

Confirmed



Minutes of the **Annual Full Council Meeting** held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Wednesday, 24 May 2023** at **6.30 pm**

Members present:

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Paul Ashton, Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Seamus Bennett, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Jan Candy, Councillor Jenny Ceresa, Councillor Dan Clery, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor Tom Daly, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Deborah Dean, Councillor Julia Ewart, Councillor John Fisher, Councillor Amanda Folley, Councillor Tess Gandy, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Katie Graham, Councillor Alan Green, Councillor Owen Grey, Councillor Toby Hammond, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Beth Keys-Holloway, Councillor George King, Councillor Vince Langdon-Morris, Councillor Stuart Lawson, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor James Mallinder, Councillor Debbie McCallum, Councillor Stephen Molyneux, Councillor Mike Ninnmey, Councillor Sally Noble, Councillor Mark Packard, Councillor Graham Parker, Councillor Keith Patience, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor Lee Reeves, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Sheryl Rumble, Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte, Councillor Anthony Specca, Councillor Jamie Starling, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Caroline Topping, Councillor Geoff Wakeling, Councillor Sarah Whitelock, Councillor Tim Wilson, Councillor Kay Yule

Officers present:

Chris Bally (Chief Executive), Chris Bing (Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer), Kate Blakemore (Strategic Director), Phil Harris (Strategic Communications and Marketing Manager), Andy Jarvis (Strategic Director), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)), Sue Meeken (Labour Political Group Support Officer), Agnes Ogundiran (Conservative Political Group Support Officer), Nicole Rickard (Head of Communities), Lorraine Rogers (Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer), Isabel Rolfe (GLI Political Group Support Officer), Paul Wood (Head of Economic Development and Regeneration), Nicola Wotton (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)

Others present:

Councillor Chris Blundell (outgoing Vice-Chairman of the Council)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Myles Scrancher and Councillor Rosie Smithson.

2 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3a Minutes - 22 February 2023

The minutes were moved and seconded and it was by a unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2023 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3b Minutes - 8 March 2023

The minutes were moved and seconded and it was by a unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2023 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3c Minutes - 15 March 2023

The minutes were moved and seconded and it was by a unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Announcements

The retiring Chairman, Councillor Jenny Ceresa, thanked all Councillors for their support during her time as Chairman of the Council. She particularly wished to thank the retiring Vice-Chairman, Councillor Chris Blundell, for his support.

The Chairman stated that the recent Civic Reception which was held at East Point Pavilion in Lowestoft, raised funds for the Chairman's Charity for 2022/23, which was Waveney and Lowestoft Breastfeeding Support. The charity had now found a long-term venue and would continue their fundraising for this worthy cause and she thanked all Councillors who had supported this charity.

5 Election of a Chairman

Councillor Ceresa, outgoing Chairman of the Council, sought nominations for the Chairman of the Council for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

On the proposition of Councillor Byatt, seconded by Councillor Deacon, Councillor

Malcolm Pitchers was nominated as Chairman of the Council.

Then, on the proposition of Councillor Topping, seconded by Councillor Beavan, Councillor Anthony Specca was nominated as Chairman of the Council.

There being no further nominations, the 2 nominations were put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

That Councillor Anthony Specca be elected as Chairman of East Suffolk Council for the 2023/24 municipal year.

The newly elected Chairman then signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Officer form and was duly invested with the Ribbon of Office.

6 Election of a Vice-Chairman

Councillor Specca, newly elected Chairman of the Council, sought nominations for the Vice Chairman of the Council for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

On the proposition of Councillor Rivett, seconded by Councillor McCallum, Councillor Jenny Ceresa was nominated as Vice Chairman of the Council.

Then, on the proposition of Councillor Candy, seconded by Councillor Thompson, Councillor John Fisher was nominated as Vice Chairman of the Council.

There being no further nominations, the 2 nominations were put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

That Councillor John Fisher be elected as Vice-Chairman of East Suffolk Council for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Outgoing Vice Chairman, former Councillor Chris Blundell, sent his best wishes to the newly elected Members and encouraged Councillor Specca and Councillor Fisher to enjoy their time as Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively.

The newly elected Vice Chairman then signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Officer form and was duly invested with the Ribbon of Office.

7 Election of a Leader of the Council

Councillor Specca, Chairman of the Council, sought nominations for the Leader of the Council for the four-year term May 2023 to May 2027.

Councillor Beavan proposed Councillor Topping as the Leader of the Council and was seconded by Councillor Daly.

