy, and therefore where the land does not have market housing value.

- The Suffolk Coastal Local Plan policy [SCLP5.11](#) 'Affordable Housing on Exception Sites' which provides detailed policy in relation to SCLP5.3 permits proposals for affordable housing in the countryside subject to conditions including "it is demonstrated there is an identified local need for affordable housing and this cannot be met through existing housing allocations in the Local Plan or relevant Neighbourhood Plan, or through development within the Settlement Boundary".
- The Waveney Local Plan policy [WLP8.6](#) 'Affordable Housing in the Countryside' permits affordable housing in the countryside subject to conditions including "it is demonstrated there is an identified local need for affordable housing and this cannot be met through existing housing allocations in the Local Plan or relevant Neighbourhood Plan".
- Development of 100% affordable housing could in theory come forward on any site allocated for residential development in the two local plans, the [Suffolk Coastal Local Plan](#) and [Waveney Local Plan](#), or in a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan, subject to relevant policies in those plans, however see 'challenges' below.
- Development could come forward on sites located within settlement boundaries around town and villages where housing development is supported in principle, subject to relevant policies in the local plans. However similar challenges to those associated with allocated sites would exist as the principle of market housing is accepted.
- Neighbourhood plans may also set their own policies and for example the Reydon Neighbourhood Plan includes a policy under which affordable housing can take place where otherwise it would not be able to.
- The [East Suffolk Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document](#) provides detailed guidance including recommended processes for those wanting to bring forward exceptions sites for affordable housing.
- Housing developments in East Suffolk are required to pay a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Developments for affordable housing can apply for a 100% relief from CIL.
- The Council's Housing Enabling Team offers support to Community Led Housing groups such as Community Land Trust, Cohousing or Cooperative Housing Societies in bringing forward local affordable housing.
- The Council's Planning Team provides support to Neighbourhood Plan Groups that want to allocate land for affordable housing.

Challenges –

- Land supply is low throughout the district.
- Competition - East Suffolk Councils ability to compete with other developers for the acquisition of land for off and on market sites. As ESC requires Cabinet approval for spends of over £250,000. Most land values exceed this, thus having a detrimental impact on ESC's ability to be competitive in acquiring sites. Once the necessary due diligence, viability carried out and cabinet paper written the subject site is likely to have been sold.
- Land values – Landowners appear to be asking above market values for sites which is having a significant impact on the viability of bringing forward potential sites for affordable housing.
- There is a strong developer preference for delivering open market housing alongside the policy required amount of affordable housing due to the profit margins associated with market housing which are required to make a development viable.

- As much as affordable housing is very important to achieve, so is open market housing. People want and need homes to buy of a mix of sizes and the private rental stock of housing in the District is also important, particularly for renters who may not qualify for affordable housing.
- It is also important to achieve well mixed communities and it is a long established planning design principal that affordable housing should be mixed and tenure blind. There are risks that high concentrations of affordable rent properties can also lead to some social issues in communities.
- If there was an increased focus on 100% affordable developments, there may also be a risk of seeing more 100% open market developments. This would create social division in communities.
- When 100% affordable housing sites are proposed we usually cannot require the additional affordable housing (above policy requirements) to be secured through the legal agreement, as the principle of market housing development is accepted on the site.
- There is no register or database of land available from landowners for the development of 100% affordable housing. Any scheme would need to identify areas where there is a potential need, carry out a local housing need assessment, contact all the local landowners to ascertain the availability of land and submit proposals for planning approval.
- The level of need for affordable housing needs can vary considerably across the district. Not all Parishes have a demonstrable need for affordable housing.
- Most affordable housing to rent is managed by a Registered Provider (RP) or the Council. An RP would need to be willing and able purchase and manage the housing for rent.
- RPs can sometimes struggle to be competitive with developers of market housing and this can make it difficult to secure land for 100% affordable housing. Most RPs seeking to develop land for affordable housing will now also include some open market housing in order to cover the costs of the development.
- Alternatively, during economic downturns in the housing market and land market, RPs may have access to grants and a willing to buy land that developers of market housing don't. During an economic downturn a lack of competition can benefit RPs.
- There are many costly financial requirements involved in development of land which must be addressed. These include flood risk, land contamination, biodiversity net gain, provision on onsite infrastructure (schools, playgrounds, open space etc), provision of roads and cycling and walking infrastructure, and utilities (usually more costly in rural locations) etc. There can be site specific issues such as the discovery of gas or water mains etc. The local plans have been subject to viability testing, and in the Waveney Local Plan area the affordable housing requirements are lower in the lower value areas where it would not be viable to require a higher amount.
- The cost of house building has increased significantly in recent years due to the cost of materials and changes in Building Regulation standards.
- The Council may wish to build to particularly high environmental standards which will add to the build cost and require specialist consultants and contractors.
- East Suffolk Housing Development Team has an existing housing programme and a team with little capacity sizewise. The development team is also under significant budget constraints which are having a detrimental impact on the delivery/acquisition of sites for additional affordable housing over what is already in the current programme The same does apply to a number of RPs.
- Where sites come forward for 100% affordable housing, as CIL relief can be applied, there would be no CIL provided from the development. This can result in some communities

receiving development but also not receiving Neighbourhood CIL. There are risks that if too many 100% affordable developments came forward, the cost to deliver infrastructure such as school expansion and health facilities would not be covered.

Risks –

- Any housing built and rented by the Council, a housing association or RP could be purchased under the Right to Buy. The resulting number of affordable homes to rent therefore may not increase in the long term.
- The cost of borrowing and the general economic situation could make it difficult to sell affordable housing to those who would qualify to buy them. There are financial risks for the developer associated with slow house sales or a drop in the price of housing.

Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date	22/02/2024
Subject	REVIEW OF EAST SUFFOLK COUNCIL'S ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY
Cabinet Member	CLlr Rachel Smith-Lyte, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment
Report Author(s)	Paul Mackie Lead Officer, Climate Change & Environment paul.mackie@eastsoffolk.gov.uk
Head of Service	Fiona Quinn Head of Environmental Services and Port Health fiona.quinn@eastsoffolk.gov.uk
Director	Nick Khan Strategic Director Nick.Khan@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

Key Decision?	No
Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN

Purpose/Summary

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide information to assist the Committee to understand and review the Environmental Impact theme of the new Our Direction 2028 Strategic Plan.
- Provide information to assist the Committee to understand and review the deliverability of the Council's strategy for the environment.

Recommendation(s)

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Having considered the report, make any recommendations as required.

Strategic plan

How does this proposal support Our Direction 2028?

Environmental Impact	This report relates to the delivery of the environmental impact theme of Our Direction 2028.
Sustainable Housing	This report indirectly relates to the delivery of priorities within the Sustainable Housing theme of Our Direction 2028.
Tackling Inequalities	This report indirectly relates to the delivery of priorities within the Tackling Inequalities theme of Our Direction 2028.
Thriving Economy	This report indirectly relates to the delivery of priorities within the Thriving Economy theme of Our Direction 2028.
Our Foundations / governance of the organisation	This report indirectly relates to governance for the delivery of Our Direction 2028.

Justification for recommendations

1. Background

1.1. The previous ESC Strategic Plan

The Council's previous Strategic Plan set out its vision to deliver the highest possible quality of life for everyone who lives, works in or visits the district. Within the theme of Caring for our Environment, the Council committed to lead by example, seeking environmental benefit in everything we do, working with communities for biodiversity and optimising the use digital solutions to reduce environmental impacts; to minimise waste, promote reuse and maximise recycling; to explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy solutions as a council and encourage others to do the same; and to use our influence and regulatory functions to protect our natural environment and coastline. This strategy was superseded by 'Our Direction 2028' in November 2023.

1.2. New ESC Strategic Plan: Our Direction 2028 (appendix A).

As reported at Full Council on 22 November 2023 and outlined within the accompanying papers:

The East Suffolk Plan 2019-23 was East Suffolk Council's first ever Strategic Plan. In nearing the end of its cycle, consideration was given to what was achieved as part of the Council's annual Strategic Plan report 2023, along with what was achieved over the whole lifetime of the Plan, considering what a new Plan could build on, accelerate and change focus on.

1.3. The new strategy 'Our Direction 2028' was drafted in response to these lessons. Our Direction 2028 is the Council's blueprint for success over the next four years. Our Direction 2028 is a strategic-level document and therefore it sets the path we are embarking on together, collaboratively, over the next four years. It establishes an ambitious approach, creating a golden thread and setting targets to help us deliver what we aim to achieve by 2028. Our Direction 2028 sets out a vision and four associated themes, under which several priorities have been defined.

1.4. Our Direction 2028 is the key document for the Council in setting the direction of East Suffolk Council for the next four years. Following on from significant consultation and further development and finalisation of Our Direction 2028, the Strategic Plan was presented to Council for its approval at Full Council on 22 November 2023.

1.5. Our strategic focus of the environment.

The Our Direction 2028 vision is 'Our aim is to promote a bright, green, open, free, and fair future for all East Suffolk'. Our Direction 2028 has four core themes which includes an 'Environmental Impact theme' which set its vision as 'delivering positive climate, nature, and environmental impacts through the decisions we make and actions we take'.

1.6. Within the Environmental Impact Theme there are eight priority topics:

- a. **Continued commitment to net zero by 2030.**
- b. **Supporting sustainable transport.**
- c. **Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.**
- d. **Support, promote and implement green tech.**
- e. **Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience.**
- f. **Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials.**
- g. **Encourage food self-sufficiency.**
- h. **Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage.**

1.7. ESC's ongoing net zero commitment

On 24 July 2019 (Full Council agenda item 9(a)), the Council resolved unanimously to:

- Declare a climate emergency
- Set up a cross party Task Group, commencing by October 2019, to investigate ways to cut East Suffolk Council's carbon and harmful emissions on a spend to save basis, with ambition to make East Suffolk Council (including all buildings and services) carbon neutral by 2030.
- To work with Suffolk County Council and other partners across the county and region, including the LEP and the Public Sector Leaders, towards the aspiration of making the county of Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030.
- To work with the government to:
 - a) deliver its 25-year Environmental Plan, and
 - b) increase the powers and resources available to local authorities in order to make the 2030 target easier to achieve. The Environment Task Group was formed as a cross-party Task Group

- 1.8.** As we have pledged to become a carbon neutral council by 2030 – which also means we will look for environmental benefit in everything we do – this includes radical changes to our vehicle fleets, business mileage usage plus energy used by council buildings and leisure centres to ensure they contribute to our carbon neutral aims. We have also implemented digital solutions to further minimise our carbon footprint.

ESC declared a climate emergency to reinforce our commitment to the environment. This commitment was reinforced by the environment being a key principle of the previous and current strategic plans, underpinning our work as an authority.

As ESC produces less than 1% of Suffolk's carbon emissions, our focus has been on our most powerful role – engaging with the public and using our powers, duties and networks to encourage climate positive behaviours.

Our focus on restoring nature and increasing biodiversity has also been a key area of work, as this plays a fundamental role in the response to climate change, so is closely interlinked.

