

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Full Council** held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Wednesday, 27 July 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 Peter Byatt, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor Tom Daly, Councillor John Fisher, Councillor Lydia Freeman, Councillor Tony Fryatt, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Tony Goldson, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Richard Kerry, Councillor Stuart Lawson, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor James Mallinder, Councillor Keith Patience, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor Carol Poulter, Councillor Russ Rainger, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Letitia Smith, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Steve Wiles

Officers present:

Stephen Baker (Chief Executive), Chris Bing (Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Andrew Jarvis (Strategic Director), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Sue Meeken (Political Group Assistant for Labour Group), Brian Mew (Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer), Tom Potter (Communications and Marketing Officer), Agnes Ogundiran (Political Group Assistant for the Conservative Group), Dickon Povey (Principal Planner for Policy and Delivery), Fiona Quinn (Head of Environmental Services and Port Health) and Nicola Wotton (Deputy Democratic Services Manager).

Others present:

Cassandra Clements (Managing Director of East Suffolk Services Ltd).

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Brambley-Crawshaw, S Burroughes, A Cackett, J Ceresa, M Cook, M Deacon, T Gandy, L Gooch, T Green, D McCallum, F Mortimer, T Mortimer, M Newton, M Richardson, D Ritchie, R Smith-Lyte, C Topping and K Yule.

As apologies had been received from Councillor J Ceresa, Chairman of the Council, Councillor C Blundell, Vice Chairman of the Council, chaired the meeting.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 25 May 2022 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Announcements

The Leader of the Council

New Appointment

The Leader took the opportunity to welcome Cassandra Clements, newly appointed Managing Director of East Suffolk Services Ltd, to the meeting. Ms Clements was observing the meeting from the public gallery this evening.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Hardship Fund

Councillor Gallant took the opportunity to update Members about one of the questions which had been raised at the Audit and Governance Committee meeting on Monday, in respect of the static balance of £500,000 on the HRA Hardship Reserve.

It was noted that the HRA Hardship Reserve was technically more correctly called the HRA DHP Top-Up Reserve. It was set up in 2012/13 with a fund of £500,000 and had taken the Welfare Reform Act 2012 into account. The reserve recognised the unexpected and exceptional difficulties tenants may face arising from those changes. The reserve was specifically to 'top up' the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) made by the Council by the value used by HRA tenants, only if the total payments made were to exceed the value of the DHP grant received by the Council from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It was reported that the Reserve itself was not a grant fund that tenants applied to. To date, the Reserve had not been required, as this DWP funding had increased in recent years. There was 72% uptake of DHP grants in 2020/21, and 84% in 2021/22.

Council tenants can access support in a number of different ways, including external grant funding that the Homelessness Team had available, that can clear arrears or pay deposits. However, as this reserve had not historically been required for the specific purpose that it was established for, and uptake of the DHP grant remained below 100%, we will review it and consider alternative ways that it can be utilised to support Council tenants.

Local Government Association (LGA) Conference Highlights

- This was the first 'in person' LGA conference for 3 years – took place in Harrogate between 28 and 30 June.
- The Council was represented by 6 x Members of the Administration, 4 x Members of the Opposition, as well as the Chief Executive and Strategic Director, and

between us we covered a lot of ground.

- As you would expect, much reference was made to the impact the pandemic has had on local government over the last two years and on recognition of the work undertaken to protect the most vulnerable members of the community. There was also an acknowledgement of the important role of local government in providing support to those fleeing Afghanistan and Ukraine. The conference was joined briefly by the Mayor of the Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv who gave a sobering account of the current situation in his local community. He was at pains to thank local authorities in the UK for their ongoing support.
- The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove, addressed the conference for the first time in his current role. He spoke about maximising the opportunities of Levelling Up and the positive impact devolution has on economic growth.
- There was much emphasis on the cost pressures faced by councils this year (£2.4bn) as a result of spiralling inflation, rising energy prices and increases to the National Living Wage. It is anticipated that this figure will rise to £3.6bn in 2024/25.
- On the workshop side, there were several sessions of particular interest including:
 - o How councils can respond to the cost of living pressures with particular emphasis on how a collaborative and participatory approach to policy making can bring about tangible solutions.
 - o The role that arts and culture can play in the recovery from the pandemic – this was of particular relevance to us given the offer that exists within the East Suffolk district.
 - o Adult social care reform and funding and the Government's vision, including how it needs to be a joint endeavour between local government, national government, the NHS, care providers and others.
- In the Innovation Zone there were excellent examples of ways councils can respond to the climate emergency and achieve net zero. In relation to the latter, examples of pilot partnerships between businesses and local authorities to drive innovation and scale up the impact of net zero projects were given.
- Staying on the theme of net zero, Craig and I were invited to a discussion hosted by a company called Beyond 2050 where we talked through the benefits of hydrogen and where pilots in the north of the country have been successful – this is definitely one we are looking to explore further.
- All in all it was a very enjoyable, informative but exhausting three days and the Conference would be held in Bournemouth next year.

