

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Full Council** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, on **Wednesday, 23 February 2022 at 6:30 PM**

Members present:

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Chris Blundell, Councillor Norman Brooks, Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Alison Cackett, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Maurice Cook, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor Tom Daly, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor John Fisher, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Tess Gandy, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Tony Goldson, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Richard Kerry, Councillor Stuart Lawson, Councillor James Mallinder, Councillor Keith Patience, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor Russ Rainger, Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Letitia Smith, Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Caroline Topping, Councillor Steve Wiles

Officers present: Stephen Baker (Chief Executive), Chris Bing (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Andy Jarvis (Strategic Director), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Siobhan Martin (Head of Internal Audit Services), Brian Mew (Chief Finance Officer & Section 151 Officer), Agnes Ogundiran (Conservative Political Group Support Officer), Dickon Povey (Principal Planner (Policy and Delivery)), Lorraine Rogers (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Amber Wellham (Finance Business Partner - Housing), Nicola Wotton (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Brambley-Crawshaw, J Ceresa, T Fryatt, G Lynch, D McCallum, F Mortimer, T Mortimer, M Newton, C Poulter, M Richardson and K Yule.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Announcements

The Chairman of the Council:

The Chairman reported that he had attended one civic engagement since the last Full Council meeting, which was:

Lowestoft Town Council's Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, which had taken place at the Railway Station in Lowestoft on the 27 January 2022.

The Chief Executive:

The Chief Executive advised that there had been changes to the government's guidance for dealing with Covid, with a new plan for living with Covid. As a result, the Council's guidance for staff would be amended and re-issued in due course and more desks would be made available for use in the offices at East Suffolk House and Riverside. There would be a new focus on personal responsibility on matters such as mask wearing and crowded spaces.

The Leader of the Council:

The Leader reported that the council was part way through the Peer Review and he took the opportunity to thank everyone that had given up their time already to speak to the Peer Review Team. The Leader knew that many others had appointments booked and urged Members to be open and candid in their responses to questions. The Leader stated that he was keen that the council gained as much feedback as possible from this process. This will allow the council to grasp all the opportunities to further enhance and develop the excellent work being delivered right across the organisation.

The Leader then reported that, using his delegated authority, Councillor K Patience had been replaced on the Waveney, Lower Yare and Lothingland Internal Drainage Board Outside Body, by Councillor P Byatt and this would take place with immediate effect.

The Deputy Leader of the Council:

There was no update on this occasion.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor Burroughes, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Customer Services, ICT and Commercial Partnerships, updated Members on the unprecedented closure of 2 household waste sites recently. This had caused a significant impact upon waste collections, with vehicles having to travel much greater distances to unload waste. He thanked staff and officers for their hard work during this time and for getting services back to normal so quickly.

Councillor Burroughes then updated Members on the Digital Towns Plan, which would provide 12 towns in East Suffolk with free wifi access. The first towns, Lowestoft and Felixstowe, would commence shortly and there would be a phased approach, until all 12 towns had free wifi access by October 2022. Press releases would be published tomorrow and this should prove to be an exciting project for the district.

4 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2022 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Questions from the Public

Question from Mr A Robertson to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health

What effective actions are the Communities Team doing in relation to alleviate the speeding and anti-social behaviour, which is happening at the Gateway Retail Park and along the Kessingland Bypass?

Response from Councillor Rudd

The Council is working closely with the Police in relation to the car-related issues at the Retail Park and along the bypass, including noise, speeding and large numbers of cars congregating. We understand that a detailed response has already been provided by the Police to Mr Robertson.

Police have carried out plain clothes and uniform patrols as part of their ongoing operation, which has included Section 59 seizure of vehicles as well as crime prevention work in the area and visits to both local residents and retail park unit owners.

Discussions have been held about installing a barrier to prohibit use of part of the car park to prevent large numbers of cars meeting up. A Public Space Protection Order has also been explored as an option and the Council is working closely with the Police to ensure that if it is decided to implement a PSPO there is sufficient evidence in place. This includes working with partners, including the MP Peter Aldous to encourage residents to report all incidents. It is important to note that a PSPO is only effective if the Police has the capacity to enforce it and therefore Suffolk Police would require approval for extra patrols in order to enforce a PSPO. A better first step may be a Community Protection Notice (CPN) and therefore a draft CPN has been prepared and is ready for use if required. However only three complaints have been received between the start of December and 9th February so it is unclear if this is an ongoing issue or if the problems have moved to another location. We will continue to work with key partners, including the Police to respond to problems in these locations.

6 Questions from Members

a) Question submitted by Councillor Beavan to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources

Whilst our communities helped each other through Covid, some selfish people just helped themselves by robbing the public purse. How many holiday let businesses in my Southwold ward did we give loss of business Covid grants, at what total cost to the taxpayer and how many were refused because they could not prove that they actually did any business at all?

Response from Councillor Cook

Thank you for your question, I was a little surprised by his question as I would not have thought that his suggestion, that residents of his prestigious ward included robbers of the public purse, was an effective way making friends and influencing people. Particularly as the evidence I am about to present, seems to suggest that broadly, they are a lot more honest than Councillor Beavan seems to believe.

Grants were paid under the Small Business Grants Fund from March 2020 through to September 2020. These were one-off grants of either £10,000 or £25,000 with the level of payment based on rateable value. A total of 361 potentially eligible holiday lets were on the rating list, as at 11 March 2020, in Southwold Ward. Of these, 251 grants were paid totalling £2,750,000. No applications were refused as not meeting eligibility requirements.

From November 2020 through to May 2021 grants were paid under a number of schemes, primarily from the Local Restrictions Support Grant Fund and the Restart Grant Fund. There were 374 potentially eligible holiday let businesses on the rating list in Southwold Ward, over this period. Nevertheless, 204 grants were paid totalling £3,630,106. 3 applications were refused for not meeting eligibility requirements.

The current round of grant applications covering the effects of the Omicron variant and Plan B restrictions during December 2021 were still being processed and so no statistics were available as yet.

And finally, just to address the version of the question that was posted on a social media advertisement and was essentially, how many fraudulent payments has East Suffolk Council made? The simple response, Chairman, is none. This is because they were all paid within the law as it currently stands and Councillor Beavan, like other Members, will be well aware that the loophole allowing those people who feel inclined to avoid paying Council Tax or Business Rates is now to be closed. Although the figures seem to suggest that very few, if any, took advantage of that loophole.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Beavan

Thank you, finally, I have got some details after 2 years. I am worried that some people may have done this and we may not know about it. Nationally, 2% of resources are expended to the crime of fraud, which accounts for 40% of total crime. I am worried about whether we have the capacity to stop this kind of fraud, as I know of one case where fraud has taken place, which the Council has not picked up on. Thank you for finally providing me with some details but I am still not satisfied, regarding fraud. Don't you agree?

Response from Councillor Cook

No, I do not agree. I think that the figures indicate this and you refer to one case. There are many genuine holiday let businesses in Southwold and that is a large portion of its economy. There were clearly a lot of people that understood that if they were not running a holiday let business, they were not eligible to apply for the grants. However, I am sure that Councillor Beavan is correct and there will always be

those people who will take advantage of loopholes when they exist. That is a fact of life and I am satisfied that, based on these figures, in this District, the instance of fraud has been extremely small.

b) Question submitted by Councillor Gandy to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources

- Lord Agnew, a Conservative Peer, recently resigned in parliament unable to defend the government's £4.3bn write-off of Covid loans fraud, saying oversight of the loans scheme had been 'nothing less than woeful', adding 'schoolboy errors were made: for example, allowing over 1,000 companies to receive bounce-back loans that were not even trading when Covid struck.'
- The National Audit Office (NAO) also singled out the government's 'inadequate' attempts to tackle fraud because anti-fraud checks had been 'implemented too slowly'.
- HMRC believes that about £5.8bn, or 7%, of the £81.2bn paid out by the taxpayer through the various Covid-19 emergency response schemes has been stolen.