1.9. Legislation related to this theme

There are a number of pieces of Government legislation and policy in place to support the delivery of East Suffolk's climate aspirations and objectives, which are:

- UK Climate Change Act 2008: Legally binding 2050 net zero target.
- Biodiversity Net Gain: mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to be delivered by all development, introduced through the 2021 Environment Act and came into force in January 2024 and phasing through stages of implementation starting with smaller developments.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies: Associated with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) delivery to be prepared by Suffolk County Council with a supporting role for district councils.
- Building Regulations: Part L changes deliver a 30% improvement on energy efficiency above previous 2013 standards. Future Homes Standard would represent 75-80% improvement.
- Transport: Ban on combustion engines in new cars from 2035. 'Decarbonising Transport' (2021) understood that decarbonisation will be informing next round of Local Transport Plans (prepared by SCC).

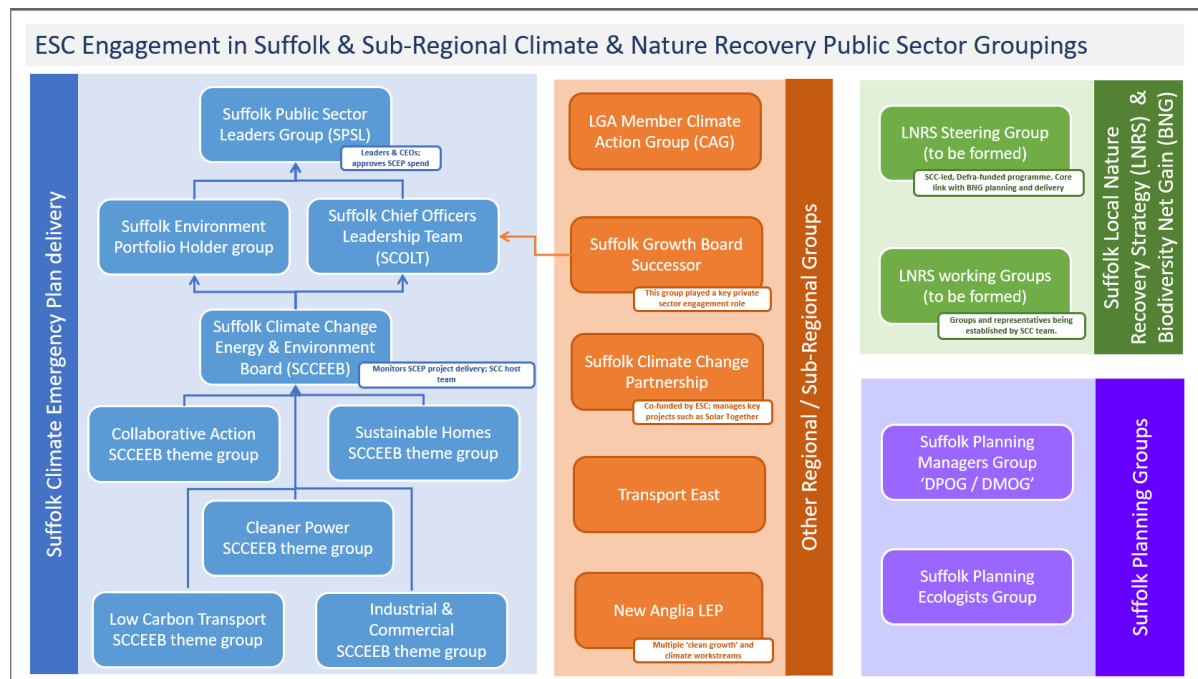
1.10. There are further pieces of Government legislation and policy in place to support the delivery of East Suffolk's climate aspirations and objectives, key examples of which are:

- Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006.
- Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- Potential 2023 Procurement Act secondary legislation.
- Habitats regulations 2010.
- Water Resources Regulations 2015.
- Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016.
- 25 Year Environment Plan.

1.11. Collaborations and partnerships with other organisations.

There are a range of groups working across the district and County addressing the climate change and nature emergencies. These are shown below. ESC is either an active

member of these groups or is indirectly involved.



1.12. As an ambitious council, despite limits to the resources, funding and powers available to District Authorities, East Suffolk Council publicly committed to collaborate with other local and national organisations to urgently address climate change.

Examples include working with partners to address important national issues such as low carbon transport and decarbonising private homes.

East Suffolk Council supports the 2030 net zero target for Suffolk as a whole by tackling emissions from the wider sectors of transport, business, industry and households. To do this we are an active partner in the delivery of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, such as by helping households install energy reduction measure use through the 'Warmer Homes' programme, co-funding the Solar Together scheme and supporting business to decarbonise through our net zero grant programme. East Suffolk Council is also committed to supporting the delivery of HM Government's 25 year Environment Plan.

1.13. Delivering the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan

East Suffolk Council has been working with other authorities since 2007 as part of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership.

In 2019, all Suffolk authorities declared a climate emergency and a net zero target of 2030 was set. The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (SPSL) gave approval to develop the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, which was published in 2021. SPSL then approve annual funding for projects to deliver a programme of work to tackle the climate emergency in Suffolk, which is now being delivered.

The Suffolk Climate Change Energy & Environment Board (SCCEEB) and its subgroups were formed to deliver the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan and report to SPSL via the portfolio holders and Suffolk Chief Officers Leadership Team (SCOLT) groups.

1.14. Enabling community action: The Greenprint Forum.

The Greenprint Forum's important work also helps support the delivery of our environment core programme, plus the wider Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan in addition to the independent work of its member groups and organisations.