Changes to the Licensing Committee membership

Councillor Gallant reported that, using his delegated powers, he had made some changes to the membership of the Licensing Committee.

He stated that Councillors Frank Mortimer, Trish Mortimer and Russ Rainger would be replaced by Councillors Alison Cackett, Tony Cooper and Andree Gee, with immediate effect.

Southwold Harbour Management Committee

Councillor Gallant reported that using his delegated powers, he had made a change to the membership of the Southwold Harbour Management Committee. With effect from 4 July 2022, Councillor James Mallinder was replaced by Councillor Mary Rudd.

Changes to the CIL Spending Working Group

Councillor Gallant reported that using his delegated powers, he had made a change to the Terms of Reference of this Executive Working Group, which was included within the CIL Strategy.

In order to assist the meeting being quorate, he had increased the size of the Working Group from 6 to 8 Members, with immediate effect, and their membership was now as follows:

Assistant Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management – Tony Cooper
(Chairman of the CIL Spending Working Group)

Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism – Letitia Smith

Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment – James Mallinder

Planning Committee North Chairman – Paul Ashdown

Planning Committee South Chairman – Debbie McCallum

Conservative Councillor – Tony Fryatt

Labour Councillor – Mike Deacon

GLI Councillor – David Beavan

‘Ease the Squeeze’ Tackling the Rising Cost of Living Update

Councillor Gallant reported that he was delighted to update Members that since the impact of increasing costs of living had been discussed at the last Council meeting in May, the Community Partnership Board had allocated £100,000 towards the new ‘Ease the Squeeze’ programme. This was in addition to funding already in place from the Covid Community Recovery Fund, 2021/22 Enabling Community Budgets for various food projects and, of course the £52,500 that Members had agreed to allocate through their 2022/23 Enabling Communities Budgets.

Councillor Gallant updated Members that three new Financial Inclusion Officers were now in post in the Communities Team and they will work with the existing Financial Inclusion Officer, in the Housing Service, to provide advice for residents about budgeting, debt, benefits, grants and credit, in a range of community settings in line with the emerging financial inclusion strategy.

In addition to the Councillor briefing on 20 June 2022, which almost half of Members attended, workshops had been held for staff and partners. From the sixty plus projects identified, a list of priority projects has been identified which included:

- A network of Warm Rooms around the District to help people to manage the cost of heating their own homes this winter whilst reducing loneliness and isolation
- Funding for a Food Network Coordinator to open up local food pathways and support the establishment of Community Pantries and Fridges
- A programme of Cooking on a Budget classes across the District
- The launch of Comfort Food (a free meal and drink in local café's) building on Thin Ice run by Access Community Trust at Sam's Café in Lowestoft last winter
- Food to Fork projects to encourage community gardens and allotments, planters and widow boxes growing fruit and vegetables
- Increased access to microwaves, hobs, slow cookers, and clean, warm bedding

Each of these projects was currently being scoped and costed and had a lead officer within the Communities Team. A new webpage and 'Ease the Squeeze' campaign would commence shortly. Councillor Gallant encouraged Members to contribute and share information about these projects far and wide.

Cabinet Members

There were no Cabinet Member updates on this occasion.

Chief Executive

Mr Baker, Chief Executive, took the opportunity to formally announce that he would be taking retirement and his final day at the Council would be 31 December 2022. His last Full Council meeting would therefore be on 23 November 2022.

He reported that the Council would have a new start in 2023. The recruitment process for a new Chief Executive would commence shortly, however, the recruitment process for the additional Strategic Director post would take place slightly later in the year, to enable the new Chief Executive to be involved in that appointment process.

The Chairman of the Council

The Chairman gave an update on the Civic Engagements that the Chairman and Vice Chairman had attended, since the last Full Council meeting.

The Chairman had attended:

- The President's Lunch at the Suffolk Show, Trinity Park, Ipswich on 1 June 2022.
- The County Service of Celebration - HM Queen's Platinum Jubilee at St Edmundsbury Cathedral in Bury St Edmunds on 12 June 2022.

The Vice Chairman had attended:

- RAF Honington Freedom Parade, Platinum Jubilee Parade and Sunset Ceremony for HM The Queen at the Athenaeum, Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds on 9 June 2022.
- Suffolk Day 2022 - Gathering of the Civic Leaders to hear the Proclamation at Castle Meadow, Framlingham on 21 June 2022.

- Suffolk Armed Forces Day at Hadleigh on 23 June 2022.
- The Mayor of Ipswich 'At Home' at the Ipswich Transport Museum, Ipswich on 8 July 2022.
- Festival of Suffolk Community Games at Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre on 9 July 2022.
- Commonwealth Baton Relay at Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds on 9 July 2022.
- Martlesham Play Area New Equipment Opening at the Jubilee Play Area, Martlesham on 15 July 2022.
- Stowmarket Mayor's Civic Service at St Peter and St Mary's Church, Stowmarket on 17 July 2022.

5 Questions from the Public

Councillor Byatt sought clarification about whether Mr Robertson had needed to declare that he was a Carlton Colville Town Councillor, when submitting his public question. There followed some discussion in this respect and the Mr Baker, Chief Executive, confirmed that there was no requirement for Mr Robertson to make any such declaration.