This damning indictment of the chancellor and the government's failure on fraud is indefensible despite the speed with which the funding of a lockdown economy was needed to support jobs and livelihoods.

Though we are certain Council Officers would have done their utmost to prevent, detect and counter fraud when it crossed their desks, by how much were their hands tied by the government's lax and 'lamentable' oversight of the various support schemes and, therefore, what is the best estimate of how much money has been taken from the decent tax paying people of East Suffolk and gifted to criminals because of this central office failure?

Response from Councillor Cook

Thank you, Councillor Gandy, for your question and the opportunity to correct the mis-information contained within it.

Since the start of the pandemic the Council has administered a range of grant schemes for Covid-19 business grants following guidance issued by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) – there were many different schemes during this time period, with differing eligibility and rules. A dedicated team administered all grants by putting in place a stringent e-form application process.

During that period, just over £130 million was distributed to businesses across the East Suffolk district, via 29,502 payment transactions. This gives an indication of the scale and complexity involved in delivering the schemes. And yet only 21 grants totalling just over £197,000 have been identified for recovery so far. Just over £60,000 of this has already been recovered or is in the process of recovery. The remaining repayments will be referred to BEIS following the necessary debt recovery guidance and in accordance with an Assignment Agreement with BEIS. This underwrites any losses incurred by the Council through erroneous claims. Although post payment fraud checks continue to be

undertaken, these extremely low levels of payments to be recovered illustrate the effectiveness of the processes put in place by the team in East Suffolk Council. The BEIS issued and continues to issue guidance regarding the pre and post payment fraud checks to be undertaken by Councils. The Head of Internal Audit would produce a report upon the COVID 19 Grant process later in the year, when post payment fraud checks have concluded.

The Council had not administered any 'Bounce Back Loans' or Furlough payments, but in addition to COVID 19 Business Grants, Anglia Revenues Partnership has also been administering the Test and Trace Self Isolation Payments scheme. To date, 623 payments totalling £275,500 have been made. 10 payments totalling £5,000 have been identified for recovery and £1,500 of this has been recovered so far. A review of all COVID Grants (other than Business Grants) was also in the Strategic Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23.

So, to address the specific points in the question, whilst I understand that opposition colleagues wish to take the opportunity to criticise their fellow Conservatives in government, it was in fact the local billing authorities which had been administering many of these payments, a significant number of which are run by the Parties opposite. Therefore, this Council had not had its hands tied by the lax and 'lamentable' performance of the government but rather other less financially efficient councils of which the parties opposite must take their fair share of responsibility.

Finally, I can therefore confirm that no East Suffolk money had been taken from the decent tax paying people of East Suffolk and gifted to, presumably, yet to be convicted criminals.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Gandy

Thank you for the clarification and confirmation that this council had not been responsible for or allowed fraudulent behaviour, however, we must as a council accept, whatever party, that fraud had taken place. May I suggest that we write to Rishi Sunak, expressing this council's serious concerns about how this situation came about and the financial irresponsibility of central government?

Response from Councillor Cook

No, I will not accept that and we will not be writing to Rishi Sunak. We are not responsible for any degree of fraud in this district and that was what concerns me and my team. It was for Members themselves to write individually if they wish to criticise. You refer to the lamentable performance of the government, in fact what they have been doing is footing the bill for the lamentable performance of some councils.

c) Question submitted by Councillor Deacon to the Chairman of the Council

As is evident from recent Full Council meetings it would seem that there is some confusion surrounding the way in which Motions are dealt with at Full Council.

Last month Councillor Gandy submitted a Motion on behalf of the Labour Group. She

was asked to shorten the Motion, which she duly did, prior to its publication in the Agenda.

At Full Council she was asked to read the Motion aloud, but this requirement does not appear within the Constitution, unless I have missed it.

In addition, when the Motion was discussed, she was told that it wasn't possible for Members to debate the Motion, as there was insufficient evidence for an informed debate to take place.

There appears to be a contradiction here, as well as confusion as to what is the 'approved' length of a Motion, as well as clarifying what form it should take.

Can we please have clarification of this as matter of urgency, as the Constitution is unclear, so that we can all benefit in contributing Motions for future Meetings?

Response from the Chairman of the Council

The rationale for asking Councillors to read out their motions at Full Council is so that any members of the public watching at home are aware what the motion under consideration was, if they do not have access to, or have difficulty reading, the papers. It's about the Council endeavouring to be inclusive and open and transparent in the way it conducts its business at Full Council.

In terms of procedure, the consideration of motions at Council was a 2 stage process. First, it needs to be determined whether the motion will be discussed by Council that evening or whether the motion will be referred to Cabinet or another Committee for consideration instead. At this first stage, the debate needs to be focused on procedure with arguments for and against Full Council being the appropriate venue for the motion to be debated. It's a procedural debate and, after members have had an opportunity to express their view, there needs to be a vote as to the preferred venue for the motion to be debated. We only move on to a debate the actual merits of the substantive motion, if Council votes to hear the motion that evening.

The proposer of the motion has potentially 3 opportunities to speak. They introduce their motion at the outset by reading it out. When we then go into the procedural debate as to the venue for the substantive motion to be debated, they can express their view as to why, or why it is not, important that the motion be debated at Council that evening rather than it being referred to Cabinet or another Committee to consider. If it was agreed that the substantive motion will be debated that evening, the proposer of the motion also has a final right of reply before the substantive motion goes to the vote.

On 16 November 2021, Democratic Services sent an email, with a link to a motions flowchart, to all Members to help explain the process for debating motions. In response to further feedback, the motions flowchart was amended and circulated to all Members.

The Constitution states at 11.1 of the Council Procedure Rules that a 'Notice of motion

is a request to the Council for a decision to be made or action to be taken'. Therefore, the motion should be succinctly and clearly expressed to reflect this requirement. There should not be a long preamble prior to motion that 'This Council resolves to.....' We need clarity and certainty as to what it is Members are being asked to support. The proposer can elaborate on the background to their motion and the reasons why they believe it should be supported if it is decided by Full Council that the substantive motion should be debated. The full background and reasoning did not need to be printed in the Council papers. To allow this, would in effect turn the motion into almost a report with a recommendation, which was not the function of a motion.

The Constitution provides that the ruling of the Chairman as to the interpretation and application of this Constitution cannot be challenged at any meeting of the Council. Outside of council meetings, it is for the Monitoring Officer to determine questions as to the interpretation of the Constitution.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Deacon

Thank you for your response but I am afraid I do not accept some of it, however, we can talk about it at a later date. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the last Council meeting in January as I was unwell but I watched the meeting on the councils YouTube channel. I have to state that due to the confusion, Councillor Gandy received a very ungalant response to her proposed motion, in a manner which we have not been accustomed to in the last few years in this council chamber. I very much regret that. It does seem that we need to resolve some of the confusion around the submission of motions. I would like to suggest an urgent review of the relevant section of the Constitution be undertaken so that we do have clarity. Notwithstanding the flow chart that has been circulated, I believe there was still some confusion. The possibility of providing an appendix to provide some background to a motion, to allow Members to fully understand it, would enable motions to be debated at the meeting without any concerns that Members were not in full possession of all the facts. Would you agree?