There being no further nominations, it was

RESOLVED

That Councillor Caroline Topping be elected as Leader of the Council for the four-year term from May 2023 – May 2027.

Councillor Topping signed her Declaration of Acceptance of Office and the Chairman invited her to address the Council:

Councillors, officers and members of the public – I am incredibly honoured to have been elected as Leader of East Suffolk Council tonight and I am also very proud to be its first female Leader.

As you will be aware, the Green, Liberal Democratic and Independent Members have formed the GLI group and we will be the new Administration.

Over the past four years, we have developed a fantastic working relationship, building on our shared values, and I am humbled that the Group have chosen me to lead them.

I would now like to welcome all 55 Members who have been elected to represent the 29 different wards of East Suffolk Council. I know that we share the same passion and determination to improve the lives and outcomes of our communities, and I look forward to working with you all.

After many, many years of Conservative Administration at Suffolk Coastal, Waveney and East Suffolk Councils, our residents have now voted in huge numbers for Green candidates, and for something different. This a great opportunity to establish a new way of doing things. Our communities have put their trust in us, and we will do our best to deliver what they want us to achieve.

On the doorsteps we heard how worried people were about affording food and heating. We know that the cost-of-living crisis 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 Administration will operate on the basis of clear priorities which reflect our shared values. These priorities will emphasise the critical importance of ecological sustainability and social justice.

We will ensure that these priorities contribute substantially to a green, fair and flourishing East Suffolk, and that they are meaningful and deliverable.

However, to achieve these things, we also understand that Councillors must work in a spirit of collaboration. In this chamber, there have been historic frustrations about the absence of proper debate with opposition groups. This will be addressed, so we can all move forward collaboratively and work together for the benefit of our communities.

In addition, Officers will of course play a huge role. I have seen, as a Councillor, how dedicated and professional the officers of East Suffolk are, and the Administration is

really looking forward to a productive and positive working relationship.

All Members appointed to the new Cabinet have been given their positions because of the passion they have for particular issues and their real-life professional experiences, now or in the recent past.

The Cabinet Members introduced themselves:

Cllr David Beavan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing)

Cllr Katie Graham (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism)

Cllr Mike Ninmey (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health)

Cllr Paul Ashton (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Corporate Services - Digital, Customer Services, HR and Assets)

Cllr Toby Hammond (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development and Transport)

Cllr Tom Daly (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Energy and Climate Change)

Cllr Kay Yule (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management)

Cllr Vince Langdon-Morris (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources and Value for Money)

Cllr Rachel Smith-Lyte (Cabinet Member with responsibility for The Environment)

Finally, I would like to reiterate a really important point to you all and to everyone watching and listening. We are now a council comprising 55 Members of five different colours and I really do hope that we will be able to work constructively across all parties, with our residents, businesses, visitors and everyone who cares about East Suffolk in mind.

8 Announcements

Chairman of the Council

Fellow Members of East Suffolk Council – let me first congratulate you on your election or re-election. I am deeply honoured to preside over our first meeting together. And I extend my sincere thanks to our outgoing Chair, Cllr Ceresa, for her service to this Council over the past year, as well as to the Officers of East Suffolk Council who support us in our role.

Fellow Members – I'm grateful for the confidence you have shown in electing me to serve as this Council's chair for the civic year 2023-24.

As Chair of the Council, I am not only the civic head of East Suffolk. Just as crucially, I am also the guardian of the East Suffolk Constitution, and of the integrity of this Council Chamber. All sides of it, no matter the political party. This means three important things.

First – it is part of the integrity of this Chamber that it belongs to the people of East Suffolk. It is ultimately their Chamber, not ours. The people of East Suffolk deserve their business – and only their business – to be conducted here. They also deserve to

have their business conducted expeditiously, with their best interests in mind.

As Chair, I pledge to preside over efficient and focused Council meetings at which the business of the people of East Suffolk comes first and foremost. This business is by its very nature political, but I shall take a dim view of the use of this Chamber to conduct politically motivated battles. Members should reserve those battles for the media – and for elections.

Second – it is part of the integrity of this Chamber that all Members, no matter ward or party, are on equal footing here. As elected representatives of the people of East Suffolk, each of us has the same right to be heard in the people’s Chamber.

As Chair, I pledge to ensure that every Member who wishes to be heard will be heard within the limits of our Constitution. That Members who need extra accommodation to be heard because of disability or obstacle shall have it. And that, in due course, our Constitution will be reviewed to ensure that the principles of democracy underpin its every letter. But I shall take a dim view of any attempt to close debate prematurely, to block motions properly made, or to refer outside of this Chamber business that should properly be conducted within it.

