

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Audit and Governance Committee** held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Monday, 16 May 2022 at 6:30 PM**

Members of the Cabinet present:

Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Tess Gandy, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte, Councillor Ed Thompson

Other Members present:

Councillor Louise Gooch

Officers present: Chris Bing (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Alli Stone (Democratic Services Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Creation of a Second Vice-Chairman position for East Suffolk Council

The Committee received report **ES-1152** of the Leader of the Council. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which asked the Committee to consider a proposal to create a second Vice Chairman post for East Suffolk Council for the municipal year 2022/23 and continuing thereafter.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services summarised the report. The East Suffolk Council District was a large area covering around 487 square miles, and the Chairman had a busy civic role. The Chairman received over 100 invites for events on evenings and weekends throughout the year, and due to the scale of the role it was proposed to create an additional Vice Chairman role to allow for more flexibility and coverage. This would also allow for a wider range of Councillors to take on the role, including those with caring responsibilities and other jobs.

The Chairman invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Coulam asked how many functions the Chairman and Vice Chairman had attended in the previous year. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that Covid restrictions and lockdowns meant that there had been fewer civic engagements and so there was not an accurate figure. The Civic Secretary had confirmed that the Chairman received around a hundred invitations a year. Councillor Coulam asked if figures on the number of events attended could be provided following the meeting.

Following a question from Councillor Gandy on voting powers at Full Council, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that there was only one Chairman at a meeting, and whoever was in the Chair for a meeting would have the casting vote.

Councillor Gandy queried whether there would be an additional allowance for the new post of outgoing Vice Chairman as well as Vice Chairman elect. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that there would be an additional allowance for the outgoing Vice Chairman. Councillor Gandy stated that this was perhaps not appropriate considering the cost of living crisis and the financial pressures people were facing.

Councillor Thompson asked why the Chairman needed additional training and support and why this could not be provided by officers. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that officers did provide support to the Chairman, but the majority of the Chairman's role was civic and the outgoing Chairman was best placed to provide this support. Councillor Lynch added that the Chairman had more obligations in the larger East Suffolk Council than in the predecessor Councils and required more support. When Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils had combined, the civic team for the area had reduced from four to two. It was therefore reasonable to add a third person back into the team.

Councillor Thompson asked whether a Conservative Vice Chairman elected this year would be Chairman of the new Council in 2023 following elections which may change the political make up of the Council. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that Full Council voted to elect the Chairman each year and there was no rule to state that it had to be the Vice Chairman that was elected.

Councillor Coulam stated that the Vice Chairman should be learning from the current Chairman rather than the Council having to spend more money on another Vice Chairman. Councillor Coulam asked whether the Vice Chairman had to become Chairman. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that it was only custom that the Vice Chairman became Chairman, and it was for Full Council to nominate and determine the Chairman. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reminded the Committee that the report proposed a change to the structure of the civic team going forward to provide the necessary coverage for the area.

Councillor Gandy stated that this set up should not have to be formalised as support should be provided by an informal arrangement with the outgoing Chairman providing mentoring support without the need for additional money. This arrangement had not been previously necessary and there were not sufficient reasons for it to be necessary now.

Councillor Cooper referred to point 3.3 in the report and asked if the order of who would take the Chair for a meeting if the Chairman was absent could be swapped to

prioritise the Vice Chairman elect. The Committee agreed that this was a preferable order to allow for the Vice Chairman elect to have more experience.

A proposal was made to add a recommendation to the report that in the absence of the Chairman, if both Vice Chairmen were present, the Vice Chairman elect would preside at the meeting. The amendment was proposed by Councillor Cloke, seconded by Councillor Coulam and agreed.

Councillor Gandy asked how the Chairman had coped with the civic side of the role in 2019 prior to lockdown. Councillor Lynch confirmed that the current Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council felt there was too much work to cope with already which had prompted this report. The Council was formed in April 2019 and as such there was not a 'normal' year of work to compare too. Councillor Lynch reminded the Committee that the focus of this report was on the Chairman's role outside of the Council chamber in visiting towns, villages and events across the area.

The Committee considered when it would be appropriate for this change to be reviewed. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the Committee were due to review other Constitution changes in June following the elections in May. Councillor Coulam felt this was too long a period and asked if there could be a review in six months. Councillor Lynch proposed that the changes be reviewed in March 2023 with information included on the split of work between the civic team.

Councillor Lynch asked if there could be a mechanism to ensure that the Chairman and Vice Chairmen would be geographically spread to ensure that one area of the District was not overrepresented. Councillor Coulam disagreed and argued that it would be a backwards step to introduce a north/south split. The Committee discussed that although it was not desirable to reintroduce a split in the District, if the Chairman and Vice Chairmen could cover the whole area and reduce travel costs and the environmental impact of long journeys. Councillor Lynch proposed amending the recommendation to state that Audit and Governance Committee recommend to Full Council to create a second Vice Chairman post for East Suffolk Council to have the Chairman supported by two Vice-Chairmen, and that there be geographic balance between the Chairman and Vice Chairmen to ensure one area of the district was not overrepresented.

On the proposal of Councillor Cloke, seconded by Councillor Coulam it was

RESOLVED

That Audit and Governance Committee recommend to Full Council to create a second Vice Chairman post for East Suffolk Council to have the Chairman supported by two Vice-Chairmen, and to amend East Suffolk Council's Constitution accordingly.

That Audit and Governance Committee recommend to Full Council that a mechanism be introduced in this role to ensure that there would not be a geographic balance between the Chairman and two Vice Chairmen to ensure one area of the District would not be overrepresented.

That Audit and Governance Committee recommend to Full Council to amend point 3.3 of the report to state that in the absence of the Chairman, if both Vice Chairman were present, the Vice Chairman elect would preside at the meeting.

Exempt/Confidential Items (LGA)

There were no Exempt of Confidential items.

The meeting concluded at 7.28pm

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Chairman