Response from Councillor Robinson

No, I don't agree. However, we have agreed to review the Constitution and motions procedures and we have added this item onto the Audit and Governance work programme, which will help to clarify the whole process.

7 Petitions

No petitions have been received as provided by Council Procedure Rule 10.

8 Notices of Motion

a) Motion submitted by Councillor Smith-Lyte

The Chairman invited Councillor Smith-Lyte to read out her Motion.

Councillor Smith-Lyte proposed her Motion and then read out the following:

This Council notes:

- 1. East Suffolk Council has done considerable work on publicising eco-friendly agriculture, for example at the 'Farming Today, Fit for Tomorrow' conference last year, but could do more to provide practical examples and leadership in the field.*
- 2. As a local landowner, the Council has a responsibility to lead and share best practice in sustainable farming practices, even if only on a small scale.*
- 3. Agroforestry is the growing of trees and crops on the same piece of land, allowing for land to be used for short-term income while still preserving forests and tree growth.*
- 4. The Council owns several small plots of land that could be used to pilot a small-scale agroforestry scheme.*
- 5. If the approach is successful on ESC land, partner working to expand the scheme could be explored, such as working with Suffolk County Council to expand the scheme onto SCC-owned land, or extending advice and support to interested landowners, using well established agroforestry schemes such as Wakelyns.*

This Council resolves to:

- 1. Ask officers to put together a business case costing a small agroforestry pilot on a suitable piece of ESC-owned forested land, with crops to be selected based on what would best suit the biome of the site.*

Councillor Topping seconded the Motion and she reserved her right to speak.

The Chairman then invited Members to consider whether to debate the Motion this evening or not.

Councillor Gallant proposed that the Motion be debated at the meeting this evening and the proposal was seconded by Councillor Mallinder. The Chairman invited Members to vote on the proposal to debate the Motion this evening and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

Councillor Smith-Lyte stated that she had been to inspect small parcels of land that were owned by the District Council and had been accompanied by Councillor Beavan and Councillor Fisher. She was pleased to report that a suitable piece of land had been identified, which had potential for use in this way. The identified land was in Saxmundham, which was helpful as there were currently no allotments there.

Councillor Mallinder took the opportunity to offer congratulations to Councillor Beavan on his recent appointment as the Leader of the Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent (GLI) Group. It was pointed out that congratulations were somewhat premature and a further announcement would be made in this respect in due course.

Councillor Mallinder commented that he was surprised that the matter of agroforestry had not been raised sooner via the Environment Task Group. It was noted that the council owned very little land that would be suitable for this purpose. Farming was not a role for the district council, its focus should be on providing key services to the residents of East Suffolk. He felt that this Motion would be more appropriate for consideration by Suffolk County Council, who owned more suitable land in the district. He stated that the council was very focussed upon the environment, was

building environmentally sound buildings and was provided strong leadership.

Councillor Byatt commented that the Motion was a commendable idea, however, suitable land was required. He asked if the council could contact Suffolk County Council to see if they would be able to donate some land for this purpose?

Councillor Gallant apologised for the earlier announcement by Councillor Mallinder regarding Councillor Beavan. He commented that the council was not a farmer, however the council would support the environment and would encourage others to do the same.

Councillor Beavan reported that he was an ex-farmer. He felt that small plots of land, similar in size to an allotment would be sufficient and could be used as a small pilot study. Using land in this way would help with the cost of living and would allow more people to grow their own vegetables.

Councillor Plummer stated that she agreed with Councillor Beavan. There was currently a small Community Farm in Beccles, which was working well and provided lots of benefits to all those involved. She felt that expanding this to other areas would be beneficial.

Councillor Topping reported that she had identified a piece of land in Puddingmoor, Beccles. The site was suitable and if it was successful, this could be expanded to include other areas. She stated that using the land in this way would protect the council's interests and may stop land being lost via vacant possession.

Councillor Smith-Lyte reported that this way of working was supported by Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). It was very successful in many areas and was a positive way to use wasted land. It was good for people's stress, mental health and it provided a boost to the green economy.

As there was no further comments or debate, the Chairman invited Members to vote on whether to support the Motion or not. Upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Motion was **LOST**.

b) Motion submitted by Councillor Beavan

The Chairman invited Councillor Beavan to read out his Motion.

Councillor Beavan proposed his Motion and then read out the following:

This Council recognises that:

1. *Revenue from current assets can be improved and there is also a need to invest in green growth to achieve our net zero target.*
2. *East Suffolk invests the most Treasury cash in other authorities of all district*

councils in the UK, both absolutely at £97m and relatively at 71% of total investments compared to UK average of 17%, at an annual 0.26% rate of return. Whilst we appreciate that reserves must be liquid enough to maintain cash flow, we maintain £30m available for use within three months so there is room for investing just £8m of the £97m in our own community.

3. The local knowledge held by Community Partnerships means that they are well-placed to identify many opportunities for green, revenue-generating investments within East Suffolk district boundaries.

This Council resolves to:

1. Ask each Community Partnership to recommend possible green investments in their area, up to a total worth of £1m for each Community Partnership area, to be investigated by officers. Business cases for suitable investments will then be prepared for consideration by Cabinet and the Audit & Governance Committee at its next Treasury Management Investment Strategy for 2023/24.

Councillor Gooch seconded the Motion and reserved her right to speak.

The Chairman then invited Members to consider whether to debate the Motion this evening or not.

Councillor Gallant proposed that the Motion be debated at the meeting this evening and the proposal was seconded by Councillor Cook. The Chairman invited Members to vote on the proposal to debate the Motion this evening and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

Councillor Beavan stated that this council should make sure that it had enough money to provide the services that East Suffolk needed next year and for the foreseeable future. The council also had another responsibility in respect of its Climate Emergency Plan, to make sure East Suffolk existed in the future. At the same time as making sure the bank account was sustainable, the council should make sure that the environment was sustainable. He stated that over the last three years, the council had identified its assets, therefore, it should now look to ways that it could generate revenue from them. As the Leader of the Council had previously stated, this council may not be a business but it could be business-like.

Councillor Beavan suggested that this may involve some seed investment, however, this would be worthwhile if the revenue generated exceeded the finance costs. He gave an example that the Council could install a car charger in Ferry Road car park in Southwold, as it would allow visitors to charge their car whilst they went to the beach or the pub. There was a dearth of chargers for the rapidly increasing fleet of electric cars, so this would be a USP for tourism, as well as generating revenue for the council. He reported that there were two cars being charged this morning at the Southwold EV chargers, earning the council £4 an hour. The installation of those chargers had been free and they were now earning the Council several thousand pounds a year. Councillor Beavan then stated that three years ago, he had asked if the three shops the previous council had bought for £4m in Lowestoft, which were then valued at £3m, meant that this council had lost a £1million and he had been told that values go up as well as down. However, those shops were currently valued at £1.5m, as at

page 29 of the Treasury Management Strategy, and he asked if that money could have been spent more effectively? There were also traditional borrowing sources such as the Public Works Loan Board, so could the council look at innovative sources in a review of Treasury Management this year?