(a) Question submitted by Mr Adam Robertson to Councillor Mary Rudd, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Safety.

As the freeholder of the Gateway Retail Park, how long will East Suffolk Council allow negotiations to continue between the leaseholder Freshwater Group and Peter Aldous MP before enforcing a solution as the freeholder, which will stop the congregation of cars and anti-social behaviour happening at the Retail Park?

Response from Councillor Rudd

The Council attempted to contact its tenants, Metropolitan Properties (Investments) Limited, in early May without response. We contacted them again in mid-July asking for a response by 29 July 2022 giving full details of what actions are being taken to address the issue. The letter highlighted that if satisfactory action was not taken the Council reserves its rights to take appropriate action, as the issue is contrary to tenant covenants within the lease.

Such action could include a Section 146 notice, however, robust evidence of an ongoing problem would need to be available to underpin any such action. It was important to note that only two reports have been made to the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (ASBU) in the last six months and four to the Police, including those from Mr Robertson, who has done several FOIs etc, but the Council needs as much evidence as possible to enable it to reinforce the urgent need to act.

When Council and Police officers have visited Gateway Retail Park, anecdotal feedback has been provided by businesses, but I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of both local residents and businesses reporting concerns through the Police, to enable them to use their powers under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002, and through the Council's ASBU to enable us to build a picture of the issues. Additional reports from residents and businesses, including completed diary sheets,

will be considered alongside information gathered through previous and planned future visits to the site.

6 Questions from Members

a) Question submitted by Councillor Tom Daly to Councillor James Mallinder, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment

Theberton and Eastbridge Parish Council have expended a lot of time and effort to obtain Dark Skies in their area which is classed as category 1, Milky Way quality. Other PCs in the area are looking to follow suit.

They simply need ESC approval to complete the process of securing Dark Skies status.

I have been asking for a response for them since August 2021. Environment is one of the main pillars of our statutory plan; can we please give them the encouragement they deserve in their sterling efforts for their local environment by giving our approval?

Response from Councillor Mallinder

I am still investigating this and I will respond accordingly to the 3 relevant Ward Members, namely Councillors Russ Ranger, Tony Cooper and Tom Daly, in due course. I would like to reassure you that the Dark Skies are an important principle at East Suffolk Council and it is embedded into the Local Plan, various Supplementary Planning Documents, planning considerations, Neighbourhood Plans and is also a principle of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Council's Environmental Protection Team also investigate complaints received concerning unnecessary light pollution.

Through my engagement as the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment, Community Partnerships, the work of all Councillors and this Council, we always give encouragement to local environmental initiatives and provide support to local communities.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Daly

This has all being going on for a year now, the Parish Council is getting concerned and is starting to feel that the Council is being obstructive. We need to be working as a team. Please can you keep me informed of any developments, as we need to give the Parish Council hope that we are going to make some progress?

Response from Councillor Mallinder

Yes, we will keep you updated regarding the progress in this matter.

b) Question submitted by Councillor David Beavan to Councillor Richard Kerry, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing

Dismayed by the low registration for social homes via HomeChoice in my ward, I decided to test the system by registering myself in March. Why is there no 'save' option for the 17 page online application form whose second page of 38 questions starts by saying, "You must submit this page in the next 15 minutes"? Why is my registration still waiting for approval four months later? Can we make this system fair and fit for purpose?

Response from Councillor Kerry

When you first go to the registration page on the Gateway to Homechoice Website, you can see at the top of the page a message that reads "You must submit this page in the next 15 minutes".

Once an applicant starts to complete the application, at the 13-minute mark the system will give a warning, with a pop up message saying "Your session will expire in 2 minutes. If your session expires, you will lose any unsaved data changes you may have made on the current page and will be returned to the Login page. Click 'Ok' below to extend your session by another 15 minutes."

If the applicants follow the instructions by clicking 'ok' the system will extend the session by a further 15 minutes to complete the page and move onto the next one. If the applicant logs out, the system will save what has been completed and when they login back again, it will remember the changes made on the previous pages so that they can continue to work on it.

The application is split into 17 pages with each page having 15 minutes to complete. The 15-minute time frame will reset once the applicant has clicked "next page" and all the information on the previous page is then saved. If an applicant is timed out of a page of the application, all the information that they have previously input will be retained, except that on the page that was timed out (so for example, if timed out on page 8, all information input from page 1 – 7 will be retained and the customer can simply click through these sections and pick up again at page 8).

We do offer assistance with submitting applications over the phone, where a customer requires this – the Gateway specialists in Customer Services currently manage these appointments.

We have raised the concerns shared by Councillor Bevan with Civica, the software provider, and they do not wish to extend the timeframe, as this would add additional risk to the system and all we can do is monitor and report back, should we have any further complaints or issues raised by applicants struggling with this, which, to date, we have not.