Third – it is part of the integrity of this Chamber that when Members are heard, they are heard respectfully. There will be robust debate in this Chamber – indeed, there must be, or else we risk not doing our best for the people of East Suffolk. But I shall take a dim view of disrespectful speech – and an especially dim view of hateful speech – whether towards my office or the office of any other Member. Debate, not hate.

With those principles of respect and inclusivity in mind – and as a final note – I request Members and Officers to refer to me as ‘Chair’, not ‘Chairman’, and to refer to my tenure as my ‘Chairship’, not my ‘Chairmanship’. I may be a man by gender, but my predecessor in this Chair was not, and this Chamber does not include only men.

Fellow Members – once again, I am grateful for the confidence you have placed in me. I will do my utmost to discharge my office energetically, faithfully and above all impartially. I look forward to working with all of you over the coming civic year.

Vice Chairman of the Council

Councillor Fisher thanked Members for electing him to the role of Vice Chairman, and thanked the outgoing Vice Chairman, Councillor Chris Blundell, for his hard work as a Councillor and a Vice Chair.

Councillor Fisher confirmed that from this point onwards, all Members and officers refer to his office as that of the Vice Chair.

There were no announcements from the Cabinet Members or the Chief Executive.

The Council received report **ES/1539** by the Leader of the Council, which sought to allocate seats on the Committees of the Council, in accordance with the statutory requirements set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990. These Regulations ensured that seats on the Committees and Sub-Committees were allocated on a politically proportionate basis, so far as was reasonably practicable.

The Leader reported that since the report was published, the committee placings on Licensing Committee and Scrutiny Committee had needed to be adjusted, to give the GLI a majority on all Committees, in line with the statutory principles covering political balance. The apportioning of seats was detailed within Appendix A to the published report, which had been published on CMIS and tabled during the meeting.

The Chair invited questions to the Leader and there were none.

The Leader moved the recommendations within the report, which were seconded by Councillor Yule. Upon being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED

1. That, with effect from 24 May 2023, in order to meet statutory requirements, seats on Committees and Sub-Committees of the Council be allocated in accordance with the contents of the report and Appendix A to the report.
2. That the Leader be granted delegated authority to make any necessary changes to the membership of the Committees for the remainder of the 2023/24 Municipal Year, in consultation with the other Group Leaders.

10 Appointments to Outside Bodies for 2023/24 (Non-Executive)

The Council received report **ES/1541** by the Leader of the Council, which asked Members to consider the appointments to Outside Bodies (Non-Executive) for the 2023/24 municipal year. It was noted that the Council appointed annually to a wide range of diverse Outside Bodies. Some appointments were made because of a statutory requirement to appoint one or more Members to them; most appointments were discretionary, whilst taking into consideration how representation added value. The appointment of Members provided support to the organisation concerned and enabled Members to fulfil their community leadership roles. Members appointed were able to work with and alongside local community groups, helping to empower them in terms of addressing local issues and delivering sustainable solutions.

The Leader advised that following nominations received from Group Leaders, Appendix A to the report was presented to Members for consideration. It was noted that the document had been published on CMIS and tabled during the meeting. The Leader proposed that the uncontested positions be approved en bloc and that a separate vote be undertaken for all of the contested positions, which was duly seconded by Councillor Byatt. Upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

1. That Councillors be appointed to those outside bodies listed in Appendix A for the 2023/24 municipal year.
2. That the Leader of the Council be authorised to fill any outstanding vacancies left unfilled by Council.
3. That the Leader be granted delegated authority to make any necessary changes to the membership of the Outside Bodies for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, in consultation with the other Group Leaders.

The contested seats were decided as follows:

Broads Authority - Two nominations received for one seat. A separate vote was undertaken for Councillor Keith Patience and Councillor Andree Gee. Councillor Patience was duly appointed.

Disability Advice Service East Suffolk - Two nominations received for one seat. A separate vote was undertaken for Councillor Rosie Smithson and Councillor Ed Thompson. Councillor Ed Thompson was duly appointed.

Felixstowe Dock Local Authority Liaison Committee - Three nominations received for two seats. A separate vote was undertaken for Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Lee Reeves and Councillor Mark Jepson. Councillor Mike Deacon and Councillor Mark Jepson were duly appointed.

Merchant Navy Welfare Board - Two nominations were received for one seat. A separate vote was undertaken for Councillor Mike Deacon and Councillor Lee Reeves. Councillor Lee Reeves was duly appointed.