Councillor Beavan stated that the council's treasury had more than £100m waiting to be spent, from which the council invests to earn a bit of interest. He reported that the council had invested £97m a year in other councils, which was the highest amount of any district council in the country. By contrast, Great Yarmouth Borough Council had borrowed £31m from other councils. This council had £30million ready, at three months' notice, for an urgent call on its cash flow. Surely East Suffolk Council could do better than the 0.25% return on these investments? Councillor Beavan felt that it would be a good challenge for each Community Partnership to think of ideas, which could enable environmental investment. Local government finance was a difficult subject and he stated he was only asking questions at this stage. Other options could be the Municipal Bonds Agency, green bonds or tax increment financing with the growth of green energy coast and freeport. Councillor Beavan stated that this council had made a good start on its zero carbon journey but it would get harder and substantial investments were needed in the Capital Programme next year. He felt that now was the time for imaginative financing and investment in East Suffolk's future, before it was too late.

Councillor Cook reported that the Treasury Management function and the wise and prudent management and investment of the reserves, was of vital importance to the financial sustainability and success of the council. That was why both he and the Assistant Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Back, received weekly reports of movements in the national interest rates of all providers and movements in investments with the pertinent consequences and comparisons with the budget forecasts. A Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022/23 & Treasury Management Investment Strategy for 2022/23 was approved by the Audit & Governance Committee in December 2021 and at Full Council in January 2022.

Councillor Cook commented that it was an ever-changing picture which required careful consideration of balance, particularly in respect of the Capital programme and in managing the attendant risks of any form of investment. In addition to the expertise and experience of the Finance Team, the council also took the advice and guidance of its city analysts, Arlingclose. As of 18 February 2022, the council currently invested 54% of its Investment Portfolio in Local Authorities, amounting to £92.5m. It was because of the financial success of this council that it was able to effectively make loans to other authorities, who have the need of such assistance, from reserves at attractive comparable interest rates, an appropriate level of accessibility and with a sound degree of security. Overall, the Treasury Management cash investment portfolio would yield an income of £650k in this financial year, which by way of comparison, was £200k greater than the amount of Council Tax increase to be proposed in the budget report. Also included in the Budget report was the required report of the Chief Finance Officer who concluded that the level of reserves was adequate for the 2022/23 budget plans. In respect of reserves, one of the key purposes for retaining an adequate level was "to take previously unseen opportunities to secure benefits that may arise during the year." There was therefore every opportunity for new worthwhile projects which coincide with the council's strategic objectives to be proposed via the appropriate

portfolio department. Therefore, in the Chief Finance Officer's view, the Finance Team should retain the responsibility for the investments of the council and not pass this on to Community Partnerships, as this would be neither practicable or desirable. Councillor Cook reported that he would therefore be voting against this motion and urged Members to do the same.

Councillor Brooks, Cabinet Member for Transport, advised that a report would soon be taken to Cabinet, to consider the installation of additional EV charging points in the district.

Councillor Jepson reported that he was the Chairman of a Community Partnership (CP) and whilst he would be pleased to receive a million pounds to allocate in his CP area, he felt that the CP did not have the infrastructure or the knowledge to deal with funding of that size. He felt that it was just not practical and the decisions in relation to funding for environmental projects, would be better placed with the Cabinet Member for the Environment or the ETG.

Councillor Ritchie took the opportunity to provide some clarification regarding the previous investment by Waveney District Council, mentioned by Councillor Beavan, into shops and a car park. It was noted that the shops and car park had been leased for many years ago on what had become unfavourable terms. The purchase of the sites had been of considerable benefit to the council and had resulted in ongoing savings of around £300,000 per year, which made the council more sustainable.

Councillor Daly reported that the aim of the Motion was to get multiple benefits for the council, including getting the public more involved. It was important to make improvements to the environment and the council needed to be proactive and take a new approach.

Councillor Blundell reported that he was also a Chairman of a Community Partnership. He reported that it was important not to lose sight of what the CPs were set up to do, which was to improve their local area according to the CP priorities, which had previously been identified. There was already plenty of work to do in this respect, without undertaking additional responsibilities.

Councillor Mallinder reported that there needed to be a meaningful change in relation to the environment and matters such as this could be brought before the Environment Task Group (ETG) for detailed discussion. It was important that the financial matters were retained by the council and its finance team.

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Tourism, reported that the Community Partnership Board had a budget and anyone could bid for funding for a variety of projects that would benefit their local area.

Councillor Gooch took the opportunity to provide some examples of work by other councils, which had adopted a similar approach to the Motion that had been proposed. Plymouth City Council, which had no overall control, had provided grant funding and encouraged bids for grants up to £250 for suitable projects in their area. Other schemes had involved Collecting and Recycling, a Nappy Library and a Re-wilding Scheme. Telford and Wrekin Council had also provided a grants pot of up to

£100,000 to give grants of up to £5,000 for appropriate projects.

Councillor Gallant raised a point of order at this point in the meeting. He felt that the examples being provided, did not reflect the contents of the Motion under discussion.

There followed some discussion in this respect and it was stated that the examples given by Councillor Gooch appeared to be grants, therefore the funding was not being invested in order to gain any financial returns for the Council.

The Chairman commented that the examples of projects provided should be sent to Councillor Mallinder and Councillor Smith, as well as the ETG, for further consideration.

Councillor Cackett commented that the Motion was about investing, where interest would be received. The examples provided by Councillor Gooch had appeared to be about providing grants, where no financial return would be received.

Councillor Beavan conceded that his Motion could have been clearer, however the main aim of the Motion was to engage with communities and try to identify areas that could be improved and make a real difference. He stated he was not suggesting that each CP should receive £1million to allocate but suggestions could be made for future investment and improvement, which would help with growth. He stated that he understood that Treasury Management had to be prudent, however, could the Council invest some of its £92 million in green bonds in the future?

Councillor Beavan thanked Councillor Brooks for looking into providing more EV chargers across the district, as he felt it was needed urgently. He also thanked Councillor Ritchie for the back story to the investment in the shops and car park. He asked that more be done to invest for a better future and environment for all.

As there was no further comments or debate, the Chairman invited Members to vote on whether to support the Motion or not. Upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Motion was **LOST**.

c) Motion submitted by Councillor Byatt

The Chairman invited Councillor Byatt to read out his Motion.

Councillor Byatt proposed his Motion and then read out the following:

This Council notes that:

- *During the Corona Virus Pandemic the Government was obliged to put in place laws, rules and guidelines to prevent the disease from spreading in order to save lives and reduce its impact on the National Health Service. During this time in 2020 and 2021 millions of people obeyed these rules, often at huge personal cost, particularly during*

times of lockdown.

- *This Council responded to this national emergency; our Communities Teams supported the vulnerable; our colleagues stepped up to support their neighbours; the voluntary sector responded with heroic action to get food and medicines to those that needed them and ordinary people from all walks of life did the right thing to support each other, making enormous sacrifices for the common good.*
- *This response and adherence to the law was not reflected to the same extent by Government operations at 10 Downing Street. Evidence of social gatherings with 'excessive consumption' of alcohol represent a serious failure by the Prime Minister and his staff to observe not just the high standards expected of those working at the heart of Government but also of the standards expected of the entire British population.*
- *Although a Metropolitan Police investigation of the Prime Minister over these breaches of Covid-19 Regulations has not concluded, Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, has confirmed publicly that he believes the Prime Minister should resign, stating he has no confidence in him as Leader of The Conservative Party.*

This Council calls upon the Leader of the Council to:

- *Write a letter of support to Peter Aldous MP, stating that the issue of the parties at 10 Downing Street during the pandemic should no longer be a distraction for the Government when it should be facing the various serious challenges such as a cost-of-living crisis, economic recovery from the pandemic and a deep loss of trust and faith in our democratic institutions, all matters that have consequences for this Council.*
- *Following the admirable stance of their colleague, Peter Aldous MP, write further letters to the other two MPs in East Suffolk, Therese Coffey and Dan Poulter, urging them to write their own letters to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee of Backbench Conservative MPs, stating that they similarly have no confidence in the Prime Minister and request that he resign.*

Councillor Gooch seconded the Motion and did not reserve her right to speak.