In relation to Councillor Bevan's Gateway to Homechoice application, this is currently being processed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, due to conflict of interest. I have made contact with the Team, and they have confirmed that they are awaiting verification information e.g. ID / Income in order to proceed with the application. They wrote to Councillor Bevan, initially, on 22/04/2022 and a second letter was sent on 27/05/2022 asking for this information. They have received some completed paperwork but not everything they requested. They will resend the letter

on the 15 July 2022, requesting the information once again, so that the application can be verified and made active. However, I feel that those officers have much more pressing work to be undertaking, for genuine applicants.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Beavan

It would be simple to add a 'save' button so that you can just save as you go along, which would make it much easier to complete the form. I am surprised the developers cannot do this and that it would add additional risk.

I have been watching my 'to do' list on the website and there was no progress at all and I also did not receive any correspondence as a result of my application, until after the papers for the Full Council meeting were published. Within half an hour of receiving the letter, I had sent them all the information they had requested. It appears to take months to be registered and people who are being made homeless are also telling me this. It is taking is far too long and I think that we need to look into this.

Response from Councillor Kerry

The officers work very diligently to prevent people being made homeless. We are 1 of 7 Councils that use this service and I have checked and there have been no other complaints or concerns raised about the application process.

c) Question submitted by Councillor David Beavan for Councillor James Mallinder, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment

How long will the air quality monitoring at the current sites within Woodbridge continue? Bearing in mind that the UK air quality standards are far less strict than WHO's Air Quality Guidelines, which state that 10µg/m³ is the highest safe level of NO₂, and that levels in Woodbridge are still at 25µg/m³, will Cabinet commit to continue monitoring these sites on a permanent basis?

Response from Councillor Mallinder

Thank you, Councillor Beavan, I am delighted to say that the air quality has improved to such an extent, at this location, that we have been advised by DEFRA that we can remove the air quality management area status. We have been out to consultation to make that suggestion and once the replies have been analysed, I will make the final decision. This is another good news story for East Suffolk, I am sure you would agree.

However, let me reassure you and others that this doesn't mean we will stop monitoring this site. It is just removing the air quality management area status. We have over 70 sites across East Suffolk that we monitor and this Council takes the concept of clean air very seriously. I am delighted to confirm that we meet all statutory requirements across the district for air quality.

East Suffolk Council has big ambitions and we want to be better than the minimum, so we have launched an Air Quality Strategy to do just that, to make sure this concept is at the heart of East Suffolk and air quality considerations are taken into account in planning, projects, consultations and the decisions that this Council makes.

With regards to any changes to the statutory requirements, I would suggest that you lobby your local MPs.

Comment from Councillor Beavan

I am encouraged that this Council is taking this seriously. However, air quality may worsen in the future due to the traffic caused by the Sizewell C development. There have been reports in the news that air pollution may cause dementia or worsen long Covid, so it is important that we are taking action. Thank you.

7 Petitions

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

8 Notices of Motion

a) Motion submitted by Councillor Byatt

The Chairman invited Councillor Byatt to read out his Motion.

Councillor Byatt proposed his Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Craig, and he read out the following:

This Council recognises that the cost of living crisis has had a noticeable impact on the price of freshly-grown food. Some residents already make use of their own outdoor spaces to grow their own vegetables and fruit, and also there are those who are fortunate enough to have access to Allotments.

We believe that there is a simple and positive way to support residents in the long-term to save money and at the same time, to encourage a healthy life-style.

This Council resolves, therefore, to establish a Working Group to liaise with Parish Councils, local Allotment Groups, land-owning Charitable Trusts and other land-holding bodies with the purpose of seeking opportunities to provide additional Allotments across East Suffolk.

In addition, this Working Group will widen its brief to consider the current status of public green and brown spaces across the District, with the purpose of encouraging community groups to adopt these spaces, to establish Pocket Parks, Community Gardens and Orchards.

The Chairman advised that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.4, the Leader of the Council, Leaders of the Opposition Groups and the Chairman of the Council had met to discuss this Motion and agree a way forward. The recommendation from this meeting was that the Motion would be discussed this evening. He therefore proposed from the Chair that this Motion be discussed this evening and it was seconded by the Leader of the Council. The Chairman invited Members to vote on the proposal to debate the Motion this evening and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

The Chairman invited Members to debate.

The Leader of the Council stated that whilst he was very supportive of people being given the opportunity to grow their own vegetables, he had some concerns about the Motion. This was because allocating officers to support any specific newly formed Working Group was going to impact on the capacity within the Communities Team. This would ultimately inhibit their ability to respond flexibly to the needs of the community in the run up to the autumn and winter period. It would also not be realistic to get food grown and harvested before the crisis started to bite.

The Leader then proposed an amendment to the Motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Smith. The amended Motion was as follows:

This Council recognises that the cost-of-living crisis has had a noticeable impact on the price of freshly grown food. Some residents already make use of their own outdoor spaces to grow their own vegetables and fruit, and there are those who are fortunate enough to have access to Allotments.

This Council will seek to support residents over the long-term to save money and at the same time, to encourage a healthy lifestyle through our 'Ease the Squeeze' cost of living programme, including a project supporting people living in some of our most deprived communities to learn to grow and cook vegetables and fruit at home .