1.15. What resources are available?

As this is a very broad area of work, resources and funding come from a wide range of sources. Most Service Areas are working on environment and climate-related projects utilising their existing teams in addition to delivering statutory duties and services. Examples within our core programme include:

- **Operations:** Overseeing the delivery of the range of services delivered by East Suffolk Services LTD (ESSL), ranging from waste & recycling, grounds and habitat management and decarbonising the fleet and our built assets.
- **Housing:** Delivering the low carbon ESC developments and retrofitting our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties.
- **Communities:** Delivering the leisure centre decarbonisation programme and supporting communities through the ES Forum to address climate and environment issues in their local area.
- **Economic Development:** Giving direct funding support to enable low carbon businesses, supporting delivery of the East Suffolk Clean Hydrogen Strategy and delivering exemplar sustainable regeneration projects.
- **Planning & Coastal Development:** Engaging with major renewable energy projects, delivering biodiversity net gain, developing innovative Planning guidance such as our Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document (2022) and East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy aims plus delivering resilience and adaptation to climate risks on our coast.
- **Environmental Services & Port Health:** The wide range of duties delivered, ranging from addressing air quality, fly tipping and waste incidents and the work of the climate change and sustainability team.

1.16. What funding is available?

The majority of the existing work addressing climate change and the environment is delivered within existing budgets. Ringfenced reserves have also been utilised, which were put in place to deliver the previous ESC strategic plan priorities.

However, it should be noted that much of the discretionary work related to climate and environment is not funded through core funding and is therefore dependent on significant external funding from public and private services. Therefore, the work of Economic Development's funding team is essential alongside other officers delivering funding bids across the organisation.

1.17. What other Local Authorities are doing? (benchmarking)

Although most local authorities are addressing the nature and climate emergencies,

there is a large variation between how they are responding. District councils, vary significantly in their district’s emissions profile, alongside geographic and socio-economic variations. For example, ESC is situated in one of the driest regions of the UK, with one of Europe’s fastest eroding coastlines, which presents a unique set of issues. This means that it is challenging to benchmark progress.

However, when reviewing other district and borough authorities’ responses, it is clear that ESC is ahead of the curve in its strategic approach. A key example of this is Climate Emergency UK’s 2023 ranking of East Suffolk Council’s climate change response.

Most councils have now declared a climate emergency, and 85% have formulated climate action plans. One in five LAs do not have a climate action plan. Following a detailed review covering a range of ESC’s work addressing climate change and wider environmental challenges **ESC was ranked the 12th best district council in the country** on its response. Details can be found on Climate Emergency UK’s website here: [Council Climate Action Scorecards | Climate Emergency UK \(councilclimatescorecards.uk\)](https://councilclimatescorecards.uk)

We are also benchmarking data such as our recycling rates which are included in our public Environment KPI dashboard.

In addition, ESC has been a very active collaborator alongside other local authorities across Suffolk and is an active participant in a number of county and regional delivery groups. These include the Suffolk Climate Change, Environment and Energy Board and Suffolk Climate Emergency Programme. This is a fundamental part of our response, as addressing a macro challenge such as climate change requires effective partnership working across sectors. Data on Suffolk’s progress addressing the climate emergency can be found on the public dashboard here: [Suffolk Observatory – Environment – Suffolk Climate Emergency Dashboard](#).

2. Answers to Overview & Scrutiny Committee questions.

2.1. Committee question 1: Are there any differences between the previous strategy for the environment and the new one in Our Direction? If so, what implications will there be of these changes in direction?

There are a number of points of synergy and divergence when comparing the previous and current strategic plans. The environment priorities in the previous ESC strategic plan and current Our Direction 2028 Environmental Impact priorities are compared in the tables below:

	Previous ESC Strategic Plan Environment Priorities	Included in new plan’s Environment Impact priorities?
1	Lead by example, seeking environmental benefit in everything we do, working with communities for biodiversity.	No
2	Optimising the use digital solutions to reduce environmental impacts.	No
3	Minimise waste, promote reuse and maximise recycling.	Yes: ‘Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials’.

4	Explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy solutions as a council and encourage others to do the same.	Yes, technically: 'Support, promote and implement green tech'.
5	Use our influence and regulatory functions to protect our natural environment.	No.

Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact priorities.		Included in Previous ESC Strategic Plan Environment Priorities?
1	Continued commitment to net zero by 2030.	No (this was a separate strategic commitment).
2	Supporting sustainable transport.	No.
3	Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.	Yes.
4	Support, promote and implement green tech.	Yes, technically: 'Explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy solutions as a council and encourage others to do the same.'; Optimising the use digital solutions to reduce environmental impacts.
5	Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience.	No
6	Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials.	Yes 'Minimise waste, promote reuse and maximise recycling'.
7	Encourage food self-sufficiency.	No.
8	Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage.	No.

The potential implications of delivering the new Environmental Impact priorities are listed in the table below:

Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact priorities		Implications
1	Continued commitment to net zero by 2030.	No new implications – this continues to be reliant on external funding.
2	Supporting sustainable transport.	No significant new implications beyond limited additional officer resources and funding if work is to be expanded.
3	Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.	No significant new implications unless a significant expansion of activities is required / new projects are initiated.
4	Support, promote and implement green tech.	No significant new implications based on the scope of the priority as currently outlined in the document.

5	Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience.	No significant new implications anticipated beyond predicted increase in coastal impacts from climate change.
6	Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials.	No significant new implications anticipated based on the Our Direction 2028 priority description, beyond incoming national requirements.
7	Encourage food self-sufficiency.	This is a new priority so may require modest additional resource and funding to realise depending on scale of ask.
8	Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage.	Work in progress - this is a new priority and any significant new implications will depend on how this is defined further and how it can be addressed by existing and future plans and policies.

2.2. Committee question 2: Who has been consulted on the Our Direction Environmental Impact theme, or are there any plans for consultation?

As reported at Full Council on 22 November 2023 and outlined within the accompanying papers:

Whilst the Our Direction 2028 themes were initially developed by the GLI group, including an initial set of priorities, much has happened in way of consultation with all Members, Officers, residents, and stakeholders to further develop and finalise the themes and priorities outlined in Our Direction 2028.