Councillor Gallant raised a point of order and it was confirmed by the Monitoring Officer that Councillor Gooch could speak now, in support of the Motion, if she so wished.

Councillor Gooch reported that she had written to Peter Aldous, MP, on 8 February 2022, to praise and support him in writing to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee, in relation to the behaviour of the Prime Minister. She felt that it was admirable that he was trying to uphold the Nolan Principles of Public Life. Councillor Gooch stated that Mr Johnson was ill equipped to be Prime Minister and she had no confidence in him. She felt that it had taken great courage for Peter Aldous to try and uphold integrity, within his own party. Councillor Gooch stated that she had received a letter from Peter Aldous, thanking her for her kind words. She asked that all those Councillors worried about the behaviour in parliament to write letters to Therese Coffey and Dan Poulter and support those MPs asking Mr Johnson to resign. She invited Members to agree with her and support the Motion.

Councillor Gallant proposed that the Motion be debated at the meeting this evening and the proposal was seconded by Councillor Blundell. The Chairman invited Members to vote on the proposal to debate the Motion this evening and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

Councillor Byatt provided reassurance to Members that the Motion under consideration was not about show boating. He felt very strongly that since spring 2020, the world had changed considerably and people had made a wide range of sacrifices. The Leader had updated the Opposition Group Leaders on a regular basis, for which he was very grateful. The vast majority of people had obeyed the rules in good faith and Councillor Byatt reported that he had spent 3 months living alone in a caravan, in order to self isolate. During the pandemic, people had been unable to see their loved ones or even attend funerals. Meanwhile, it transpired that multiple parties had been taking place in Downing Street and the public were told that no rules had been broken. The Prime Minister had also made a terrible slur against Sir Kier Starmer in relation to the prosecution of Jimmy Saville. This was not the behaviour expected by a Prime Minister and the country needed to think carefully about what it wanted and expected from a Leader.

Councillor Gallant reported that it was not the role of this Council to become involved in the political wrangling of central government. The 3 MPs who represented the district were able to think for themselves and decide what to do for the best. If the MPs wanted the views of this council, they would ask for them. Councillor Gallant stated that this council should not be meddling in national politics.

Councillor Daly reported that he was disappointed with the Leader's comments on the wrangling of central government. He queried how far things would have to go before the council acted? He felt that residents deserved to have a decent government and it was important to invite the council and Members to register their views that the Prime Minister's behaviour was not acceptable.

Councillor Thompson stated that Members should look in the mirror and decide if the behaviour of the Prime Minister was acceptable. Were Members happy to accept that Mr Johnson was representing them? If not, he stated that they should protest.

Councillor Back reported that he had written to support Peter Aldous for his actions, as an individual, not as a Councillor. He could not support Mr Johnson and his behaviour and he asked for MPs to consider the situation carefully and take action as appropriate.

Councillor Hedgley reported that Dan Poulter MP had made his position clear. If Mr Johnson was found to have lied, then his position would become untenable and he should resign.

Councillor Beavan stated that Mr Johnson's behaviour had been disgraceful and disrespectful. It was important for all people in public life to be mindful of the Nolan Principles and to behave accordingly.

Councillor Goldson reported that the world was facing a potential World War 3, due to the issues in Ukraine caused by Russia. He felt that people were wasting time talking

about parties when there were much more important things to consider, that could affect people greatly.

Councillor Byatt acknowledged that this was a sensitive matter and he was approaching it with realism. It was important to have a civilised debate about such things. However, lying was not a joking matter and trust had been lost in the government as a result. He stated that Members were able to abstain, when voting on this Motion, they did not have to vote against it. He commended Dan Poulter's approach and the need to uphold standards.

As there was no further comments or debate, the Chairman invited Members to vote on whether to support the Motion or not. Upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Motion was **LOST**.

9 ESC General Fund Budget and Council Tax Report 2022/23

N.B. Councillor Thompson left the meeting during the discussions on this item at 8.37pm.

Full Council received report **ES/1049** of Councillor Cook, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, which sought approval of the General Fund Budget and Council Tax for 2022/23. Members noted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the proposed Budget had been the subject of extensive updating, scrutiny, and consultation over the course of this year's budget process, with the Final Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 7 February 2022. There were no significant changes from the Provisional Settlement, and it was generally favourable to local government and the council, with a new round of New Homes Bonus (NHB) allocations and a one-off Services Grant for 2022/23. Other grant funding, such as the Revenue Support Grant and the Rural Services Delivery Grant, also continued into next year, with no significant change from current year funding levels. The council's and the Suffolk Pool's advantageous position on business rates had also been maintained for at least another year.

Councillor Cook reported that the Council Tax base was an improved position for 2022/23, with growth at 1.93%, compared to previous forecasts of 1%. The Final Settlement confirmed no change to the referendum limit for Council Tax and remained at the higher of 2% or £5. For the council, an increase of £4.95 (2.89%) equated to a District Band D Council Tax of £176.22 for 2022/23. A cautious approach had been taken with forecasting tax base growth in future years, with prudent assumptions regarding LCTRS reliefs and Collection Rates, and completion of development sites levelling off.

Since the Cabinet had considered the Budget and MTFS at its meeting on 1 February 2022, there had been some updates to the budget. The key changes had been to Business Rates income for next year, following the completion of the NNDR1 Return and the additional Section 31 Grant in the current year associated with Business Rates Reliefs in response to Covid.

Councillor Cook reported that as of February 2021, the budget gap reported for 2022/23 was £5.4m. The council had been able to close this gap and achieve a balanced budget, predominately assisted by the deferral of the Business Rates system for at least one more year. Following the completion of the NNDR1 return for 2022/23 the Council was in a position to transfer £0.549m to the In-Year Savings Reserve. It was noted that the impact of these changes had been managed through reserve movements. Councillor Cook then took Members through the appendices to the report in detail, for completeness.

Councillor Cook was pleased to announce that this report presented a balanced position for the current year and next, which was achieved by a combination of additional income, savings and use of reserves. Budget gaps would, however, remain in future years of the MTFs (£5-£6m) and were subject to significant uncertainty due to local government finance reforms - a position that was likely to become clearer during the course of next year. It was likely that a combination of action would be needed to ensure a longer term sustainable position, including a phased use of reserves, maximising income and achievement of savings. These would need to be worked up over the coming year, as it was increasingly likely that funding reforms would finally be implemented in 2023/24.

Councillor Cook advised that guidance from government had been received earlier today, regarding the one-off Council Tax Rebate. He then invited Mr Mew, Chief Finance Officer, to update Members on the newly received guidance. Mr Mew stated that the Council Tax Rebate was referred to in paragraph 3.24 of the report and in recommendation 14. The scheme was substantially similar to the scheme referred to in the report in that it would be a one off payment of £150, for households in Council Tax Bands A – D, however second homes and empty properties would not be eligible for this payment. There would also be a discretionary fund, which was intended to support other energy bill payers, who were not eligible for this Council Tax Rebate scheme, and councils were able to decide how best to use this fund, to support those people affected by the energy crisis. It was noted that there would be different payment arrangements in place for those whom the council held live direct debit information and those for whom it did not. Reassurance was provided that the appropriate checks and balances would be undertaken. Mr Mew stated that an information leaflet would be provided regarding the rebate and it would be included within the Council Tax bills sent to every household over the coming weeks. It was noted that recommendation 14 would need to be amended slightly, to accommodate the newly released guidance and in particular the discretionary fund.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Cook.