Suffolk Coast Forum - Four nominations were received for two seats. A separate vote was undertaken for Councillor Keith Patience, Councillor Rosie Smithson, Councillor David Beavan and Councillor Jan Candy. Councillor David Beavan and Councillor Jan Candy were duly appointed.

Members were advised that further information was required from Suffolk County Council in respect of the appointments to the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel, therefore, these appointments would not be made this evening.

11 Appointments to Working Groups 2023/24

The Council received report **ES/1540** by the Leader of the Council, which asked Members to consider the continuation and membership of the Working Groups for the 2023/24 municipal year. It was noted that the Council appointed to a number of Working Groups each year as part of its corporate governance framework and in support of the democratic process and decision-making arrangements. The Working Groups had clear terms of reference outlining their roles, responsibilities and reporting mechanisms, thereby increasing openness, transparency and making the best use of resources.

Following nominations received from Group Leaders and discussion between the

Group Leaders, Appendix A to the report was presented to Members for consideration. It was noted that the document had been published on CMIS and tabled during the meeting.

The Chair invited questions to the Leader and there were none.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Yule. Upon being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED

1. That the membership of Working Groups for the 2023/24 municipal year, as agreed by the Political Group Leaders and detailed at Appendix A to the report, be appointed.
2. That the Leader of the Council be granted delegated authority to make any necessary changes to the membership of the working groups for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, in consultation with the other group leaders.

12 Appointment of Independent Persons

The Council received report **ES/1542** by the Leader of the Council, which sought the appointment of Independent Persons for the next four years, who would be consulted on Code of Conduct complaints pursuant to the Localism Act 2011.

Members noted that East Suffolk Council was required under the Localism Act 2011, and the local arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints made under that Act, to appoint at least one Independent Person to be consulted by the Monitoring Officer on Code of Conduct complaints brought against district and parish councillors in East Suffolk. The Council had previously appointed two Independent Persons, to provide resilience and enable the effective management of complaints, across East Suffolk.

Dr Andrew Peck and Mr Michael Urey were appointed as East Suffolk Council's Independent Persons at Annual Council in May 2019. Their term of office had now expired. Dr Peck and Mr Urey were also the Independent Persons to East Suffolk Council's predecessor Councils, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council. It was noted that an Independent Person was consulted on all Code of Conduct complaints made against any councillor in the 178 town and parish councils in East Suffolk, as well as any district councillor.

The Chair invited questions to the Leader and there were none.

On the proposition of the Leader, seconded by Councillor Daly, it was by a unanimous vote

RESOLVED

1. That the Council appoints Dr Andrew Peck and Mr Michael Urey as East Suffolk

Council's Independent Persons for a four-year term until East Suffolk Council's Annual Meeting in May 2027.

2. That the Council pays an annual allowance of £300 to each Independent Person, and agrees to pay a fee of £50 for each investigation report that the Independent Person considers on behalf of the Council.

13 Calendar of Meetings for 2023/24

The Council received report **ES/1546** by the Leader of the Council, which sought approval for changing the start times for Full Council and Cabinet meetings from 6.30pm to 6.00pm, for the 2023/24 municipal year.

The Chair invited questions.

Councillor Rivett stated that there had been regular debates on the start times of meetings in the past and he asked why the start times of Full Council and Cabinet, in particular, been moved forward. The Leader stated that there had been issues in the past for Councillors who travelled by train, who were not able to get home if meetings extended past 9.00pm. The Leader stated that many other Councils started meetings in the early evening to allow both Councillors and officers to leave at a more reasonable time. Chairs of other meetings would be allowed to choose their own start times if they wished.

Councillor McCallum asked whether Full Council would now be finishing at 9.00pm whether business was completed or not. The Leader stated that this would not be the case, meetings would finish when the business was complete. By starting earlier, there was the hope that the meeting would finish in good time to allow travel home.

Councillor Byatt referred to the Leaders speech when she had stated that debate should be encouraged, and an earlier start time would allow for better debate. Councillor Byatt stated that this report had been received much later than the others and asked whether the report could be deferred to the next meeting to allow Councillors to consider it fully. The Leader stated that officers had looked at other Councils in Suffolk who started their meetings at 5.30pm and it was reported that if the earlier start time did not work out, then it could be changed.

The Leader moved the recommendations within the report, which were seconded by Councillor Beavan.

The Chair invited Members to debate.