This consultation included:

- **All Member briefing and ongoing discussions across all political groups.**
- **Strategic Plan discussion at Overview & Scrutiny Committee in September 2023.**
- **Corporate Leadership engagement sessions.**
- **Online CEO staff briefings.**
- **Staff engagement roadshows.**
- **Press release and launch of an online survey for residents and stakeholders to complete.**
- **Letters sent to key stakeholders asking for feedback.**

Feedback from staff and Members included clarification questions, suggested improvements in language, merging of and additional priority suggestions, alongside a significant number of ideas for action in terms of how the Plan can be subsequently delivered over the next four years.

Feedback from residents and stakeholders included a total of 380 online survey responses, with 89% of these responses coming from residents in the district.

Interestingly areas of the survey also aligned with internal staff and Member feedback regarding additional priorities, clarification of language and ideas for action in terms of

delivering this Plan. This feedback has been addressed as part of the finalisation of Our Direction 2028.

2.3. Committee question 3: What plans are there for meeting each of the eight objectives in the Our Direction Environmental Impact strategy?

It should be noted that most of the Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact priorities are being delivered in some form. As the plan was recently approved by Full Council, work is now taking place to define the scope and action plan for delivering these priorities.

The first step, which is currently underway, is to establish the internal governance and leadership of each Our Direction 2028 themes. Current chairs of the strategic plan delivery teams are being consulted on their recommended ways forward, which will be considered and agreed upon by the relevant Members and senior officers.

When the governance approach has been agreed, these groups will then agree the scope, create and seek approval for the detailed action plans.

Existing work addressing these priority areas through statutory duties and services plus our discretionary projects continue but with renewed vigour under the new Our Direction 2028 strategic plan.

2.4. Committee question 4: How will progress of deliverability be measured and by whom?

As reported at Full Council on 22 November 2023 and outlined within the accompanying papers:

To govern the direction of the Strategic Plan as a steering document, work has been undertaken to evolve the current governance framework to continue to provide oversight of overall performance and delivery against the Strategic Plan. This achieves several aims:

- **Oversees the programme of work feeding into each theme.**
- **Steers the activities of the Council to ensure they are delivering to the plan.**
- **Monitors progress of delivery to the key priorities within each theme.**
- **Monitors, understands, and challenges performance.**
- **Monitors risks which may compromise delivery of strategic objectives.**

Governance arrangements will include the development of an annual action plan that will contain the high-level programme of work that the Council will undertake to deliver against its strategic themes and how we will monitor to ensure the Council is moving in the right direction.

The governance arrangements will also continue to include clear Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) at a strategic level, that will be regularly monitored, reported and available to internal and external stakeholders.

Progress against this action plan will be reported annually in the form of an annual report.

Organisationally, to ensure the “golden thread” of the Strategic Plan runs throughout the organisation, annual service planning linked to the themes of the strategic plan, and its underlying governance structure, will be in place and complimented by service-level performance and appraisals.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1.** The issues covered in this report have the potential to have a significant impact on the council’s finances, depending on whether or not actions that address these issues to be addressed by existing budgets, with the need for additional external funding to be sourced to deliver these priorities.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1.** As a Planning Authority, ESC does have a statutory duty to ensure at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is delivered by developments in the District.

5. Risk Implications

The Council’s Corporate Risk Register already identifies the issues addressed in this report as areas of corporate risk. These main areas of risk are:

- 1. Reputational;** an inability to effectively meet our own carbon neutrality commitments could impact on the council’s ability to engage effectively with those it needs to influence through leadership; in turn risking the wider prize of Suffolk-wide carbon neutrality.
- 2. Financial;** an inability to tackle the council’s consumption of energy in the course of its pursuit of carbon neutrality could mean that future financial benefits of reduced Grid dependency are not realised.

6. Options

- a. Continue to move forward with the development and delivery of Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact theme.**
- b. Recommend changes in approach to the development and delivery of Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact theme.**

7. Recommendations

That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, having considered the information in this report, provides feedback on the Council’s approach to the development and delivery of the Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact theme.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

The environment and responding to the nature and climate emergencies continues to be a key pillar of the Council’s strategic direction. Due to its importance, we will continue to give regular updates on the Council’s work to address delivery of this core theme - these will be provided to Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and other key groups where appropriate.

As the need to react to environmental challenges continue, the delivery plan will continue to play a significant role. This is a broad and significant challenge for all Local Authorities, which can only be addressed through open, active and productive collaboration, both internally and with key partner organisations. On its own, East Suffolk cannot solve the challenge but can play an important role in finding solutions.

The recommendation to the Committee to consider the progress to date developing the governance and plan for delivering Our Direction 2028 and offer feedback is put forward with the aim of ensuring we are delivering on the ambitions set out in the Council's strategic plan. This will help ensure we are responding to both the challenges and opportunities for our communities.

Areas of consideration comments

Section 151 Officer comments:

Not Applicable

Monitoring Officer comments:

Not Applicable

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion/EQIA:

Not Applicable

Safeguarding:

Not Applicable

Crime and Disorder:

Not Applicable

Corporate Services implications:

(i.e., Legal, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Digital, Customer Services, Asset Management)

Not Applicable

Residents and Businesses consultation/consideration:

Not Applicable

Appendices:

Appendix A	Our Direction 2028
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Background reference papers:

Date	Type	Available From
22 Nov 2023	Full Council papers	CMIS > Meetings (Item 9 refers)



EASTSUFFOLK
COUNCIL

OUR

DIRECTION

2028

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Cllr Caroline Topping, Leader

I was incredibly honoured to have been elected as Leader of East Suffolk Council and to be its first female Leader. This is a truly beautiful and vibrant part of the world and I am proud, as a resident, to serve you all.

After many years of Conservative Administration at Suffolk Coastal, Waveney and East Suffolk Councils, our residents voted for change. Our communities have put their trust in us, and we will do our best to deliver what they want us to achieve.