Councillor Deacon queried the second titled item 'Additional Income' in the table on page 73, Appendix A4, of the meeting papers. He wanted to know if this was where the income from the sale of the former Suffolk Coastal District Council headquarters in Melton would appear when it had been finalised? Councillor Cook invited Mr Mew to provide clarification on where this particular capital receipt would appear. Mr Mew stated that the analysis on page 73 related to revenue income and as Councillor Cook had previously stated, capital receipts would appear within the Capital Programme, as a potential source of funding for other projects.

Councillor Deacon asked if there was any update in relation to the progress of the sale, as this site was one of the largest disposable assets that the council had? Councillor Gallant reported that he was unable to provide any details for commercial reasons, however, he advised that the sale was progressing and he hoped to have positive information to share in due course.

There being no further questions, Councillor Cook moved the recommendations, including the amended recommendation 14, which was 'That the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer be granted delegated authority in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources to award Council Tax Rebates in respect of energy costs in 2022/23 under the Discretionary Fund announced by the Government on 23 February 2022.' The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor Gallant, who reserved his right to speak.

The Chairman invited Members to debate.

Councillor Topping thanked the Chief Finance Officer and his Team for their ongoing hard work in relation to the budget preparation, which was a very difficult task. She then drew Members' attention to Appendix C, paragraph 5.1 and read out the wording therein regarding future reforms to the local government finance system, which would provide greater uncertainty in relation to funding, which would require increased savings and maximising income, to maintain services.

Councillor Topping reported that the GLI Group would not be voting against the proposed budget and that they were pleased that the mistake of freezing Council Tax had not been repeated again this year. She stated that the small increase of £5 for a Band D household, with those on benefits receiving relief, proposed by the GLI last year, would have been worth approximately £300,000 which could have been spent on front line services and support for residents. If the Conservatives had not frozen Council Tax last year, this council would not have lost that £300,000 going forwards and the proposed increase could have been smaller this year, when residents were suffering much hardship and were in more desperate need.

Councillor Beavan confirmed that he supported Councillor Topping in this respect. He stated that while he supported the proposed increase, he was also concerned about council employees pay. Employees were likely to get a pay increase of only 2% for this year, while the rate of inflation was currently very high, at around 5%. He asked if Councillor Cook would help to put pressure on the government to increase the amount of Council Tax rises for next year, as 2% may not be sufficient?

Councillor Byatt stated that, as always, it had been suggested that Opposition Groups should present an Alternative Budget however that was not practical given the number of staff available and all the things the council had committed to do. He joined Councillor Topping in thanking Councillor Cook and the Finance Team for their hard work. He thanked Councillor Gandy, Labour's Shadow Cabinet Member for Resources, for allowing him to speak regarding the budget this evening. He acknowledged the Council's statutory duties, providing much needed services to residents and that there was very little wriggle room. Therefore, attention was being focused upon opportunities where there was room for manoeuvre, such as in capital projects and

income generation. He confirmed that this council had significant ambitions and the Strategic Plan featured investments in many of its assets, spending its funds wisely and in the best interests of residents. All were good and commendable projects, however there was one area where the council was lacking and that was the provision of council homes.

Councillor Byatt felt that the council should have greater expectations, commit to a larger base figure and be more aspirational. The council was also in the difficult situation of losing around 30 of its council homes each year, due to the Right To Buy (RTB) scheme, which was not just a loss of income but a significant reduction in the council's assets. 30 properties could equate to a loss to the council's estate of some £3million, therefore he felt that this council should actively campaign against RTB. He felt that the council could not sit and blame the government, it should instead see how it could support community led housing projects to provide more social housing. The council needed to start being creative with some of its significant reserves and be bold in anticipating future income from those homes.

Councillor Byatt stated that Members were aware that the council had 2 guaranteed sources of future income - both were known unknowns in the form of the Local Authority Trading Company (LATCO) and Freeport East. Members had been told the LATCO had been formed to save money, therefore any money saved should be invested into housing and Freeport East could create 13,500 new jobs and attract a potential £650 million of investment. He felt that this council should be bold and set up a task group or similar, within the council's resources directorate, to investigate what would be the prudent level of funding that we could commit to, to increase council housing stock. This would need to include realistic forecasts of what we could expect from the LATCO and Freeport East, alongside the anticipated savings from the new procurement systems. The council should also look at potential sites for development, in the council's own land holdings and on the open market.

In relation to Council Tax, Councillor Byatt stated that there was always debate about increasing financial burdens and there would be more families struggling than ever, however the proposed Council Tax Rebate for households in bands A - D would provide some relief. Therefore, the Labour Group reluctantly supported the Council Tax increase this year. There was also to be an increase in the Policing Precept and he felt that there needed to be a demonstrable reduction in crime as a result, however if that did not happen, the council should hold the Police and Crime Commissioner to account. There were many key projects in the Capital Programme and if they all come to fruition, they would greatly benefit residents.

Councillor Burroughes stated that setting the budget was always a difficult task and he wished to comment in relation to Councillor Topping's statement about the supposed mistake of the zero increase in Council Tax last year. He stated that many people were struggling last year and because the Conservative Administration was astute financially, it had been able to make no increase in Council Tax last year, which had helped many people. A lot of people did not have any savings to draw upon or had the benefit of being on furlough. This council did exactly what it needed to do, at the correct time. Therefore, the zero-increase last year was not a mistake, and he felt it was more evidence of this council's financial prudence. Overall, this was an exciting, good, strong and visionary budget, which he fully supported.

Councillor Deacon stated that he agreed with Councillor Burroughes' comments and that there had been many people in his Ward who had been grateful for the zero-increase last year. Many people struggled and it had meant a lot to them that there was no increase. The Labour Group were proud to have supported the zero-increase last year.

Councillor Gallant stated he had listened carefully to the comments made by Members so far this evening. He commented that the GLI Group, of whom Councillor Topping was the current leader, spoke on behalf of the Greens, the Liberal Democrats and the Independent Councillors. It was clear that they wanted to make sure this council took the maximum rises in Council Tax possible. Councillor Gallant stated that he hoped that this information was shared widely. The gesture of a zero increase last year was key, the council understood people were suffering at a difficult time and this council did what it could to support them. People had been grateful for that approach. The budget presented this evening was the work of Councillor Cook, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, and Mr Mew, Chief Finance Officer, and his team. The budget was excellent, balanced and the envy of many other councils in the country and this council was continuing with its many aims and aspirations.

Councillor Gallant stated that Councillor Byatt had mentioned housing earlier and Members will look at the Housing Revenue Account as the next item of business on the agenda, however, the Council's aspiration had always been to build as many council houses as possible but it had to be a balanced process. Councillor Gallant confirmed that he did not want to build more housing until the current housing stock was of the right standard for its tenants. He commended the proposed budget and called for all Members to support it.