This Council resolves, to ask the Chairs of the eight Community Partnerships at their next Regular Meeting to debate how they can use their local influence to encourage Town and Parish Councils, local Allotment Groups, land-owning Charitable Trusts, and other land-holding bodies to join them in seeking opportunities to provide additional Allotments and other growing spaces across East Suffolk.

In addition, This Council will ask the Chairs of the Community Partnerships to consider the current status of public green and brown spaces across their areas, with the purpose of encouraging community groups to adopt these spaces, to establish Pocket Parks, Community Gardens and Orchards.

The Chairman invited Members to debate the proposed amendment to the Motion.

Councillor Byatt stated that he was supportive of the proposed amendment, as it fulfilled the objective of the original Motion. He felt that taking the matter to the 8 Community Partnerships was a positive step and he reported that he was happy to support the amendment.

Councillor Jepson, Chairman of the Felixstowe Peninsula Community Partnership, reported that his Community Partnership had already been working with local primary schools and had assisted with the installation of raised beds. This had encouraged young people to become involved in gardening and he supported the amendment.

Councillor Fryatt queried whether the Council had any unused land that could be donated for the purpose of encouraging gardening? Councillor Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, reported that all of the assets owned

by the Council were listed and available to view on the Council's website. People were encouraged to contact the Assets Team with any suggestions for changes to land use for the purpose of growing food.

Councillor Smith confirmed that she was very supportive of the amended Motion, for the reasons already raised this evening.

Councillor Gallant stated that the amended Motion acknowledged the value of the project and utilised existing and established routes to achieve the desired outcomes.

There being no further debate, the amendment was put to the vote and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

There being no further discussion, the Chairman invited Members to put the Motion to the vote and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

b) Notice of Motion Submitted by Councillor David Beavan

The Chairman invited Councillor Beavan to read out his Motion.

Councillor Beavan proposed his Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Daly, and he read out the following:

This Council notes:

1. *Following the announcement in May of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill by DLUHC, ESC will be able to utilise a new discretionary council tax premium of up to 100% on second homes which are not let out or lived in for at least 70 days a year.*
2. *As of 2021 there were 4,113 second homes in East Suffolk, which inflate the local housing market beyond the reach of local people, depopulating the resident communities for lack of alternative social housing to rent.*
3. *This could provide up to £7.6m annually for the East Suffolk area from 2024/25, of which ESC would receive £700k.*

This Council resolves to:

1. *Utilise the full 100% council tax premium on second homes and empty dwellings to fund Community Land Trusts to provide local social housing for rent in the wards affected by second homes. At a cost of roughly £210k per new home, ESC would be able to provide up to three new rented social homes per year.*
2. *Reach out to Suffolk County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner to explore the possibility of working together to utilise the entire £7.6m pot for the construction of up to 36 homes a year.*

The Chairman advised that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.4, the Leader of the Council, Leaders of the Opposition Groups and the Chairman of the Council had met to discuss this Motion and agree a way forward. The recommendation from this meeting was that the Motion would be discussed this evening. He therefore proposed from the Chair that this Motion be discussed this evening and it was seconded by the

Leader of the Council. The Chairman invited Members to vote on the proposal to debate the Motion this evening and it was unanimously **CARRIED**.

The Chairman invited Members to debate.

Councillor Beavan stated that taxation needed to be fair and second homes were pricing locals out of the market, when they earned an average wage. He reported that a shared ownership property was up for sale in Southwold for around £400,000, where a wage of £50,000 pa was required to pay the mortgage, which was significantly out of reach of the majority of local people. He had heard of tenants being evicted from their homes, as landlords would be able to gain much greater rents from the holiday market. He was greatly concerned that coastal communities were being hollowed out and would ultimately be left with no residents in future, they would just become holiday parks.

Councillor Beavan reported that house prices were too high for the vast majority of local people. He knew of several local businesses which were having to offer their workers accommodation as part of their remuneration package, as they were unable to afford to rent or buy in Southwold. Councillor Beavan acknowledged that tourism was the lifeblood of the local area, however, he felt that there needed to be a way for tourism to co-exist with a healthy, local community. He stated that additional homes for rent were desperately needed and increasing the Council Tax paid by second home owners could help to fund this much needed additional housing for rent.

Councillor Gallant noted the good intentions contained within the Motion and took the opportunity to remind Members of the actions taken by the Conservative Government and the proactive way that they had reacted to the ongoing issues caused by excessive second home ownership. He stated that this demonstrated how the Conservatives listen, understand and react to local issues. It was also noted that the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources had been extremely proactive in leading the Councils representations to Government.

Councillor Gallant stated that the prudent financial stewardship and management of the Council's finances meant that the Council would not commit funds to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, or any other project, until the funds had been received. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which dealt with the introduction of a Council Tax premium on 'periodically occupied' properties, was not expected to complete its passage through Parliament until the Spring of 2023. There would then be a requirement for the property owners concerned to be given 12 months' notice of the intended premium. The financial benefits to local authorities would, therefore, not be realised until 2024/25 at the earliest, which also assumed that the Bill received Royal Assent on that timescale.