We fully appreciate how worried people have been about tackling the cost-of-living crisis which has hit our communities really hard. People can't find affordable housing; they are worried about their town centres with shops and banks closing, and they are worried about the environmental legacy we are leaving for our children, with the threat of climate change already evident.

Therefore, this Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Administration, working collaboratively with all Members, staff and important stakeholders will operate on the basis of clear priorities which reflect our shared values. These priorities are presented here in 'Our Direction 2028', our plan for the next four years.

The Council is ready for an exciting and ambitious new phase, and Our Direction has seen the original East Suffolk Plan evolve, with a refreshed and refined approach, reflecting the political ambitions of the new Administration.

Our Direction 2028 is about the path we are embarking on together, collaboratively, over the next four years. We are taking an ambitious approach and have sought the views of local people to create this Plan. We are working with and empowering communities and individuals to conserve what we love about our District, improve services where we need to and adapt to our changing environment to ensure the District is in the best place possible in 2028.

Over the next few pages, we will explain exactly what we are seeking to achieve and the standards to which we expect to be held. It will no doubt be challenging, but also exciting and on behalf of all councillors I can guarantee that we will do our very best at all times.

“



”

Chris Bally, Chief Executive

'Our Direction 2028' comes at a time of great challenge and opportunity for the district and the organisation. East Suffolk Council has made huge strides since 2019, delivering against the Council's first ever Strategic Plan achieving, real progress in the district.

We have welcomed considerable funding to deliver major projects and throughout East Suffolk there are examples of important schemes and activities being delivered by the Council or in partnership with other key stakeholders.

2023 has been a year of significant change, with a new Chief Executive and Administration. However, the energy, resilience and positivity shown in taking this change in its stride and continuing to deliver excellent public services is a testament to all who work for the Council.

Looking ahead, we have an exciting four-year agenda. The new Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Administration of the Council recognise the progress that has been made, but also know that they have been chosen by the electorate. They want to deliver a renewed focus on the environment and an economy that works for all in the district, addressing inequalities and tackling the housing challenge appropriately across the District.

Alongside this, at our core, is maintaining the quality of services day-in day-out and ensuring the council is governed well and delivers effectively and efficiently. We are also ready to look at things afresh, as demonstrated by the creation of trading vehicles such as East Suffolk Services Limited and East Suffolk Lettings, plus the adoption of technology through our Digital Towns work.

However, we know we cannot do this alone and welcome continued excellent working relations with other councils in Suffolk, health and police partners, the business and voluntary sectors, and central government. This is typified by our innovative Community Partnership model which will develop further to create a thriving network of projects and initiatives.

I am incredibly proud to be the Chief Executive of East Suffolk and proud of the commitment, energy and ingenuity that our officers and teams put into delivering outstanding services around the clock. Excellent planning, building control, environmental health, housing, leisure and so much more only happen because of the people dedicated to serving our communities. They are united in their purpose whether they are directly delivering services or supporting those who are engaged in that delivery to achieve the best for East Suffolk.

OUR DIRECTION 2028

Our aim is to promote a bright, green, open, free, and fair future for all East Suffolk





EAST SUFFOLK IN CONTEXT



Population of
around
250373



Around
487
square miles



115
square miles
of AONB



49
miles of
coast line



15.54%
19 or under



27.71%
65 or over

- Natural beauty
- Heritage
- Arts
- Beach
- Ports
- Market town
- Wind energy
- Nuclear energy
- Coastal protection
- A12 Roads
- Rail



11.3% of our population are affected by income deprivation, higher than the Suffolk average of 10.2%



19,638 people were claiming universal credit in July 23



Approximately **4000** planning applications per year



45% of waste collected sent for recycling or composting



2000 fly tipping incidents per year



13,000 properties pay Government-set business rates, which we administer



We collect waste and recycling, administer Council Tax, and more, from over **127,000** properties in the district



Food hygiene ratings **98.75** at rating 3-5



Over **1 million** ESC-owned leisure centre visits, year to Spring 2023

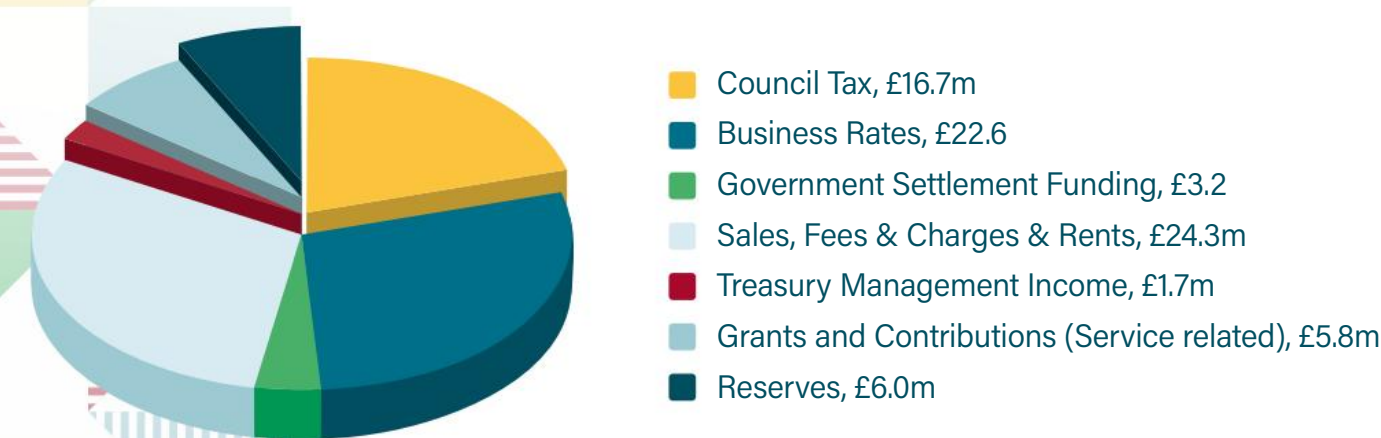


£13.8m in successful grant funding – 94% of applications, year to Spring 2023

How our Council Services are Funded

In 2023/24 East Suffolk Council had a net budget of £80.3m. East Suffolk Council's services are funded from a mix of sources including Council Tax, Business Rates, income from Fees and Charges and a small grant from Government. Between 2015/16 and 2023/24 the amount the Council received from Government fell from £8.04m to £3.23m as part of the Government's austerity programme.