Councillor Cook stated that he had a couple of responses to some of the matters raised. He reiterated that last year's zero increase was not a mistake, there was a referendum limit and he was pleased that it didn't change for this year. He stated that he would not wish to exceed the maximum increase and, as mentioned by Councillor Beavan earlier, the PCC had gone above the maximum increase, however, he had consulted on that matter. As crime was such an important issue, the proposed increase had been agreed, which was the responsibility of the PCC. Councillor Cook stated that the Council had an incredible Capital Programme, which totalled over £340 million. All of those projects would need to have a full business plan in place and detailed reports would need to be brought to the Cabinet for consideration, while some of those reports would also need Full Council approval, due to their significant costs. Those projects would also have an environmental agenda attached, many of the projects would also increase the council's asset base and in due course provide valuable income for the council. This budget would ensure that this council was financially sustainable and any budget gaps would be addressed. There were many exciting projects that had been completed this year and more would be completed next year. Councillor Cook reported that he was optimistic for the future, was proud of the budget and guidance had been received about the distribution of the £150 Council Tax Rebate, therefore, leaflets would be included about this in all of the Council Tax letters being sent to all households in the district. For those people who were most affected, there was an additional Hardship Fund of £130,000, to assist and he commended the budget to the Council.

The Chairman invited Chris Bing, Monitoring Officer, to undertake the Recorded Vote for this item. The results of the Recorded Vote are shown below:

For the recommendations:

P Ashdown, E Back, D Beavan, S Bird, C Blundell, N Brooks, S Burroughes, P Byatt, A Cackett, J Cloke, M Cook, T Cooper, L Coulam, J Craig, T Daly, M Deacon, J Fisher, S Gallant, T Gandy, A Gee, T Goldson, L Gooch, T Green, C Hedgley, M Jepson, R Kerry, S Lawson, J Mallinder, K Patience, M Pitchers, S Plummer, R Rainger, D Ritchie, C Rivett, K Robinson, M Rudd, L Smith, R Smith-Lyte, C Topping and S Wiles.

Against the recommendations:

None.

Abstentions:

None.

RESOLVED

1. That the Chief Financial Officer's report attached at Appendix C be noted;
2. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2021/22 to 2025/26, including the General Fund Revenue Budget revised for 2021/22; the proposed budget for 2022/23; and forecast budgets for 2023/24 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix A6 be approved;
3. That the movements to and from Earmarked Reserves and the General Fund Balance for 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix A7 be approved;
4. That the items to be treated as special items in 2022/23 as set out in paragraph 3.18 – the precepts by town/parish councils and parish meetings be approved;
5. That no further changes are made to Council Tax Discounts and Premiums for 2022/23 be approved;
6. That a Band D Council Tax for East Suffolk Council of £176.22 for 2022/23, an increase of £4.95 or 2.89% be approved;
7. That the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy (Efficiency Strategy) attached as Appendix B be approved;
8. That the Pay Policy Statement set out in Appendix D be approved;
9. That the Council Tax Resolutions in Appendix E be approved;
10. That the award of 50% relief on rates bills up to £110,000 per business to eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties using its discretionary relief powers under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 as amended be approved;
11. That the award of rate reliefs under the Transitional Relief scheme and the Supporting Small Business scheme (SSB) using its discretionary relief powers under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 as amended be approved;
12. That the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer be granted delegated authority to award any further reliefs in 2022/23 arising from Government announcements under these powers;
13. That, for 2022/23, awards of Discretionary Rate Relief to Charities, Non Profit Making Organisations, (NPMOs) and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CAS) disregard the value of Covid-19 Grant funding from the value of unrestricted reserves and operating surpluses be approved; and
14. That the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer be granted delegated authority in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources to

award Council Tax Rebates in respect of energy costs in 2022/23 under the Discretionary Fund announced by the Government on 23 February 2022.

With the agreement of Full Council, the Chairman announced there would be a short adjournment from 8.45pm to 8.55pm.

N.B. During the adjournment Councillors T Daly, J Fisher, S Plummer, R Smith-Lyte, C Topping and S Wiles left the meeting.

When the meeting had been reconvened by the Chairman, Councillor Goldson expressed his concern and disappointment that a significant number of the GLI Group had left the meeting whilst other budgetary matters were still to be considered by Full Council. The Monitoring Officer provided clarification that Members were able to leave a meeting when they chose to. The Chairman noted Councillor Goldson's concerns.

CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING OVER 3 HOURS DURATION

The Chairman then suggested that, as the meeting had been going for over 2.5 hours duration, that the meeting continue in excess of three hours. This was duly seconded upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

That the meeting continue beyond 3 hours duration.

10 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23

Full Council received report **ES/1050** of Councillor Cook, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, regarding the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2022/23. It was noted that the report brought together the Housing Revenue Account Budget for the period 2022/23 to 2025/26, with a forecasted position for 2021/22 and a summary of its reserves and balances. The HRA budgets were fully funded from existing funds to meet the Council's HRA spending plans, including the Capital Investment Programme and reserve balances as per the HRA Financial Business Plan. Councillor Cook reported that, under the new 2020 Rent Standard, Local Authorities could increase rents by up to CPI +1%. The September CPI value must be used, which was 3.1%, giving the Council the option to increase rents by up to 4.1%. It was noted that social rents were based on a formula rent set by government and Affordable rents although they could be up to 80% of market rent, were set based on the Local Housing Allowance. The Council continued to collect rent and service charges on a 50-week basis unless being let as Temporary Accommodation. The proposed rent gave an average weekly rent of £92.19 for 2022/23, which was an increase of £1.97, when compared to 2021/22.

With regard to Service Charges, Members noted that they could only recuperate the cost of providing a service. The proposed average weekly General Service Charge for Grouped Homes for 2022/23 was £14.57, which was an increase of £0.41 compared to 2021/22. Councillor Cook stated that the budget proposals gave a forecast HRA

working balance for 2022/23 of £3.122 million, maintaining it well above the minimum acceptable limit of 10% of total income.

Members noted that this report had been presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2022 and to the Cabinet on 1 February 2022, at which it was recommended for approval by Full Council.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Cook.

Councillor Byatt referred Councillor Cook to paragraph 2.24 on page 126 regarding arrears. He noted that there was an increase in the number of tenants who were in rent arrears and he asked if this would continue due to the current economic situation and increasing energy costs. He also asked if the Council could compare its level of rent arrears to other Councils? Councillor Kerry, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, responded that rent arrears were currently decreasing, despite the current external situations. This was due to the Council taking a targeted approach, however Members were reassured that rent arrears were decreasing overall.

Councillor Byatt then queried paragraph 3.15 on page 128, regarding the cost of service charges. He queried how much the Council was able to charge in relation to heating costs, as the levels to be charged were based on the previous year and major increases were anticipated due to the utility crisis. Councillor Kerry reported that the Council was only able to charge the costs for the services provided, there was no surcharge to be included. Therefore, the costs to be charged were decided directly by the utility provider.

There being no further questions, Councillor Cook moved the recommendations contained within the report and this was seconded by Councillor Kerry.

The Chairman invited Members to debate.

Councillor Kerry stated that there was a cap on the amount of money that could be borrowed by the HRA. There were currently many unknowns regarding the improvements needed to make the Council's existing housing stock carbon neutral. Further work was required to evaluate the work needed and the costs involved. It was important to ensure that the Council's current housing stock was efficient and sustainable. Once that was completed, work would then commence in looking at additional house building in the district.

Councillor Burroughes then proposed that a Recorded Vote be undertaken in respect of this report and 7 Members supported this suggestion. Therefore, a Recorded Vote for this item was undertaken by Chris Bing, Monitoring Officer. The results of the vote are shown below:

For the recommendations:

Councillors P Ashdown, E Back, S Bird, C Blundell, N Brooks, S Burroughes, P Byatt, A Cackett, J Cloke, M Cook, T Cooper, L Coulam, J Craig, M Deacon, S Gallant, T Gandy, A Gee, T Goldson, L Gooch, T Green, C Hedgley, M Jepson, R Kerry, S Lawson, J Mallinder, K Patience, M Pitchers, R Rainger, D Ritchie, C Rivett, K Robinson, M Rudd and L Smith.