Councillor Gallant stated that it was anticipated that these measures, together with the Empty Home's Premium coming in from 2023/24, might incentivise second homes becoming primary residences and may also lead to properties being brought back into use, thus increasing the local supply. In view of these factors, and until the effect of these potential trends had been established, it would be completely contrary to good governance and the financial prudence of the Administration to consider allocating any

of this funding in advance of its receipt. He felt that it would amount to an empty promise, something that the Conservative Administration would not make. Councillor Gallant stated that the current Administration would cease in May 2023 and the new Administration would have ample time to decide upon the allocation of future funds that may be acquired as a result of this initiative. He reported that he saw no value in seeking to tie the hands of the future Administration, who would be more than capable of allocating any funds in an appropriate way. Therefore, he called for Members across the chamber to vote against this Motion.

Councillor Jepson reported that he was Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership and he had attended several meetings of the Police and Crime Commissioner. He stated that the finances of Suffolk Police were constrained, therefore, he felt that Councillor Beavan's Motion was not viable.

Councillor Byatt said that he understood Councillor Beavan's sentiments and he acknowledged the hard work undertaken to date to try and resolve the issues created by second homes. However, he stated that the Council could not commit to building more homes for rent until the funds were available. He also queried whether second home owners would be able to find another loophole, in the future, to avoid paying double Council Tax? Councillor Byatt stated that he and his Group would be abstaining from voting on this Motion. He clarified that they were not opposed to the Motion in principle and they hoped that the new Administration would review the matter again in due course.

Councillor Plummer stated that she understood that the Council could not commit funds that it had not yet received, however, she asked if Members could support the principle of the Motion instead? She felt that those people who visited and enjoyed the area, needed to contribute to the upkeep of the area and facilities.

Councillor Daly reported that the East Suffolk District had the most second homes and short term lets in Suffolk and he felt that this issue was out of control. He was concerned that many places were becoming like ghost towns and they were empty and isolated in the winter. It was important for the Council to try and do something about it and therefore he felt that Members should support the principle and spirit of the Motion.

Councillor Beavan queried how the Chancellor had been able to commit funds for Social Care before it had been received? Therefore, if the Chancellor was able to, why couldn't this Council? He stated that it was important to build relationships between second home owners and their local communities, so they could co-exist. He said that second homes were currently a real threat, which were forcing local families to leave the area, which had a negative impact on jobs, schools, friends, families and the local community. He stated that this was not right. He asked Members to support the Motion, as it would soon be too late, if no action was taken.

There being no further comments or debate, the Motion was put to the vote and the Motion was **LOST**.

Full Council received report **ES/1221** by Councillor Cook, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, which was presented by Councillor Back, Assistant Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources. The purpose of the report was to seek Full Council approval of the updated Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy for the period 2022/23 to 2024/25, in accordance with updated Guidance and Directions issued by the Secretary of State in April. It was noted that the Cabinet had recommended approval of the Strategy at its meeting on 5 July 2022.

Councillor Back reported that the Strategy would enable the Council to potentially take advantage of a valuable flexibility enabling funding of the revenue costs of transformation projects generating savings or increased income from capital receipts. He stated that the Council had approved strategies in respect of this flexibility in the past, however, it had not utilised it. This extension was now particularly welcome and timely as the Council not only had a number of key transformation projects with significant upfront costs, but also had recently received a sizeable capital receipt for the Melton Hill site.

Councillor Back confirmed that inclusion in the Strategy did not constitute a commitment to fund through capital receipts, as this decision needed to be taken in light of the Council's overall revenue and capital financing requirements. It was noted that for 2022/23, the Cabinet would determine the actual financing when approving the Council's Capital Programme outturn and financing for the year. For 2023/24 and 2024/25, the Council would approve the budgeted funding of the projects in the strategy, when approving the Budget and the Capital Programme for the year.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Back.

Councillor Byatt queried the amount of revenue generated by the sale of the Melton Hill site, given that it had been reported in the press that security and maintenance of the site, whilst it was empty, had reached £1.5 million in costs. The Leader stated that you should not believe everything in the press. He asked Councillor Byatt to email him with his question and he would provide a response outside of the meeting.

Councillor Byatt asked if he could receive information about the sales to date of the new Eastern Edge Beach Huts in South Lowestoft? Councillor Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development, stated that he would be pleased to provide a detailed report under his Cabinet Member Update at the next Full Council meeting in September. This update would include the Eastern Edge Beach Huts as well as other significant projects and investments in the District.

Councillor Pitchers queried page 59 of the report, which stated that the business case for the creation of East Suffolk Services Ltd had anticipated zero savings. The Leader invited Mr Mew, Chief Finance Officer, to respond to this query. Mr Mew stated that the zero savings was a typographical error. The savings should be approximately £1.5 million.

Councillor Byatt commented on the cost reductions and efficiency savings and he queried where the detailed figures could be found? Councillor Back invited Mr Mew to respond to that query. Mr Mew reported that the Council was required to report all of

the savings achieved and further detailed information would be provided in future finance reports.