Councillor Robinson stated that he felt the change would disadvantage him, as he would have to arrive either an hour before or be late to meetings at East Suffolk House, due to train times from Lowestoft.

Councillor Folley asked how this would impact on those Members with full time jobs and she commented it would be difficult for many to get to meetings for 6.00pm. Several speeches were then made referring to inclusivity, however, it was felt that this change was not inclusive and Councillors could be jeopardising their employment.

Councillor Rivett agreed that this change would adversely impact those Members who worked, as they would either have to leave work early or be late to the meeting. Likewise, members of the public who wished to ask questions or observe the Councils meetings would also either have to leave work early or be late. Councillor Rivett commented that there had been many debates on meeting times and that 6.30pm had been chosen as a happy medium.

Councillor Deacon stated that for those working in Felixstowe, it would be difficult to get to Lowestoft for 6.00pm, as it was hard enough already to get to Lowestoft for 6.30pm. Councillors were expected to attend the whole of a meeting, and this proposal would mean that many would be late to a meeting, rather than leaving early. Councillor Deacon stated that the proposal should be rejected.

Councillor Beavan accepted that there would be issues for some Members and he hoped that employers would allow Councillors to leave slightly earlier for meetings and to car share, where public transport was not appropriate. Councillor Beavan stated that 6.00pm was a happy medium, as 6.30pm was too late for Members and 5.30pm was too early. He conceded that if there were problems with the new start times, they could be revisited.

Councillor Lynch stated that he finished work at 5.30pm, and to move the Councils meetings to 6.00pm would mean he could not get to Lowestoft in time for meetings. This may not be an issue for retired Councillors, but for many people who worked it would not be possible for them to take part in Council meetings. Moving to this time would exclude those who worked from the Councils meetings.

Councillor Candy stated that she agreed with many points which had been raised before and she confirmed that many people did not work within East Suffolk and this change would make it even harder for people who worked outside of the District. Councillor Candy stated that this was a step backwards for the Council, which only benefitted those who were retired and without children.

Councillor McCallum stated that she would have to change her staffs' shifts in order to accommodate this change, which may not be possible. Meetings had always started at 6.30pm and this change was only to benefit one section of the Chamber.

Councillor Graham stated that she had to give up some work to take up a role as a Councillor. The arrangement from the previous administration had benefitted some but disadvantaged others and it was worth trying something different.

Councillor Ceresa stated that the start time of 6.30pm allowed time for family members to finish work and get home to look after her child so that she could attend meetings, and an earlier start time would prohibit this. Councillor Ceresa noted that when she had her baby, comments had been made that she was the first Councillor to become a mother in a long time and it was only recently that the role of a Councillor had been flexible enough to allow people with families to take part. Moving meetings to an earlier time was a step backwards and would negatively impact those with families.

Councillor Byatt commented that all Councillors had stood for election on the understanding that Council meetings start at 6.30pm and had made arrangements on that basis. Whilst this change had been considered by the Leader and her Group, there had been no cross-party consultation to consider all options. Councillor Byatt commented that when meeting start times moved forward, the end time tended to creep back. East Suffolk was a large district, and the time it took to travel to Council meetings was much longer than in neighbouring Councils. Councillor Byatt stated he was not against a change but wanted any change to be considered fully by all Councillors.

Councillor Bennett commented that he accepted many of the arguments put forward. The GLI group was keen to make meetings as efficient as possible and that if Councillors could agree that meetings needed to be succinct and finish by 9pm then it may be possible to keep a 6.30pm start time.

Councillor Smith-Lyte commented that employers did have to give some lee-way to employees to allow them to carry out Councillor duties and that she hoped a half an hour difference could be accommodated by employers.

Councillor Gooch commented that if this change did go through, there needed to be some tolerance for those who would be late and there needed to be some monitoring of how much of an issue this caused.

Councillor Ewart acknowledged the debate by the previous Council on start times and commented that, to a new Councillor from a professional background, these debates seemed quite unhelpful and that going forward there needed to be a sensible discussion on the matter.

Councillor Topping stated that having listened to the debate, she wished to withdraw the item for further discussion in the future so that it could be more fully considered. This would allow the impact of any change on all Members to be understood and to ensure that the Council remained inclusive.

Upon being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED

That report ES/1546 Calendar of Meetings 2023/24 be withdrawn.

14 Date of next Annual Meeting

The date of the next annual meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 22 May 2024, at 6.30pm in the Conference Room at Riverside, Lowestoft.

The meeting concluded at 8.06 pm.

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Chair