Against the recommendations:

None.

Abstentions:

Councillor D Beavan

RESOLVED

1. That the HRA budget for 2022/23, and the indicative figures for 2023/24 to 2025/26 be approved;
2. That the revised outturn position for 2021/22 be noted;
3. That the Movements in HRA Reserves and Balances be noted;
4. That the proposed rent increase of up to a maximum of 4.1% (September 2021 CPI + 1%) as per the Rent Standard 2020 be approved.
5. That the Service Charges and associated fees for 2022/23 be approved;
6. That the Rent and Service Charges to be charged over a 50-week period unless being used for Temporary Accommodation when a 52-week period will be applied be approved.
7. That changes affecting public and private sector housing and welfare be noted;
8. That the effects of COVID-19 to the HRA to be noted.

11 Southwold Neighbourhood Plan

Full Council received report **ES/1051** of Councillor Ritchie, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which sought approval of the Southwold Neighbourhood Plan. It was noted that after several years of hard work, the Southwold Neighbourhood Plan completed its Examination in October 2021 and passed the referendum on 3rd February 2022. Over 87% of people had voted in favour of the Plan and the turnout was 37.8%.

The plan had been built on wide engagement with the community and it had undergone formal stages of consultation. The plan included distinctive policies that respond to important local issues. These include (amongst others):

- o A 'Principal Residence Requirement' policy. This required all new housing to be occupied only as someone's principal residence. (The plan defines a principal residence as the sole or main home of the occupants, where they spend the majority of their time when not working.)
- o Innovative policies supporting delivery of Affordable Housing from Community Led Housing groups through redeveloping Assets of Community Value; community land or buildings; or existing employment areas if and when they become available. Each policy contained carefully worded criteria to guide how the policy would be applied. How existing sites were re-used was important, given the scarcity of land available for new homes.
- o Protecting areas of Local Green Space
- o Policy to guide schemes for redeveloping important sites in the town including the former Fire Station; former Police Station; and Station Rd Courtyard. These would be informed by a Design Framework contained in the neighbourhood plan.
- o Protecting small shop units (which were suitable for independent businesses)

Councillor Ritchie also advised that the plan also contained several non-policy actions which could not be addressed via planning policies and the local community would pursue those actions outside of the planning system.

Councillor Ritchie advised that he proposed that the recommendation in the report be amended slightly to: 'That the Council "make" the Southwold Neighbourhood Plan (Referendum version) part of the statutory Development Plan.' It was felt that this change would be clearer and simpler.

Councillor Ritchie thanked Mr Povey, Principal Planner for Policy and Delivery, for his hard work in respect of this Neighbourhood Plan.

The Chairman then invited questions for Councillor Ritchie.

Councillor Beavan took the opportunity to thank the Planning Officers for their help and support in the development of the Plan. He also thanked Don Foster, who had instigated the development of the Plan. He felt that the residence clause was helpful, however he stated that more should be done to reduce the number of second homes in Southwold. He then urged other Towns and Parishes to develop their own Neighbourhood Plans.

Councillor Byatt congratulated all those involved in the development of the Plan, which he felt was a very interesting document. He then queried paragraph 4.10 in the Southwold Neighbourhood Plan in Appendix A, on page 166, which mentioned building additional affordable housing by 2036. He queried whether this new housing would have the principal residence requirement attached as a condition? Councillor Ritchie reported that the principal residence requirement would only apply to new homes being built in Southwold.

There being no further questions or debate, the Chairman invited Councillor Ritchie to move the recommendation and this was duly seconded by Councillor Beavan. Upon being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED

That the Council "make" the Southwold Neighbourhood Plan (Referendum version) part of the statutory Development Plan.

12 Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2020-21

Full Council received report **ES/1053** of Councillor Bird, Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, which contained a formal summary of the activities and achievements of the Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/21 Municipal Year. It was noted that section 6.3 of the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules within the Constitution, the Scrutiny was required to provide an annual report to Full Council on its various activities.

Councillor Bird reported that it was an honour to be the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and he was supported by a very experienced and enthusiastic Vice Chairman, Councillor Deacon. It was noted that the Chairman and Vice Chairman worked together to support and facilitate the Committee in carrying out its extremely

important statutory function.

During 2022/21, the Committee had been ably supported by Katherine Abbott, Democratic Services Officer, who had arranged a number of training sessions, specifically for Scrutiny Committee Members, to ensure that the Committee was effective and able to evolve and develop over time.

It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee was currently supported by Sarah Davis, Democratic Services Officer, and that the Committee had recently undergone a review to further embed good practice. Further information would be shared about this in due course.

Councillor Bird felt that the Scrutiny Committee Members were dedicated and hard working and he moved the recommendation within the report and this was duly seconded by Councillor Deacon.

The Chairman invited questions from Members.

Councillor Hedgley queried the membership of the Scrutiny Committee, as contained within the report. Councillor Bird confirmed that the membership as listed within the report was correct for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman invited Members to vote and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

That Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report be noted.

13 Cabinet Members Report and Outside Bodies Representatives Reports to Council

Full Council received report **ES/1052**, which was presented by the Leader of the Council and provided individual Cabinet Members' reports on their areas of responsibility, as well as reports from those Members appointed to represent ESC on Outside Bodies'. Councillor Gallant stated that the written reports would be taken as read and he invited relevant questions on their contents.

The Leader asked for the Chairman's indulgence and the indulgence of the other Members present, to permit Councillor Brooks, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport, to provide a verbal update at this point in the meeting. Councillor Gallant stated that Members were aware that a Motion had been laid before the last Full Council, which was then referred to the Cabinet, on the understanding that Councillor Brooks, as the Cabinet member for Transport, be tasked with considering the matter and reporting back. The Leader confirmed that this had now happened and with Members' approval, he could provide an update this evening and answer any questions that Members may have.

The Chairman granted the Leader's request and invited Councillor Brooks to address Members.

Councillor Brooks reported that at the Full Council on the 26 January 2022, a Motion was put forward by Councillor Tom Daly, concerning this Councils approach to the revised Highway Code. As agreed at Full Council, this was referred to the Cabinet, who had asked Councillor Brooks to look at what actions the council was taking in response the introduction of this revised code.

It was noted that this council took its responsibilities for public safety very seriously and it welcomed the amendments to the Highway Code, which had implemented a revised hierarchy of road users, to better protect pedestrians and cyclists. Although this Council does not have Highways responsibilities, it does, of course play, a role as Members were community leaders, amplifying important messages and information, regardless of its source, where it was to the benefit of its residents.

With this in mind, the council's Communications Team had shared and reposted a number of social media messages relating to the Highway Code changes, to ensure as many people as possible were aware. In addition, and to reach those who do not use social media, the Team had undertaken to incorporate this information in the forthcoming East Suffolk residents' magazine, a copy of which would be delivered to every household in the district, later this Spring.

There being no comments or questions regarding Councillor Brooks' statement, the Chairman invited questions regarding the information contained within the report.

Councillor Gooch took the opportunity to comment on the update on Tourism, from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism. Councillor Gooch stated that she was saddened by the loss of the mini golf course, next to the pavilion in Lowestoft, which had been removed due to the redevelopment of the pavilion site. She commented that the mini golf course had been a great asset and had been used by many tourists, therefore she hoped that whatever replaced mini golf course would be of equal value to attract tourists.

There being no further comments or questions, the report was received for information.

The meeting concluded at 9.27 pm.

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Chairman