There being no further questions, the Chairman invited Members to debate.

There being no debate, the Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to speak as the seconder of the recommendations.

The Leader of the Council reported that he was very pleased to support this report, which would provide additional flexibility for the Council. He then stated that Members were welcome to ask questions of Councillor Cook, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, or Councillor Back, Assistant Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, at any time. He confirmed that Members did not need to wait until the next Full Council meeting in order to ask a question to Members of the Cabinet.

There being no further comments, it was

RESOLVED

That the updated Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy attached as Appendix C to the report be approved.

10 Environmental Services Team - Resourcing and Restructure

Full Council received report **ES/1241** of Councillor Mallinder, Cabinet Member with responsibility of the Environment, which was presented by the Leader of the Council. Councillor Gallant advised that he was delivering the report this evening, as it represented a significant financial request to this Council. The report formed part of the Council's ongoing review of its capacity and capability to deliver, in a way that met local residents' expectations and the Council's aspirations, as laid out in the Strategic Plan.

Members noted that the current structure of the Environmental Protection Team had been created in 2012, to align the service across both Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils and it had not been reviewed since. In the last five years, the Environmental Protection Team had seen a sustained and significant increase in the demands and workloads placed on members of staff, which arose from several different sources, including:

- 10 NSIPs (Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects) including Sizewell C requiring high levels of involvement and expertise in noise, contaminated land, air quality and drinking water assessment and monitoring during application, construction and implementation phases, some of which have timescales of up to 12 years.
- Increase in number and complexity of 'licensable activities' in the animal welfare legislative regime.
- Sustained increase in reactive workload to nuisance complaints such as noise, smoke, air quality (an 18% cumulative rise from 2015 to 2021 from 3500 to 4180 per

year).

- Backlog of work, due to Covid pandemic, increased legislative requirements but also due to lack of staff to undertake inspections.
- Increased public and political interest in air quality and additional responsibilities envisaged from the Environment Act 2021.
- Provision of ongoing and daily specialist support to Norse Waste Management officers around data capture and enforcement expertise.
- There are over 500 private water supplies in the District and the burden for these was increased in 2018 by requiring sampling staff to be qualified and accredited to UKAS standards and the increased number of parameters for testing.
- Change in demand for out of hours noise service during the week not just weekends.

It was confirmed that, despite an increase in demand, the Environmental Protection Team had worked hard and flexibly to adapt to the additional pressures where possible. They had streamlined processes and have also continued to provide support and guidance to other areas of the organisation such as the Anti-Social behaviour team, Planning, Norse, Customer Services and Assets. Councillor Gallant reported that, whilst the Team and the Council could and should be proud of this, it should also be noted that the longer-term impact upon staff was beginning to show and there had been a recent increase in the number of service complaints received, in part due to lack of staff resource to provide an adequate and timely response.

It had been identified during the review that the current Team Leader directly line managed 15 staff, a considerable number, which was impacting upon their ability to fully undertake the corporate, financial and strategic requirements of the post. Councillor Gallant advised that the existing team structure also did not facilitate succession planning, and if the Council wanted to train and retain staff, then it must provide a structure which allowed them to progress their career paths through the Council or risk them looking elsewhere for personal development opportunities. In light of all this, a full and detailed review of the implications of the additional burdens on the service, as well as business as usual and project tasks was undertaken.

Councillor Gallant then invited Ms Quinn, Head of Environmental Services and Port Health, to provide a short presentation to outline the proposals for consideration this evening.

Ms Quinn, Head of Environmental Services and Port Health, gave a detailed presentation regarding the current staffing structure, workloads and funding streams. She then detailed the various options available and outlined the benefits of each.

Councillor Gallant stated that Members had heard the background and the rationale for the request and understood limitations of the current structure and the proposed new structure, which was Option 1 within the report. Members had also been apprised

of the financial implications of this initiative. It was noted that residents expected and deserved a better level of service than could currently be delivered within the resources available and he reiterated that the delivery gap would grow overtime, rather than reduce.

The Chairman then invited questions to Councillor Gallant and Ms Quinn.

Councillor Cooper sought clarification regarding the funding from Sizewell C, which was due to last until 2028. Councillor Gallant confirmed that the funding from Sizewell C would be made in phases and there would be a requirement for Environmental Protection involvement throughout the build. It was anticipated that the charge for Environmental Protections services would be similar to a cost recovery basis.

There being no further questions, Councillor Gallant moved the recommendations within the report and this was seconded by Councillor Mallinder.

The Chairman invited Members to debate.

Councillor Byatt took the opportunity to congratulate Ms Quinn on undertaking a restructure so quickly. He also recognised the unprecedented level of major projects requiring the Environmental Protection Team's input and the need for succession planning going forwards. He confirmed he was supportive of the proposal.

Councillor Hedgley stated he had been concerned about the capacity of the Environmental Protection Team. They were incredibly busy, however, he had been very impressed by their exemplary work when dealing with the issues in Little Bealings. He stated that he also supported the proposals.