The Council is increasingly reliant on locally generated funds from Council Tax, business rates and fees and charges. The ability to generate income from charges for its services is increasingly important to support the Council's strategic objectives. This provides a third of the total funding to Council.



Where the Money is Spent (net budget £80.3m in 2023/24)





Financial Management

East Suffolk has a good record of budget and financial management and continues to protect front line services. Good financial governance ensure that emerging budget pressures are kept under review during each year, and this has been particularly important following the Covid-19 pandemic, a period of high inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.

We review key contractual arrangements and are very active in securing external grant funding. Meanwhile, the Council held unallocated reserves of £6m at the start of 2023-24, with earmarked reserves of £45m.



Capital Programme

In addition to the revenue budget, the Council has a capital investment programme which supports delivery of the Council's strategic direction and to carry out necessary health and safety works. For 2023/24 the budget programme of capital projects totals £113m, with £73m funded from external grants and a 4-year capital programme of £370m (£260m from external grants) over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.



Housing Revenue Account

Over and above the money spent by the Council as part of its General Fund, the annual income from the Council's housing stock, is in the region of £22m and is ring-fenced for re-investment into the provision of housing services, support for tenants and investment in the existing stock and new housing.

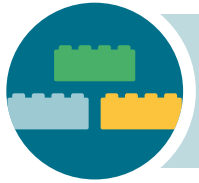


Financial Challenges to 2028

During the period of this Plan, maintaining a balanced budget will be pushed to the limit. The demand for Council services arising from a number of pressures including the cost-of-living crisis and our climate emergency will increase and it is likely the Council will face significant challenges to its income streams. Our commitment to reach net zero by 2030 and new legislation including, for example, in areas of housing regulation will put further pressure on budgets.

Following a period of high inflation, the costs for goods and services has increased and supply chain pressure will continue to impact on the Council's capital programme. The implications of the UK leaving the European Union will continue to affect the Council, not least the Port Health Authority as we implement the new Border Target Operating Model.

The absence of multi-year settlements, delays to the Fairer Funding Review and the re-set of the business rates system, does not provide the certainty to plan for financial sustainability. However we understand these challenges and commit to addressing them over the next four years.



Our Foundations

Our Direction 2028 is the Council's blueprint for success over the next four years, and in delivering this Plan we recognise the importance of the solid foundations that are critically important to any successful local authority.

We will continue to provide excellent quality services for our residents, whether it's working with Anglia Revenues Partnership to deliver our revenue and benefits services, ensuring hygiene standards are maintained by our Port Health Team who check that imported foods are safe, through hygiene inspections at your favourite café or providing access to our fabulous beach huts along our coastline.

The delivery of our day-to-day functions will always remain an unwavering priority.

We will always listen to our residents and commit to engaging with them whenever possible. We will also find innovative ways of doing this, especially for residents that are less likely to engage with us and are harder to reach.

We will ensure our customers find it easy to do business with the Council. On every occasion people interact with us, it must be as straightforward as possible and we will always adopt a solution-focused approach.

Digital Technology plays a key role in how we work as an organisation, and it is vital we continue to invest in the right technology to enable the council and the district to thrive. In doing this, we are also committed to ensuring that those who cannot access digital services themselves are not excluded.

We will use digital technology to ensure our services are efficient, secure and data-led – and we will capitalise on the benefits of greener ways of working, using technology.

Finally, we will always measure and reflect on our performance, including how we deliver this plan as part of Our Direction 2028. This includes undertaking robust internal audits across all our service areas.

We will ask our communities what they think of us in a variety of different ways, including through our regular residents surveys, and we will always take action when things are not going so well.



Our Values

We want our workforce to be the best they can, delivering the best possible services to those who need us most. Our People Strategy maps out how we want to develop our people, ensuring they have the right skills and training to do their jobs well.

East Suffolk Council has five core staff values which lay the foundation for the way our people work, engendering a common purpose that everyone understands, buys into and embodies in all they do.



Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion

We are fully committed to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in all that we do. We will strive to ensure a supportive and inclusive culture amongst our workforce, promoting diversity and eliminating all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

We will not provide less favourable services, facilities or treatment on the grounds of protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race (including ethnic origin, colour, nationality and national origin), religion or belief, or sex and sexual orientation. The District Council also includes socio-economic factors in addition to the protected characteristics.

The Council is proud to have signed up to Unison's Anti Racism Charter and we have further reinforced our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, by developing a four-year action plan to ensure that it remains integral to all we do.





Delivering positive climate, nature, and environmental impacts through the decisions we make and actions we take.



Continued commitment to net zero by 2030

We are committed to achieving net zero as a Council by 2030, and working collaboratively to deliver this for Suffolk, focussing and investing in this transition while protecting our core services.



Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience

In the face of great threats to East Suffolk's coastline, we will work in partnership with stakeholders and communities to manage coastal adaptation and create resilience wherever possible.



Supporting sustainable transport

We will support sustainable transport – delivering our own Cycling and Walking Strategy whilst working hard with our partners enabling people to use public transport and travel in an environmentally sustainable way.



Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials

Through our own practices and by encouraging others, we will focus on the reduction, re-use and recycling of materials, including the eradication of single use plastics.



Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity

We are committed to restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, through rewilding and tree planting, enabling landowners to follow our lead. We will set ambitious biodiversity net gain targets and encourage improvement.



Encourage food self-sufficiency

We will reduce food waste and encourage more local food production, including community growing schemes, to reduce food miles. We will support residents and community groups to develop food practices which move away from chemical control.



Support, promote and implement green tech

We will implement and support decarbonising, electrifying and greening technologies to create energy across the district, contributing to local and national energy infrastructures.



Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage

We will seek to preserve and maintain the inherent beauty and attraction of East Suffolk including its natural landscape and conservation areas, historic environment and cultural heritage, retaining its unique selling points for generations to come.

SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

All homes in East Suffolk are safe, suitable, and sustainable, in communities where residents are proud to live.



Deliver the right housing based on our communities' need

We want to deliver and support the right housing developments in the right locations based on all residents' housing needs, with more affordable homes including social rent and better first-time buyer opportunities.



Promote housing developments which enhance wellbeing and protect the environment

We want housing developments that enhance wellbeing with high quality infrastructure, green spaces; encouraging sustainable transport where possible, using master planning to engage with our residents.



Tackle fuel poverty and support new heating technologies

We will strive to help end fuel poverty and deliver more sustainable housing, including our own stock. We will take advantage of funding opportunities for new heating technologies, including for the installation of solar panels, improving insulation and installing heat pumps.



Reduce and prevent homelessness

We will continue to work hard for those that are at risk of becoming homeless to prevent this from happening, alongside supporting people who are homeless back into suitable accommodation.



Promote community pride in homes and neighbourhoods

We will promote community pride in our homes and neighbourhoods to help people respect and enjoy where they live and to help maintain and improve quality of life standards.



Add to, improve and make better use of our housing stock

By converting unused public buildings into housing units, developing upper floors of retail units, or bringing empty homes back into use we will make sensible use of what we have, to provide suitable housing for our residents.



Encourage more self-build housing in East Suffolk

We will seek to encourage more self-build housing in East Suffolk as a means to create homes in an environmentally sustainable way.



Improving quality of life across the district by tackling financial, social and health inequalities.



Use local data to design and deliver services

We will use local insight and data to target inequalities that exist across our district, ensuring that we adapt the design and delivery of our services accordingly to support communities and individuals appropriately.



Work with partners to better understand need

We will continue to work collaboratively with partners, including those in the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprises (VCFSE) and public sectors, to understand the needs of our residents, enabling them to help themselves.



Prioritise early help to support residents

We will further develop our Community Help Hub model and other preventative approaches to provide early help, ensuring we engage quickly to better support our residents during difficult times.



Digitally enable our communities to help residents in need

We will address a lack of digital inclusion which can drive inequality to help all our communities better access online services, including those that are designed to support residents when they are in need.



Efficiently deliver benefits and grants to residents

We will ensure residents and businesses understand what benefits and grants they are entitled to and ensure, if provided by us, that they receive exactly what they are entitled to in a timely and efficient manner.



Further develop Community Partnership model

We will continue to develop our Community Partnership model to ensure that it supports our residents, tackles inequalities and strives for a district that is fully inclusive and increases engagement.



Reduce health inequality and improve wellbeing

We will play an active role in reducing health inequalities and improving mental and physical health and wellbeing, ensuring residents have access to services, and ability to choose, that encourage healthy behaviours.



Take action to improve community safety and reduce ASB

We will take action to improve community safety throughout the district and strive to address and reduce anti-social behaviour and its impacts on residents.



Enabling residents to benefit from, and contribute to, a thriving economy.



Empower residents to build the right career skills

We want to work with partners to ensure our residents build and possess the right career skills for current and future employment opportunities across the district.



Encourage creativity and enterprise, and support start ups

We will encourage enterprise, innovation and creativity, in our population to ensure they have the tools to start up and grow their businesses, and we will celebrate all that's made and produced within our district.



Support businesses to eliminate waste and recycle more

We will work with business to decarbonise and be more sustainable, creating the conditions for business longevity, while protecting our precious environment by increasing a product's lifespan to eliminate waste and pollution.



Ensure Local Plans work for local people

We will ensure that our Local Plans will work for local people, as part of a vision to provide them with affordable housing, good public services, and a healthy environment, so that East Suffolk continues to be a great place to live and work.



Encourage investment in East Suffolk's key sectors

We will encourage investment in the key sectors which reflect East Suffolk's strengths bringing employment and prosperity.



Increase the economic viability of our towns

We will encourage place-based development to ensure we increase the viability of our Town Centres and Market Towns, ensuring they provide for our residents, businesses, and visitors, contributing to a thriving economy.



Community wealth building by working with local companies

We will work with local companies, cooperative businesses, and social enterprises, getting maximum benefit from our spending and contracting, to encourage Community Wealth Building and the reinvestment of wealth within East Suffolk for the benefit of our residents.



Ensure our residents can benefit from national infrastructure projects

We will work hard to ensure our residents benefit from Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, adopting policies that encourage investment which supports impacted communities.



Support responsible tourism and visitor economy

We will support and seek to strengthen tourism and the visitor economy, while encouraging an understanding of responsible activities which reflect our environmental priorities and ambitions.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Our Direction 2028 sets out the themes and priorities for East Suffolk Council across the next four years. However, it is important that we are then seen to deliver against these priorities, ensuring real, tangible outcomes for all our communities.

Therefore, we will develop an action plan to measure exactly what we are doing and what we have achieved. It will be clear and transparent, reflecting our determination to make a genuine difference.

To follow our journey, please head to:

 www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/ourdirection2028