Councillor Daly stated the Environmental Protection Team undertook crucial work on behalf of the Council. He felt it was very important that they had sufficient resources in order to keep on top of their workloads.

Councillor Mallinder took the opportunity to thank Mr Reynolds, Environmental Protection Manager, for all of his hard work for the Council over the years. It was noted that Mr Reynolds would be retiring shortly and Councillor Mallinder stated that he would miss his guidance and expertise and, on behalf East Suffolk Council, he wanted to thank him for his dedication to his role. He would be greatly missed and Councillor Mallinder wished him well in the next chapter of his life.

Councillor Mallinder confirmed that East Suffolk Council had a strong environmental vision and, unfortunately, some residents and visitors damage the landscapes in the district. Equally, some communities did not understand that there was a climate emergency, where their behaviour could be not tolerated. Therefore, Environmental Protection had a crucial role in supporting local residents and communities in making sure all stakeholders within East Suffolk adhered to the rules, regarding fire, air, water, animals and noise.

Councillor Mallinder stated that Environmental Protection also responded to planning applications, licensing applications and, of course, many NSIPs. It was imperative that the Team was fit for purpose. East Suffolk Council had big ambitions and part of that

involved having a robust system in place dealing with environmental protection issues. He confirmed that he was delighted to support this report and the recommendation to increase the number of officers and make sure the Council could maintain the quality of service and make sure the Team was fit for the future. He reiterated that he was proud to second the recommendation.

Councillor Gallant also sent his best wishes to Mr Reynolds and took the opportunity to thank the Environmental Protection Team for their ongoing hard work for local residents.

There being no further debate, the recommendations were put to the vote and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

That the additional funding required for Option 1 be approved for the following new posts:

- DCO/NSIP (non-SzC) Environmental Impacts Officer (1 FTE)
- Contaminated Land Assistant (1 FTE)
- Air Quality Project Officer (0.6 FTE)
- Environmental Protection Technical Officers (2 FTE)
- Senior Environmental Protection officers (2 FTE)
- SZC Project EPO/EHO (1 FTE from 2028)

to ensure that the Council has sufficient capacity within the Environmental Services team to deliver the Strategic plan and meet its statutory requirements.

11 Lound with Ashby, Herringfleet and Somerleyton Neighbourhood Plan

Full Council received report **ES/1224** by Councillor Ritchie, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which was presented by Councillor Cooper, Assistant Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management.

Councillor Cooper reported that, after a number of years of hard work, the Lound with Ashby, Herringfleet and Somerleyton Neighbourhood Plan completed its Examination in February 2022 and then passed the referendum on 23 June 2022. 92% of residents had voted 'yes' and there had been a turnout of 34.3%.

Members noted that the plan had been built on wide engagement with the community and it had undergone several rounds of consultation. The Neighbourhood Plan area also covered part of the Broads Authority executive area. As such, the Broads Authority would be considering whether to 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan at the Broads Authority meeting to be held on 29 July 2022. Officers at East Suffolk Council and the Broads Authority had provided support and guidance to the Parish Councils throughout the course of the development of the plan.

The plan included a number of policies which respond to important local issues. These include (amongst others):

- Masterplanning and design guidance which has been produced specifically for the parishes to help guide and shape new development. This includes dedicated design guidance for three sites which are allocated for development in the East Suffolk Waveney local plan.
- A policy to influence the housing mix of new residential developments which supports smaller 1, 2 or 3 bedroom homes.
- A policy to guide the character of new public open space and encourage native species of plants to improve biodiversity.
- The existing network of footpaths and bridleways which give access to the countryside is safeguarded and new connections to these are encouraged by policy.
- A policy setting minimum parking standards for new residential development and requiring safe and secure cycle storage.
- Policies in the plan support local community facilities with specific support provided for a new village hall and changing rooms at the playing field in Somerleyton.
- Development of new businesses or expansion of existing businesses is also supported by policy.

The Chairman invited questions from Members. There being none, he then invited Members to debate.

Councillor Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development, thanked Councillor Cooper for the report. He was pleased that there had been significant consultation with Town and Parish Councils and he commended the Planning Service for their ongoing hard work and support.

There being no further debate, the recommendation was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

That the Council “make” the Lound with Ashby, Herringfleet and Somerleyton Neighbourhood Plan (Referendum version, May 2022) part of the statutory Development Plan for the part of the Lound with Ashby, Herringfleet and Somerleyton Neighbourhood Area within East Suffolk.

12 Cabinet Members' Report and Outside Bodies Representatives' Report to Council

Full Council received report **ES/1214**, 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 East Suffolk Council on Outside Bodies. The Leader stated that the written reports would be taken as read and he invited relevant questions on their contents.

Councillor Byatt thanked Councillor Rudd, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health, for her report on the event she attended at Waveney Gymnastics Club in Lowestoft. He felt that there needed to be more publicity regarding such events in future.

The Chairman commented on the Communities Update from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism. He recommended the update to all Members and stated it was very interesting and informative.

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

The meeting concluded at 8.26 pm.

.....

Chairman